

Inclusivity and Accessibility of RTI Act in Bangladesh *How do women in Rangpur Division view their access to information?*

Moonmoon Mashrafy¹

Abstract: The RTI Act provides the legal means to obtain the power that comes with information. It is necessary to practise and execute the Act in order to exercise the right to information. The involvement of women in the process is less advanced than that of males. Drawing a scenario of women's engagement is the primary goal of the current study. Finding the problems and coming up with remedies at the field level are the two additional objectives. Throughout the objectives, the study responds to one main question and two related ones. This study based on mixed contained research inquiry pertains to the state of women's involvement in the implementation of the RTI Act. It is revealed from the study that Information Commission does not provide information specifically targeted at women, despite their lack of strong endorsement about women's engagement in relation to the RTA's efficacy criteria. Most women do not know about the RTI Act. Though women's backwardness is mainly due to their illiteracy, other factors like economic dependency, bullying, family, patriarchic society, religion, culture, and the scariness of law are also responsible for women's backwardness. Women's apathetic attitude is one the major causes of women's backwardness to the implementation process of the RTI Act. Indifferences of Institutions and the lack of a friendly environment are also responsible for women's backwardness. However, a small number of women know they are interested in applying for many reasons. The study mentions that different types of campaigns are fundamental to spreading knowledge and enhancing women's consciousness about the RTI Act.

Keyword: Information, RTI, Knowledge, Consciousness, Campaign, Information Commission.

Introduction

Not only is the right to information a fundamental human right, but it is also a vital instrument that enables you to hold governments accountable, engage in public affairs, and combat corruption by gaining knowledge. Open and timely information has the potential to change the lives of millions. It can help and assist governments to promote their pro-poor policies and bring benefits to people experiencing poverty. Participation, accountability, and empowerment are the elements that will lead to sustainable development in the future. Information is a public resource in the hands of the government, and the government shares it with the citizens to the best advantage of Society (Rahman, 2009).

Everyone should have access to information for their own social, economic, political, and cultural development (Hossain & Islam, 2012). The origin of granting citizens access to information held by public entities can be traced back to Sweden in 1766 (Mendel, 2014). Finland, its neighbouring country, followed suit 185 years later in 1951. The Universal

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Jagannath University, Dhaka

Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, specifically Article 19, also acknowledged this Right. By 1995, only 19 Western democratic nations had enacted laws to uphold this principle. In recent trends, a hundred countries have introduced a legal framework – for seeking information – to establish individual rights. The legal framework is the Right to Information Act (RTI). Like Western countries and Europe, several South Asian countries have already formulated the RTI. Pakistan was the first South Asian country to introduce the RTI in 2002. Then India in 2005 and Nepal in 2007, and Bangladesh in 2009 (Hasan & Rahman, 2015)

Bangladesh officially acknowledged the Right to information as a legal ordinance on October 20, 2008, during the tenure of a caretaker administration. Following this, the newly elected government of Bangladesh fulfilled its electoral promise by enacting the RTI Act during the inaugural session of the 9th Parliament on March 29, 2009. Subsequently, with the President's approval, it was formally passed into law on April 5, 2009 (Ahsan et al., 2020).

Dr Md Golam Rahman, the Ex-Chief Information Commissioner of Bangladesh's Information Commission, noted that even though the use of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, established in 2009, is on the rise, the number of information requests submitted is still deficient compared to the country's population (The Daily Star, May 31, 2016).

According to Bangladesh Education Statistics, in 2022, the total population of Bangladesh is 165.16 million, where 81.71 million are male and 83.35 million are female. Practising the RTI Act is not satisfactory level. Though the number of applications is increasing sluggishly, the amount of information provided is in the same range overall. Moreover, women are backwards compared to men. From this backdrop, the present study aims to understand women's participating status, identify the causes of women's backwardness, and find the solution to the causes.

The RTI Act is a tool for fighting corruption in Bangladesh (Hossain, 2020) and is an element of empowerment. In Bangladesh, half of the population is women. So, women's presence in the implementation process of RTI is a more significant issue in understanding the implementation of the Act. The existing literature review shows a gap in the RTI Act implementation process- women's participation, challenges and overcoming suggestions, particularly in the Rangpur division. That's the strong rational ground of the research. Moreover, the study has been conducted by collecting data from both sources. Primary data represents various sections of society's scenarios, which carry rational and valid data.

