

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Assessing the Effectiveness of the Right to Information Act in Rural Local Government Institutions in Bangladesh: A Study on Two Selected Unions in Mymensingh District

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Received: 24.06.2026

Accepted: 11.08.2026

Publication date: 31.08.2026

ABSTRACT

Right to Information Act enables the citizens to access pertinent information in both-government and non-government institutions. This study would be aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of Right to Information Act within local government institutions at the rural level in Bangladesh. The research design was mixed method research studies. Primary data was collected with the help of a structured survey questionnaire and interview checklist. The information is gathered among 138 respondents of two unions in two Upazilas in Mymensingh district. After conducting a thorough review of related literature and examining the information gathered from survey and interview, the study found that maximum number of citizens is not aware of the Act after fifteen years of implementation. They don't know the actual process of making RTI requests. They come to public offices to know information verbally. Educated people and NGO activists asked for information. They submit RTI requests to know the information related to land or development projects. The results of the research also represent that RTI Act may be used to guarantee accountability and transparency within the public offices of union. It plays a significant role towards enhancing the efficiency of RTI Act in the local government institutions in the rural level in Bangladesh. The study collects some evidence-based recommendations through survey and interview. The study also suggests some ways to overcome the existing challenges in implementing the RTI Act in rural level local government institutions in Bangladesh.

Keywords: *Right to Information, Citizen Empowerment, Citizen Charter, RTI Requests, Awareness Campaigns, Accountability, Transparency, Citizens' Satisfaction.*



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1. Introduction

"It is the first responsibility of every citizen to question authority."

- Benjamin Franklin.

The above remark was given by Benjamin Franklin. Any citizen irrespective of age, gender or religion has the right to obtain information from the responsible authority. Additionally, information is considered with knowledge. Knowledge is the ultimate source of empowerment because it grants power to the people. An informed citizen can take any decision in any situation. On the other hand, a people who has no information, can't make important decision.¹Information is thematic lamp that is essential for development at international era.²Many countries have enacted act to ensure citizens' right to gain information. Bangladesh has also enacted an act in 2009, which is known as 'Right to Information Act-2009'. It has introduced a new era of good governance. Because, it's main objective is to make information accessible to the people to improve the accountability and transparency of the government, to reduce corruption. It empowered people to take part in decision which prescribe the social, economic and political aspects of their life.³It allows citizens to obtain information not only from government offices but also from private institutions. RTI Act serves as the safeguard for citizens of a country.⁴The Act is applicable for citizens from all walks including poor and marginalized. People from remote area are now obtaining information on various SSNPs of the government, VGD (now it is called VWB), VGF cards, vouchers for maternal health and other related matters. People who live disaster-prone areas can get information about the measures for relief and rehabilitations provides by the government. Before the implementation of RTI Act, third parties acted as intermediaries between general people and public officials. People often relied on local leaders, influential individuals or political representatives (chairman, members) to obtain information from government office. Sometimes, they relied on government clerks or staff with whom they had personal relationships to informally extract information. These intermediaries often created delays, inefficiencies and opportunities for corruption.

Before RTI, process of getting information was lengthier that has been figured below-

¹HS Baroi and KP Pandey, 'Does Access to Information Facilitate Empowerment of Citizens? Answer Lies Within A Recent Example of Bangladesh' (2015) 37(2) South Asian Journal of Policy and Governance 1, 3.

²MA Rahman, R Ullah and SA Asif, 'Right to Information Act 2009' to Tackle Corruption in Bangladesh: Citizens' Perception' (2022) 9(1) International Journal of Social Political and Economic Research 26, 5.

³HS Baroi, 'The Role of Civil Society Organizations in the Implementation of the Right to Information Act: A Case of Bangladesh' (2018) 3(1) International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research 153, 2.