Literature Review

The esteemed French thinker Michel Foucault famously stated that power originates from knowledge, with information as its fundamental building block. Information enhances individuals' wisdom and equips them to navigate the complexities of the contemporary world. Therefore, the government is responsible for keeping citizens informed about the daily occurrences within its purview. Borah (2013) presented the paper entitled 'Right to Information Act: A Key to Good Governance', which aims to outline the fundamental

principles of the RTI Act, examine its connection to good governance, and address associated issues.

In conclusion, the paper offers key recommendations to enhance the effective implementation of the RTI Act. Rahman, Ullah and Asif (2022) researched the RTI Act to combat corruption in Bangladesh and citizens' perception of this Act. They argued that citizens' demand for information depends on their awareness of the Right to information. They found that most citizens are unaware of the RTI Act, institutions are short of information officers, and there are no legal obligations. Moreover, the capacity of the Information Commission is low. They argued that building the citizens' awareness of other legal frameworks is the main challenge to the effectiveness of the RTI Act.

Bari (2015) argued that the progress of RTI depends on two stakeholders (government and information commission), and he said that if two stakeholders become very active, RTI's progress will be more significant and more successful. Bari claimed some critical issues for retarded progress from 2009 to 2014, like the government's indifference, a small number of DoS appointment and Training opportunity, the educated class's indifference, an active leadership crisis for the information commission, small response of citizen's applications, paying system for information, etc. Islam et al. (2022) conducted research at the upazila level office focusing on the RTI Act implementing process, finding the challenges to implementing the RTI and how it could be implemented effectively.

They found that journalists are the primary information clients at the upazila level. However, general people seek information without specific goals and interests of general will. Local elites and public representatives could play a significant role in the publicity act. Implementing the Act at the grassroots level could reduce harassment at public offices and ensure a standard level of service at government offices. Requiring money is one of the obstacles to implementing the RTI Act.

They argue that depositing a fixed amount of money is necessary when people seek a large volume of Information and lose interest in it. They also suggested some recommendations for implementing the RTI at the upazila level, like- taking the qualitative initiative to build awareness, providing Training for officials and staff, updating the web portal of upazila offices, etc. Bario et al. (2018) showed no significant changes in accessing the RTI process because most citizens are unaware of their legal entitlement to search for and get information. He argues that a primary factor contributing to the absence of progress is the ineffective nature of the chosen implementation strategy in encouraging the public to actively seek information regarding government services. It suggests that a proactive and participatory method of disclosing information would be a more effective alternative to the current approach to implementing the RTI Act.

However, Rana (2024) claimed that several legal elements like the Digital Security Act (DSA), 2018, the Data Protection Act (DPA), 2022, and the Communication Technology Act (ICT), 2020 have an overriding impact. These eliminate the citizens' Right to information, which goes against the citizens' Right to read and be informed and violates the RTI Act 2009. Ahsan et al. (2020) highlighted several key issues that could significantly influence the effectiveness of the Information Commission's operations.

Like- Supremacy of the Retired Civil Servants in the IC, Feeling of Gratitude/Indebtedness, Old Habits Die Hard, Lack of Proactive Leadership, Quantity versus Quality of Requests, Red Tape Everywhere, Experiences in Complaint Hearing, Hesitation in Imposing a Penalty, Frequent Deferral of Hearing, No Observer Policy, Modernization Tools, and Communication Strategy. Baroi (2018) argued that RTI is a significant law which gives citizens access to government information and makes the government accountable at various levels. One needs to know and use the law to use this Act properly. He showed that a lack of awareness about the law is one of the barriers to the implementation of it.

The article emphasizes the importance of capacity building through training and awareness programs. These strategies are vital for enhancing the impact of the RTI Act and promoting transparency and accountability in government operations. The present study focuses on the status of women's participation in RTI. Baroi and Alam (2020) have found that in Bangladesh, the main challenge of implementing the RTI Act is to make citizens aware of the law and frequently involve them in the RTI process. They proposed a model of access to information through e-governance, which suggested that the process of RTI is simple, using the website without paperwork. It will be effective for marginalized due to remoteness, ethnicity, education and disability.

Shoma (2019) demonstrated, theoretically and in practical terms, the importance of gender equality as the fundamental concept in comprehending the connection between gender and the human rights necessary for women to utilize their skills and abilities entirely within the SME sector of Bangladesh. Paul et al. (2019) argued that although women's participation in Union Parishad is related to their educational opportunity, economic freedom, religious values, patriarchy and social norms, it is also positively linked with women's social and political perception.

Regarding the literature review, this paper understands that several pieces of literature focus on the importance of RTI for governance; some described the RTI as a tool for combating corruption to ensure a transparent and accountable government. Few researches have been conducted about RTI's effectiveness and limitations in Bangladesh. A few studies focus on ICT's role in women's empowerment (Genilo et al., 2015; Laizu et al., 2010). This study finds a research gap- study on between RTI and women-related research in Bangladesh perspective. Against this backdrop, this study aims to identify the present status of women applying for the RTI Act.

Conceptual framework

Citizens are empowered to request information kept by public agencies under the right of access to information (with some restrictions). It includes both the requirement that governments proactively publish information and the ability to request and receive information. With the correct information, the public and civil society activists may take part in public discussions, interact intelligently and directly with public decision-makers, and legitimately influence the creation of laws and public policies. According to the UN

Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), there should be particular procedures in place to guarantee transparency and the right of information access. Additionally, there are clauses requiring the public release and distribution of particular data about the administration's operations and anti-corruption initiatives.

The study attempts to answer the questions of whether women have access to RTI and what obstacles they face in obtaining information while living from town to village. The article's arguments subtly indicate the perception of women on access to RTI. Promoting awareness through information commissions in collaboration with advocacy organisations, such as NGOs and the media, is essential to bringing these goals to life. It focuses on improving this beforehand as there is insufficient representation of arguments from the start of the study to the finish. Analysing through the lens of gender inclusivity and revisiting the empirical results are crucial.

Information is a tool to enlighten humans. According to the Right to Information Act of Bangladesh, 'information' includes any memo, book, design, map, contract, data, log book, order, notification, document, sample, letter, report, account, project proposal, photograph, audio, video, drawing, painting, film, any instrument done through an electronic process, machine-readable record, and any other documentary material regardless of its physical form or characteristics, and any copy thereof about the constitution, structure and official activities of any authority.

To seek information under the RTI Act in Bangladesh, the individual first needs to reach out to the designated officer of the relevant government or private organization. The applicant must then submit a formal application to the designated officer using the correct application format. Usually, the designated officer must provide the requested information within 20 days of receiving the application. However, the situation is exceptional; this period may extend to 30 days. If the officer cannot provide the information, they must notify the applicant within ten working days, following the appropriate procedure.

If the applicant is unsatisfied with the response or does not receive a response, they can appeal to a higher authority within 30 days using the prescribed method. The higher authority must resolve the appeal within 15 days. If the applicant does not receive the information after following these steps, they can file a complaint with the Information Commission within 30 days. The Information Commission generally takes between 45 and 75 days to resolve the complaint after receiving it.

Research Objectives, Research Questions and Study Method

The primary goal of this research is to paint a picture of women's involvement in RTI Act implementation. Two more goals of the study are to determine the barriers that prevent women from participating in this process and to figure out how to get beyond the difficulties. The primary research inquiry pertains to the state of women's

implementation of the RTI Act. What are the barriers preventing women from taking part in the RTI implementation process? thought of as a follow-up inquiry.

This article has applied a qualitative approach. Descriptive method and content analysis were applied to this research. The study uses semi-structured, in-depth interview techniques and a survey method in which the researcher had neither control over the respondents nor any influence on their view of the issue. In this study, data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from two different groups of respondents from eight districts of the Rangpur division. Two types of pre-tested questionnaires have been used in the interview. Respondents include women, information officers and academics. As secondary data, the study has considered the existing literature, articles, reports of information commissions, newspapers, internet, blogs, etc.