⁴MR Karim and AR Mukta, 'Role of Right to Information in Empowering Citizen: An Empirical Study on Public Offices Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre Savar, Dhaka' (Research Report, Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre 2022) 10

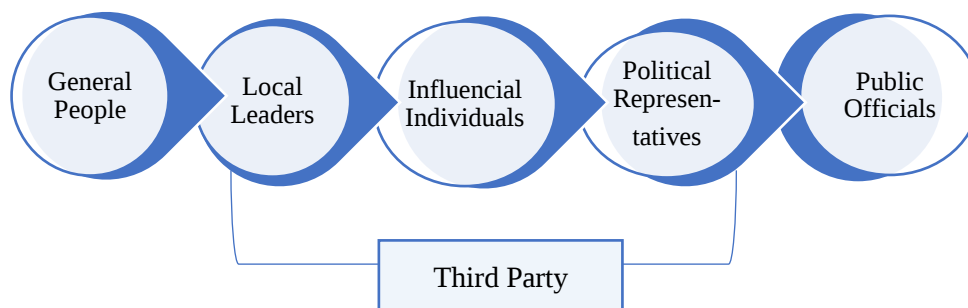


Figure 1: Getting Information Process Before RTI

After enactment of the RTI Act, it has built a bridge between just the general people and government officials and has minimized the longer process of getting information.⁵After RTI, process of getting information has turned into shorter before. The process has been figured below-

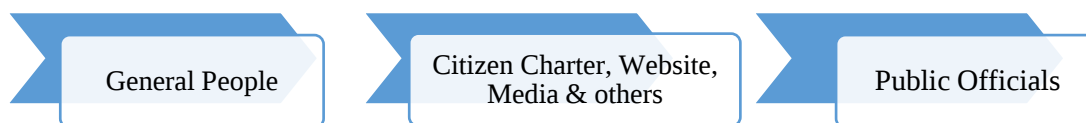


Figure2: Getting Information Process After RTI

After enactment of the RTI Act, government has disclosed service information through Citizen Charter, media, websites etc. General people are now more conscious about their rights. This openness and awareness turned the longer process into a shorter process and make the RTI Act easier for general people. Through sharing the information, it also creates the opportunity for the authority to devolve the power. By enabling citizens to gain easy access to official records, it empowers them to better understand the limitations of the government at all levels. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Right to Information act in the rural local government institutions in Bangladesh.

1.1 Objectives of the study

1.1.1 General Objective: To evaluate the Effectiveness of RTI Act in rural level local government institutions of Bangladesh.

1.1.2 Specific Objectives:

- a. To evaluate the awareness and understanding of Right to Information Act among citizens and public officials in the selected unions.

⁵MR Karim and AR Mukta, 'Role of Right to Information in Empowering Citizen: An Empirical Study on Public Offices Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre Savar, Dhaka' (Research Report, Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre 2022) 10

- b. To identify the barriers and challenges faced by citizens and public officials in implementing the RTI Act.
- c. To examine the impact of the RTI Act on public service delivery in the selected unions.⁶
- d. To provide recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of RTI Act in rural level local government institutions in Bangladesh.

2. Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Framework of the Study

2.1 Conceptual framework

The following figure portrays the conceptual framework of this study-

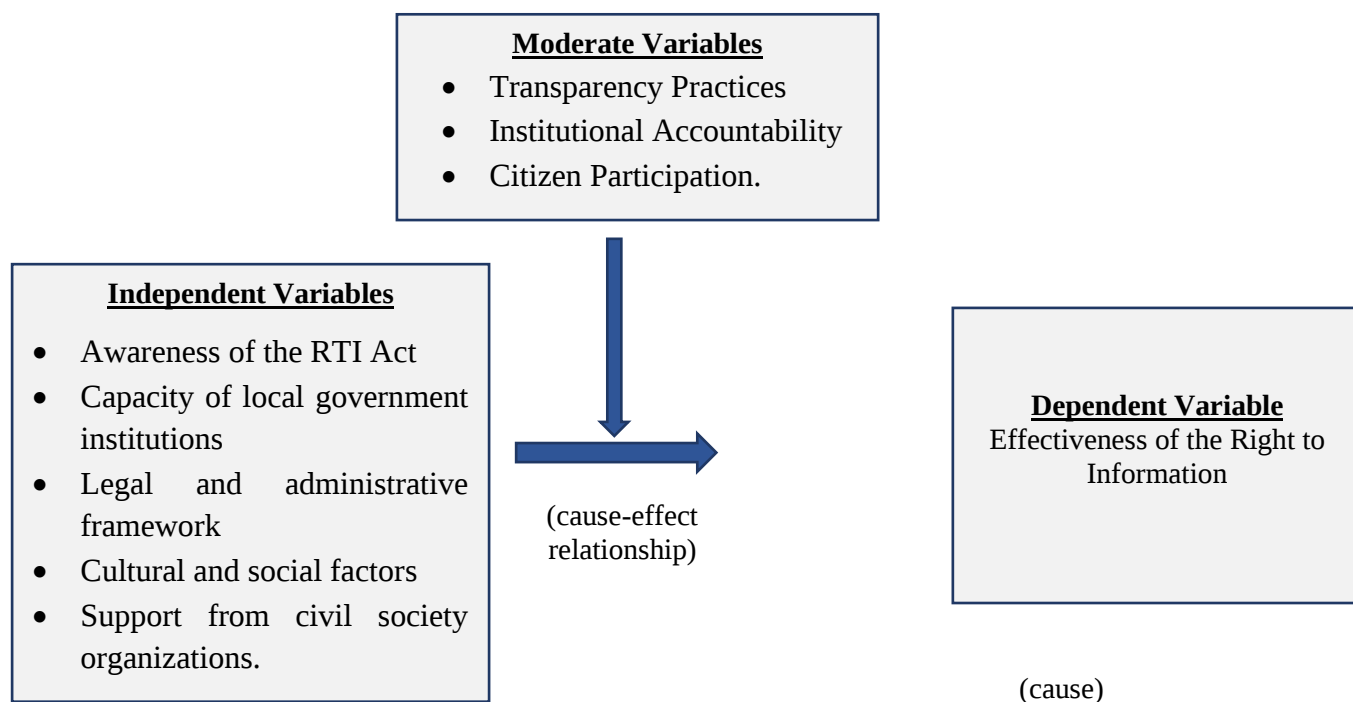


Figure 3: Conceptual framework

Theoretical Framework of the study

As it has already mentioned that theoretical framework derived from an established theory, a theoretical framework has also been developed for this study. “General System Theory (GST)” has been followed to develop the theoretical framework of the study. This theory was coined by Ludwig von Bertalanffy. System theory involves a system with various interconnect parts known as sub-system. General System theory

receives inputs, acts upon them in an organized way and thereby.