Purposive, random and convenient sampling methods have been applied to select samples from the Rangpur division in this study. Purposive sampling was used to select 50 officers from different types of offices. Two hundred women's despondences were collected using a random and convenient sampling method from eight districts of the Rangpur division. Women have been selected from different districts with different characteristics. Age and profession-based samples have been distributed as follows:

Figure-1: Age-based women respondents

Figure-2: Profession-based women respondents

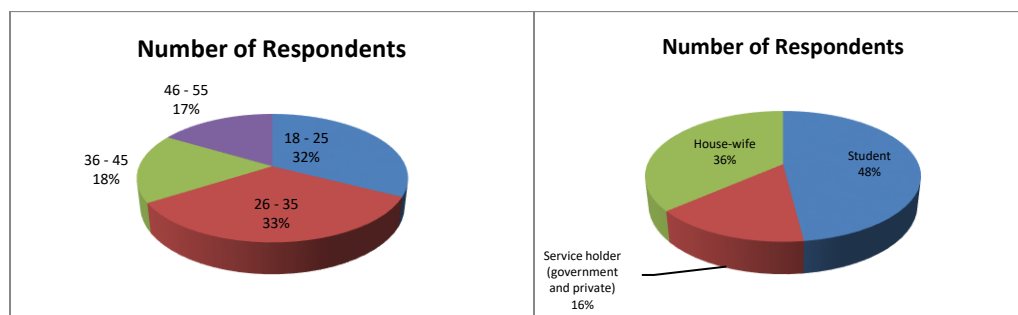


Figure 1 shows that 33 % of respondents belong to the age limit of 26 to 35, 32% are 18 to 25, 18% are 36 to 45 years, and the lower part, 17%, are 46 to 55. Respondents also have variations in the professional criteria. Figure 2 shows that the majority part of the respondents, around 48%, are students, housewives are 36%, and the lowest part of the respondents are service holders who are employees of public and private organizations.

Inclusivity and Accessibility of RTI Act in Bangladesh: Empirical Evidences

Women are poor in applying to the RTI Act. The Information Commission (IC) provides a yearly report presenting the number of complaints and considering the number of hearings. The reports also present male and female complaint ratios for hearing (Table 1). From 2011 to 2022, the data has been showed by following:

Table 1: Complaint to IC and solving status (men and women) of the complaint

Year	Total number of complain	Number of consider for hearing	Male	Female
2022	791	360	346(96%)	14 (4%)
2021	463	234	225 (96%)	9 (4%)
2019	628	565	547 (87.1%)	81 (12.9%)
2018	731(Applicant number 205)	-	184 male applicant	21 female applicant
2017	233	215	-	-
2016	539	364	334	30 (8.24%)
2015	336	240	221 (88%)	29 (12%)
2014	294	170	-	-
2013	207	116	-	-
2012	202	94	-	-
2009-11	104	44	-	-

Source: Made by author. Data collected from Bangladesh Information Commission reports.

Table 1 shows that IC's reports presented the male and female ratio data in 2015, where 12% of applications were female. The ratio has been decreased in 2016 to 8.24%. In 2019, the ratio grew but was not stable. In 2021, the rate has fallen, and it has been continued in 2022 only 4%.

Q.1: Do you know about the RTI Act?

F. 3: Respondents answer (Age-based) F.4: Respondents answer (Profession based)

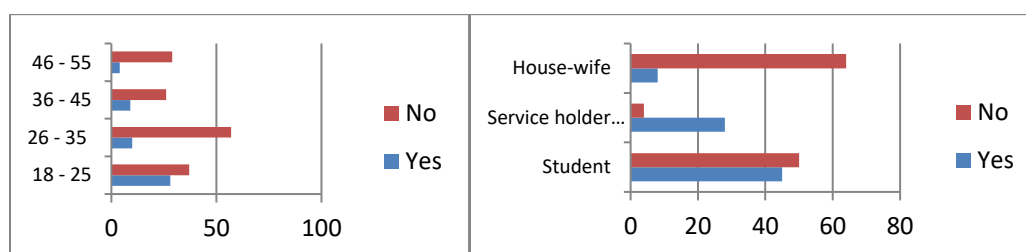
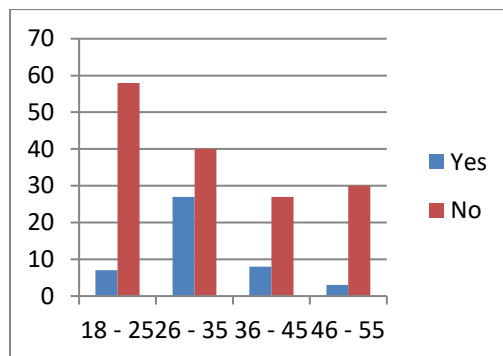