The following figure portrays the General System Theory-

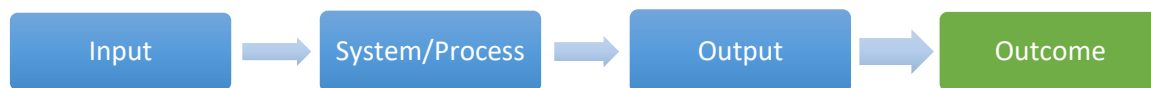
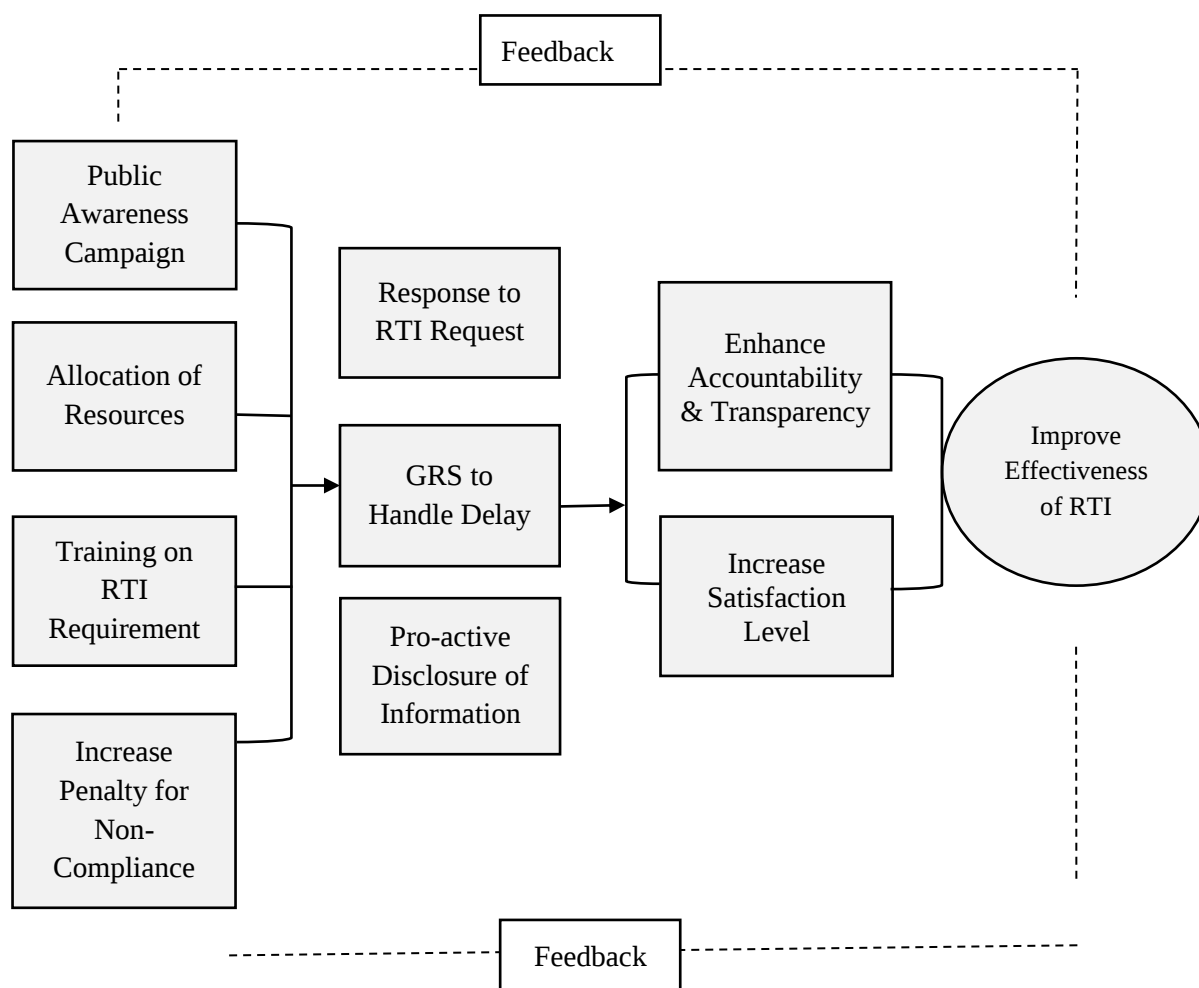


Figure 4: Steps of General System Theory

The theoretical framework of the study has been figured below-



Source: Developed by the author

Figure 5: Theoretical Framework of the Study

3. Methods

The research was conducted with a well-planned research design using a mixed-method research design that incorporated both the quantitative and qualitative data to provide valid and reliable outcomes. The study area Mymensingh Division of Bangladesh: Bhabanipur Union of Fulbaria Upazila and Trishal Union of Trishal Upazila was chosen based on the lack of previous research on the Right to Information (RTI) act in the regions, the fact that the areas are socio-economically diversified with various communities and it was convenient to collect the data. A population sample population of 138 was chosen consisting of 130 citizens using questionnaires and 8 service provider using in-depth interviews. Cochran formula was applied to the sample with 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error with a population proportion of 10%. A stratified random sample was used in selecting the survey participants and purposive sample was used in the interviews in order to achieve a variety and strengthen the external validity. The use of structured questionnaires and interviews was the means of obtaining primary data where the questions in the survey were created based on validated scales and tested on clarity and reliability. To facilitate the research setting and results, secondary data were obtained through books, journals, reports, newspapers and websites. In the analysis of the data, thematic analysis method was used to analyze the qualitative data obtained in interviews as well as quantitative data analyzed using descriptive statistics method i.e. frequencies and percentages with the help of SPSS and MS Excel and obtained meaningful conclusions.

4. Data Analysis and Study Findings

4.1 Findings from Survey Questionnaire

In this section, findings from 130 service receivers from two selected unions through structured questionnaire have been illustrated. The data are analyzed by using statistical software MS Excel. After analyzing the data, they are presented with some tables, column chart, bar charts, pie charts with suitable explanations.

4.2 Demographic information of the respondents

Demographic Information		
Gender	Male	55%
	Female	45%
	18-25	13%

Age range	26-35	23%
	36-45	32%
	46-55	22%
	Above 55	10%
Level of Education	No Formal Education	13%
	Primary	26%
	SSC	20%
	HSC	18%
	Graduate	14%
	Post-Graduate	9%
	Student	8%
Occupation	Housewife	23%
	Farmer	16%
	Government Service Holder	12%
	Private / Ngo Service Holder	15%
	Small Business	18%
	Unemployed	5%
	Other	2%

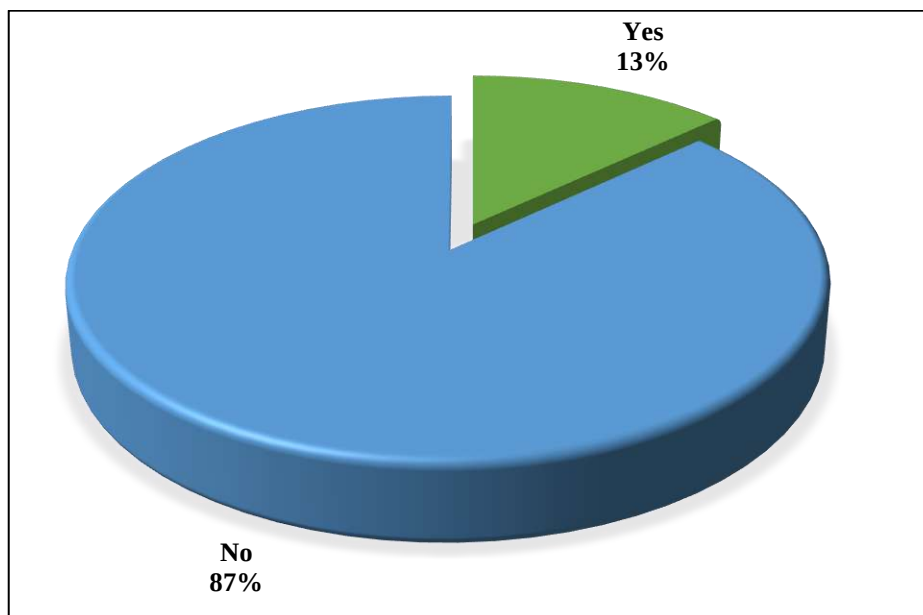
Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 3: Demographic Information of the Respondents

The above table demonstrates the demographic profile of the respondents. It is found that, 55% male and 45% female responders participate in this study. With respect to age range, the largest percentage (32%) of responders belong to 36-45 age group, next in line are 26-35 age group. The lowest percentage (10%) belongs to the people who are above 55. Regarding the level of education, respondents varied, with 26% having completed primary education, 20% having completed SSC, 18% having HSC, 14% holding graduation degree and 9% having completed post-graduation. It is noted that 13% respondents have no formal education. Occupationally, the largest group belongs to housewife with holding percentage of 23%. The second largest group (18%) belongs to the respondents who have small business. Government service holder accounted for 12%, followed by farmer at 16%, NGO/ private service holder at 15%, student at 8%, unemployed at 5% and

others at 2%. However, this comprehensive demographic information provides valuable insights into respondents' profile, which largely contribute to assess the effectiveness of RTI Act implementation in the selected two unions.