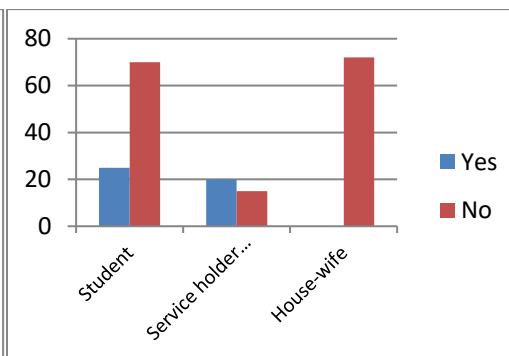
Figure 3 presents that only 43% of respondents who are 18 to 25 years old know about the RTI Act, 14.92% of 26 to 35 years, 25.71% of 36 to 25 years age range and 12.12% of 46 to 55 years age range know about the RTI Act. That means 57% of 18 to 25, 85.08% of 26 to 35, 74.29% of 36 to 45, and 87.88% of 46 to 55 years respondents do not know about the Act. And F.4 presents that 88.88% of housewives, 52.63% of students and 12.90% of service holders do not know about the RTI Act.

Q.2: Do you apply for information to the authority?

F.5: Answer from respondents (age-based) (profession-based)



F.6: Answer from respondent



F-5 shows that the 26 to 35 years range is the height range (40.29%) of those who applied for the RTI Act, and F-6 presents service holders who are the majority to use the RTI Act. Housewives (100%) do not apply the Act at all. 64.5% of service holder respondents have applied for the RTI Act, a high utilization rate.

Causes of Women's backwardness of the implementing process of RTI from secondary and primary data

Ensuring the attachment of a particular group to mainstream needs more flexibility of authority and special care. From Bangladesh's perspective, RTI Act-related institutions do not provide a women-friendly environment. Moreover, institutional indifferences make the participating environment more critical. Information Commission (IC) does not offer specific women's information even though they do not strongly recommend about necessity of women's engagement toward the RTA's effectiveness criteria (Table 2).

Table 2: Analysis of Recommendations provided by IC

Year	Focusing on (Understanding by Author)	Women's relevant recommendations present
2022	Institutional and economic capacity, publicity	Absent
2021	Institutional development	Absent
2019	Citizen's Participation in RTI	Present (economic empowerment)
2018	Campaign of RTI and officer's Training	Absent
2017	Recruitment and campaign by the media	Absent
2016	Logistic support and online application opportunity	Absent
2015	Capacity building and online application opportunity	Absent
2014	Campaign about RTI Act use by media (song/drama/film)	Absent
2013	Active team (govt. and non-govt.) work	Absent
2011	Recruitment of IOs and abolish contradictory acts	Absent

Source: made by author

Illiteracy and lack of consciousness

According to Bangladesh Education Statistics, the female literacy rate is 73% in 2022 (BES, 2022). In Rangpur, the average literacy rate is 47.2%, whereas males are 50.6% and females are 43.8%. Though Bangladesh's women's literacy rate is going first, the effectiveness of literacy is not going the same; their self-consciousness is not growing like the literacy rate. Here, women's illiteracy does not mean about their education; it means the low knowledge about the Right to Information Act. Women are less conscious about themselves than family and others in nature. Family and social responsibility are the main focus of women. Women want to serve their families physically. Consciousness can improve and enrich their skills; they do not think like this – it is their prominent illiteracy.

Women's Apathetic Attitude

Women's apathetic attitude is their common behaviour and morals as well. Society has created a value like women would be shy, soft and quiet. When a woman goes to the opposite of these traditional norms, society does not take it easily, and the female community does not look comfortable. With access to information, women can easily take advantage of opportunities and make more effective decisions about land use and ownership, agricultural practices, private enterprise, and education. But more of them don't want access to information. The local picture is different if the scenario is good in the urban area. Most local women want to have a simple life, avoiding any challenges. They believe that information makes life critical and complex. So, they are not interested enough to apply for information.