4.3 Number of People who Heard About RTI Act



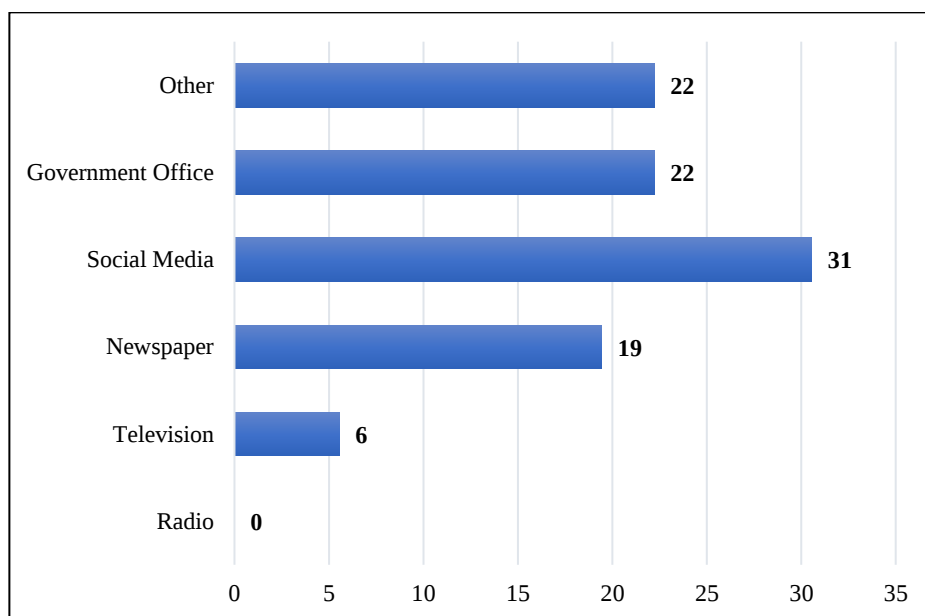
Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 8: People know about the RTI Act

The pie chart above shows the figure of those respondents with knowledge about the Right to Information Act. The pie chart indicated that majority of the respondents (87 percent) have no idea regarding the RTI Act. From 130 respondents, only 17 respondents (13%) heard about RTI Act. The study found that people just know that they can get information from government office and the office will provide the required information. From this discussion, it can be said that people living in Mymensingh District are less aware of RTI Act than another district of Bangladesh.⁷

Way of Learning about the Act

⁷MA Rahman, R Ullah and SA Asif, 'Right to Information Act 2009' to Tackle Corruption in Bangladesh: Citizens' Perception' (2022) 9(1) International Journal of Social Political and Economic Research 26, 5.

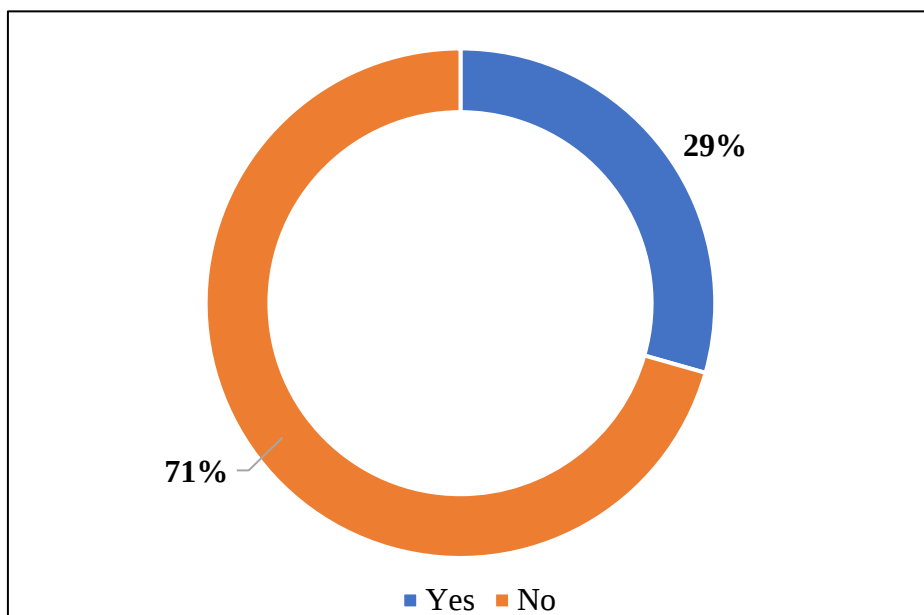


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 9: Way of learning about the act

The above bar chart represents the ways through which respondents first learned about the RTI Act. From the study, it is found that most of the people (31%) first heard about the Act through social media. Government office and other ways placed second position with percentage of 22. In addition, 19% respondents first learned about the Act by reading newspaper and only 6% respondents learned by watching television. No respondents found who have first heard about the Act from radio. The above bar chart demonstrates that social media plays an effective role to publicize the awareness of RTI Act. A large portion of people heard about the Act from others. It has also found that radio has no role in this matter which was a popular media for news few decades ago. Television has lesser impact on telecasting news related to RTI Act.