Family, Patriarchic Society, Religion and Culture

Bangladeshi women are more family-oriented and guided by social rules as well. Women's status in Bangladesh is limited by culture, which keeps them in the background of society. Entering the decision-making process of family or social and political institutions makes women powerful. However, society does not allow it as long as it is present in the local decision-making process (Paul et al., 2019). Lack of family support for women seeking information, unwelcoming attitudes from government or RTI officials towards women, women's fear of retaliation for requesting information, and concerns about their mobility and safety when travelling to public offices are the obstacles that concern women in society.

Women feel another pushback from a religious perspective. Misinterpretation of religion, fatwa, and superstition helps sustain the patriarchic society. Due to societal norms and spiritual values, women, even members of Union Parishad, can't attend rural "Shalish" as a chief (Paul et al. 2019). Women are considered inferior in society, whereas men dominate local policy adaptation and implementation (Paul et al. 2019). And they are

constantly deprived of their rights and missing their voice in local bodies. This picture is not warm enough to push women to shake information.

Scariness and backwardness of the Internet and technology

Women are always backward to men in every sector. They have a low number of internet users and are information shakers. According to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), approximately 123.8 million people in the country are internet users. The Telecom Use Survey (TUS) 2021 revealed a gender gap of 39.54%, indicating that 48.8 million women and 75 million men are using the Internet (Ahmed, July 02, 2022). Moreover, cybercrime and cyber security are the main scares for women to use the internet. Though Ahmed, Hasan and Aktar (2023) worried about the deficiency of cyber security in the vision of Smart Bangladesh, it is essential to loop the scarcity and join the mainstream of information flow to build Smart Bangladesh.

Furthermore, women are not economically free, especially in rural areas. Women rarely walk against their male guardians' decisions because they depend on their husband's income (Paul et al., 2019). When they need information and have the right to get it, their wishes and needs become destroyed in germination if their family does not permit them to apply.

A question has been asked to officers for identifying the causes of women's back down to applying the RTI Act. The respondents were answered from their view and experience.

Table 3: Causes of backwardness (Answer from Respondents in percentage)

Question	Causes of backwardness	Presentence (%) of Respondents
	Indifferences of Institution and lack of women's friendly Environment	5%
	Illiteracy and lack of consciousness about the RTI Act	79%
Why do women not apply for information?	Women's Apathetic Attitude	8%
	Scariness and backwardness of the Internet and technology	4%
	Family, Patriarchic Society, Religion and Culture	4%

Table 3 presents that 79% of the total respondents supported that illiteracy and lack of consciousness about the RTI Act is the leading cause of the backwardness of women. 8% of respondents supported women's apathy, and 5% supported insignificance from institutions and the lack of a women-friendly environment. Scariness and backwardness

of the internet and technology are also the causes supported by 4% of total respondents, and 4% claimed that family, patriarchic society, religion and culture are essential causes for women's backwardness.

Way to join women in the RTI Act implementation process

It is essential to know about the RTI Act and its usefulness for women to ensure women's participation. They also need to remove the discomfort about social movement apathies. At first, women must enhance consciousness about their rights and know that getting information is also a right. This study shows that most women do not know about the Act. A small number of women know about the Act; they don't want to apply the Act because of their shyness, bullying, family pressure, and unfriendly environment. So, the study questioned both respondents' suggestions for overcoming the challenges. They strongly suggested campaigning for RTI in rural areas. 100% of respondents support the campaign system. Then, the study asked both respondents which campaigning would work for a good response. It was an open question to find the best way from the respondent's view. They have suggested different types of Campaigns, the following:

Table 4: Respondents view the effective campaign system for joining women in the RTI Act implementation process.

Suggested way by respondents	Officers	Women
Included in the syllabus and taught by teachers	12%	5%
Publicity by media	60%	74%
Included to Non-government organizations (NGO)	20%	1%
Seminar and open discussion	8%	4%
Publicity by representatives (door to door Publicity)	-	10%
Women friendly environment	-	5%

Table 4 shows that 60% of officers and 74% of women suggested that publicity of media would be the best way of campaigning for the RTI Act and its necessity. The officer group suggested another two ways of the campaign where 12% of respondents mentioned including the RTI into the syllabus and strictly maintaining the curriculum by teachers will be a good campaign, and 20% of respondents supported that Non-government organizations (NGOs) have robust connectivity with general people, especially women. If the NGO employs a work campaign, it will give good results. Seminars and open discussion would be an effective way, as 8% of officer respondents suggested. On the other hand, 5% of women respondents said that including textbooks taught by teachers could be an effective way to spread out the Act, 4% of women respondents suggested seminars and open discussion, 5% indicated a women-friendly environment, and 10% said to do campaign by representatives (door to door Publicity) like the election campaign.