4.5 Awareness about the main objectives of the RTI Act

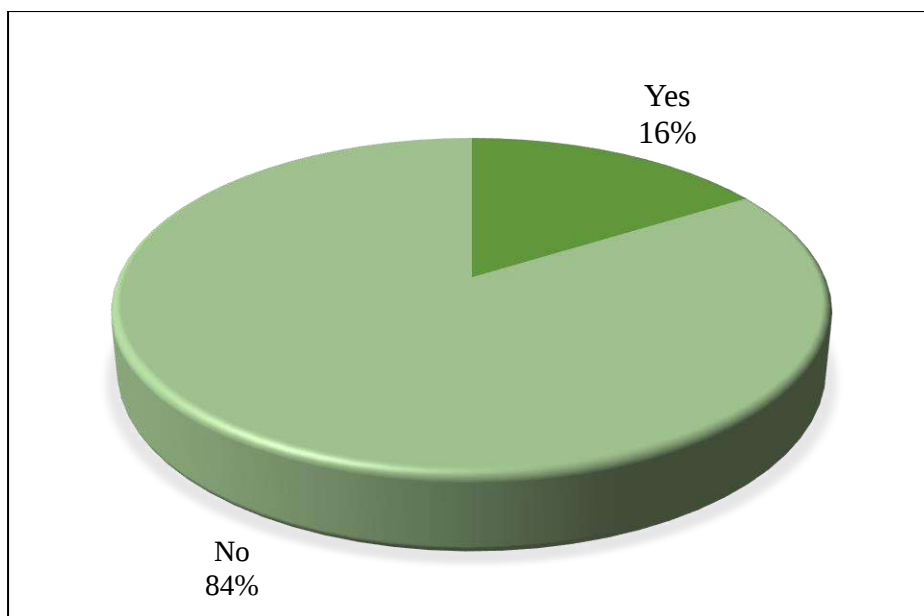


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 10: Awareness about the Main Objectives of the RTI Act

The above pie chart represents the awareness of RTI Act among people. Only 17 respondents heard about RTI Act. But they do not know the main objectives of RTI Act. Among those 17 respondents, only 6 respondents (29%) are aware of the main objectives of RTI. The rest 11 of the respondents (71%) have not any clear idea about the main objectives of the Act, they just heard the name of the Act.