Women are less active than men in the RTI Act implementation process. Lack of knowledge is the main reason for women's less activeness to the RTI Act. A few women know about the RTI Act; most are service holders, and they have applied for their personal information (national ID card correction). Others have not remarkably applied. Though women's backwardness is mainly due to their illiteracy, other factors like economic dependency, bullying, family, patriarchic society, religion, culture, and the scariness of law are also responsible for women's backwardness. Women's apathetic attitude is one the major causes of women's backwardness to the implementation process of the RTI Act. Indifferences of Institutions and the lack of a friendly environment are also responsible for women's backwardness.

Field data presents two types of information. Information officers said they show extra care and give facilities to the female applicant. To protect early marriage and dowry, they work for women. Some of them claimed that women are not coming, sometimes they go but do not want to apply, and they are interested in hearing their required information. However, women respondents claimed that the office or authority doesn't support them in the information-getting process. They don't feel extra care or facilities, and the offices are not women-friendly environmentally.

Moreover, IC's reports avoid providing particular data about women, and the absence of recommendations to include women in the process is a significant example of institutional indifference. Women are afraid to speak, claim, and go against the system. They think that life becomes critical and threatened by doing these activities. Family and society do not support them. However, the application system and office environment are not women-friendly. This study found a way to overcome the challenges based on the respondents' suggestions. Officer's and women's suggestions are different on the ground, but they are commonly suggested about the campaign about the RTI Act and its process and significance. Though respondents have supported various campaigns, about 100 % of officers and 100% of women respondents agree.

Making RTI Inclusive and Women Friendly: Suggested Way-Forward

A few recommendations about women's participation in the RTI Act implementation process are made by the study. Because the field, which represents the expectations of the responders, is the source of these recommendations, they will have greater impact. The goal of presenting the RTI Act to women across Bangladesh is to prioritise a campaign built on collaboration with pertinent actors. The media, especially social media, will carry out the campaign more skillfully according to the campaigning plan. Another methodical way to implant the RTI Act in students' thoughts is to include it in the textbook. Instructors might impart knowledge and practically apply it to their students. Over time, this procedure will increase trust in the Act's use.

In order to foster a multi-stakeholder approach, the information commission ought to involve NGO staff members in the campaign, as they have stronger connections with women in general. They might give women a thorough explanation of the RTI Act and guidelines on how to submit an information request. Serving people door to door would be a good strategy. For instance, the idea of birth control has been impacted in the past. In this manner, door-to-door service for women would increase awareness of the RTI Act. Local representatives should participate in the campaign with the government.

Representatives should have conversations with women, particularly with female ward commissioners who have a close relationship with and desire to understand women.

In order to encourage women to apply for office, the government should make sure that the environment is welcoming. Information about women's participation should be made available by the Information Commission. Since the government acts on the IC's suggestion, it must demonstrate the significance of women's participation in the report's recommendation section. The establishment of legal faith in society ought to be the initiative of the government.

Conclusion

The government of Bangladesh is struggling to create a society in which everyone, regardless of gender, has the chance to fulfil their potential, give back to the community, and take part in the advancement of their nation, despite their unwavering efforts. While the media, particularly social media, can effectively inform women about the RTI Act, women may feel threatened by the potential for their posts to "go viral" on these platforms. In order to advocate for the RTI Act and its important implementation process, the government needs to come up with a non-threatening system. Redesigning the RTI Act with a focus on women's inclusion is necessary. The study's recommendations, if followed, could have a positive impact on women's RTI Act involvement, knowledge enhancement, women's empowerment, and the development of intelligent citizens. It is imperative that action be taken about women's priority or the friendly RTI Act in Bangladesh, as there are quota systems or priorities for women everywhere (constitution and law, service sector—health, communication, etc.) to ensure equality. This study proposes a research area concerning the long-term application of the RTI Act and the use of information by women to become intelligent citizens. A shift in the community's perspective combined with strong political will may be able to mainstream inclusiveness in information access.

References

- Ahsan, S. K., Hasan, S., & Imran, N. N. (2020). Bangladesh: Political Economy of Right to Information, *Report 148252*, World Bank.
- Ahmed, S. (July 02, 2022). 21.25% women use internet, gender gap 39.54%: Survey, *The Business Post*. Retired on April 21, 2024 ([\)](https://businesspostbd.com/front/2125-women-use-internet-gender-gap-3954-survey-2022-07-02#:~:text=The%20Bangladesh%20Telecommunication%20Regulatory%20Commission,7.5%20crore%20men%20use%20internet.)
- Ahmed, T., Hasan, N., & Akter, R. (2023). Journey to Smart Bangladesh: Realities and Challenges. *International Journal of Qualitative Research*, 3(2), 178-187.
- Baroi, H. S. (2013). *Implementation of Right to Information Act, 2009 in Bangladesh: A study on Union Parishad*, Master's thesis, The University of Bergen.
- Baroi, H. S. (2018). The role of civil society organizations in implementing the Right to Information Act: A case of Bangladesh. *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research*, 3(1), 153-170.

- Baroi, H. S. (2022). *The Right to Information Act: Issues and challenges of its implementation in Bangladesh*. Thesis, Macquarie Law School Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.
- Baroi, H. S., & Alam, S. (2020). Operationalizing the Right to Information Act through e-governance in Bangladesh: challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 44(8), 685-698.
- Baroi, H. S., Alam, S., & Bernal, C. (2018). Can an Open Access Approach be the Solution to Better Implementation of the Right to Information Act in Bangladesh? *Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law*, 19(1), 45-68.
- Bari, S. (2015). State of the RTI Regime in Bangladesh. *Empowerment Through Information: The Evolution of Transparency Regimes in South Asia*, 92-109.
- Borah, S. K. (2013). Right to Information Act: a key to good governance. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 2(2), 11-22.
- Ferdous, Z., & Ahmed, S. (2016). *Implementation of Right to Information Act in Bangladesh: Gray Gleams of a Glow*. North South University.
- Genilo, J. W., Akther, M., & Haque, M. (2015, May). Women's inclusion in digital Bangladesh. In *Proceedings of the seventh international conference on information and communication technologies and development* (pp. 1-4).
- Hasan, M., & Rahman, A. (2015). Evolution of the RTI Regime in Bangladesh: Broadening the Dominant Narrative. *TAG RIB*, 25.
- Hossain, A. S. (2020). *Right to Information Act and its effectiveness as a tool to fight corruption in Bangladesh*. Thesis, International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA)
- Hossain, A., & Islam, S. (2012). Information needs of rural women: a study of three villages of Bangladesh. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 693, 1-16.
- Islam et al. (2022). *Implementation of Right to Information and Impact on Administration: A Study on few Upazilas in Bangladesh*. 217-230.
- Laizu, Z., Armarego, J., & Sudweeks, F. (2010). The role of ICT in women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh. F. Sudweeks, H. Hrachovec and C. Ess (eds). *Proceedings Cultural Attitudes Towards Communication and Technology 2010*, Murdoch University, Australia, 217-230.
- Mendel, T. 2014. *Right to Information: Recent Spread of RTI Legislation*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Paul, R., Mohajan, B., Uddin, M. M., & Reyad, M. A. H. (2019). Factors affecting women participation in local government institution: A case study of Bangladesh perspective. *Journal of Global Research in Education and Social Science*, 13(3), 94-105.
- Rahman, M. A., Ullah, R., & Asif, S. A. (2022). 'Right to Information Act 2009'to Tackle Corruption in Bangladesh: Citizens' Perception. *International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research*, 9(1), 26-48.
- Rahman, M. M. (2009). Right to Information Act for good governance: Bangladesh perspective. *Society and Change*, 3(1), 18-27.

Rana, M. S. (2024). A Critical Analysis of the Escalating Cybercrime and its Impact in Bangladesh. *CIFILE Journal of International Law*, 5(9), 40-49.

Shoma, C. D. (2019). Gender is a human rights issue: The case of women's entrepreneurship development in the Small and Medium Enterprise sector of Bangladesh. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 20(7), 13-34.

Sourav, R. I. (2015). Unjust Land Rights of Women in Bangladesh. *International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS)*, 1(3), 5-13.

Bangladesh Education Statistics, 2022

Information Commission Reports

The Daily Star