4.6 Application Under the Law

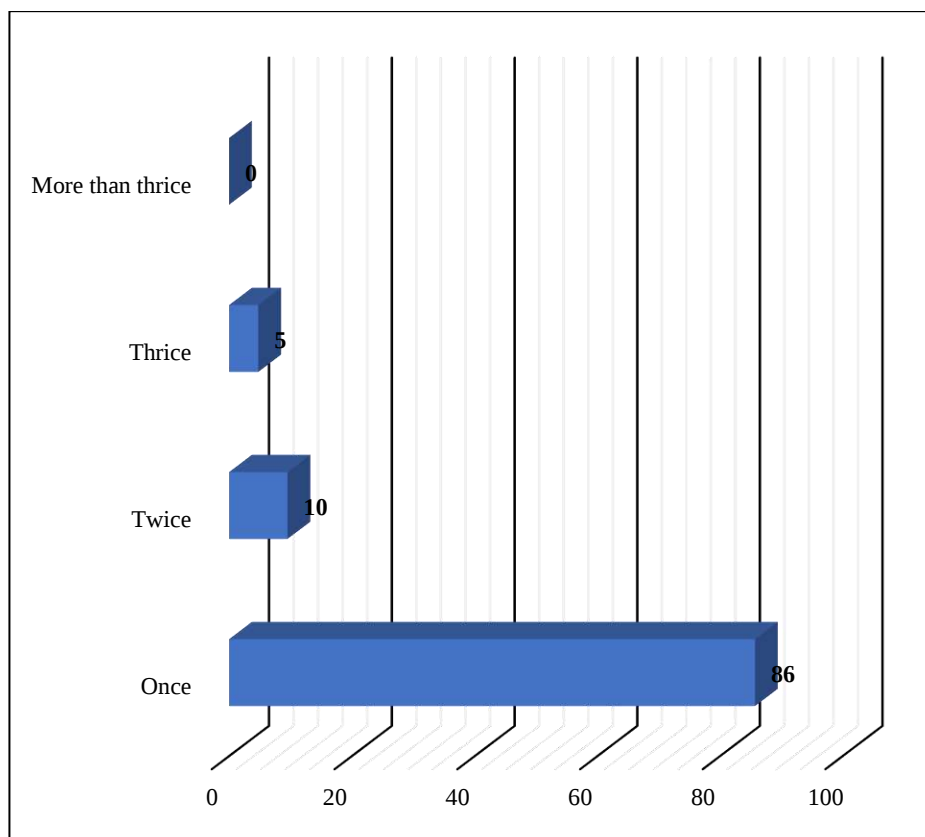


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 11: Application Under the Law

The above pie chart denotes the number of people who have applied for information under RTI law. According to the RTI law, people can get information through an application. The study found that only 21 respondents (16%) have applied for information by following the orders according to the RTI law. Rest of them (84%) have never applied for any information.

4.7 Number of Application for Getting Information

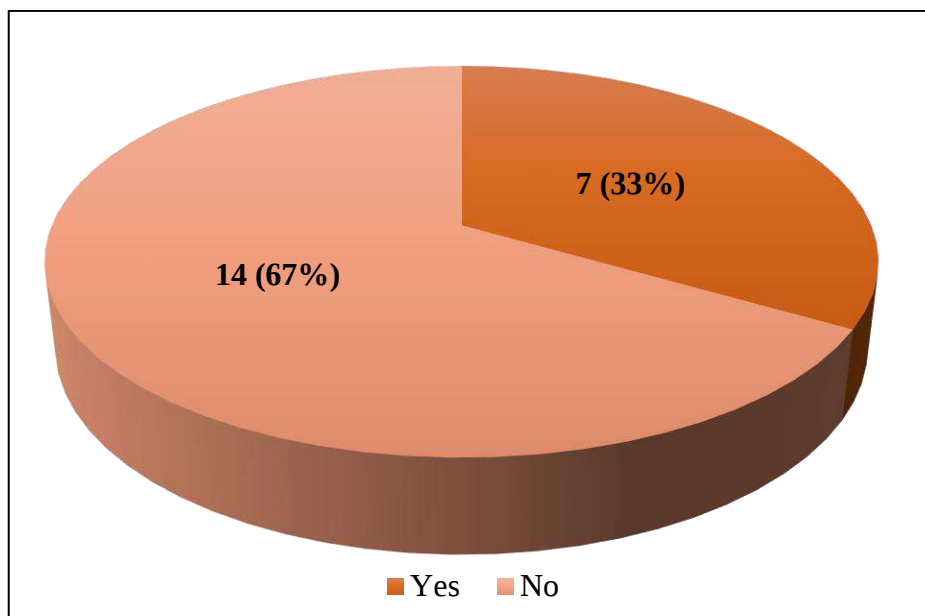


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 12: Number of Application

The above bar chart demonstrates the number of applications for getting information under RTI Act. The study found that 18 respondents (86%) applied once to get required information where 10% applied twice and only 1 respondent (5%) applied for three times. No people found who have applied for more than thrice for getting information. If people don't apply for obtaining information, it will not meet the basic provisions of the RTI Act. To enhance its effectiveness, citizen should engage more with the process.

4.8 Matter of Getting Desired Information Smoothly



Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 13: Matter of Getting Desired Information Smoothly

The above pie chart denotes the matter of getting desired information smoothly. I have already discussed that 21 respondents applied for information. Of them, only 7 respondents (33%) get the desired information smoothly. 14 respondents (67%) do not get the desired information smoothly.

4.9 Information Receiving Days under RTI Act

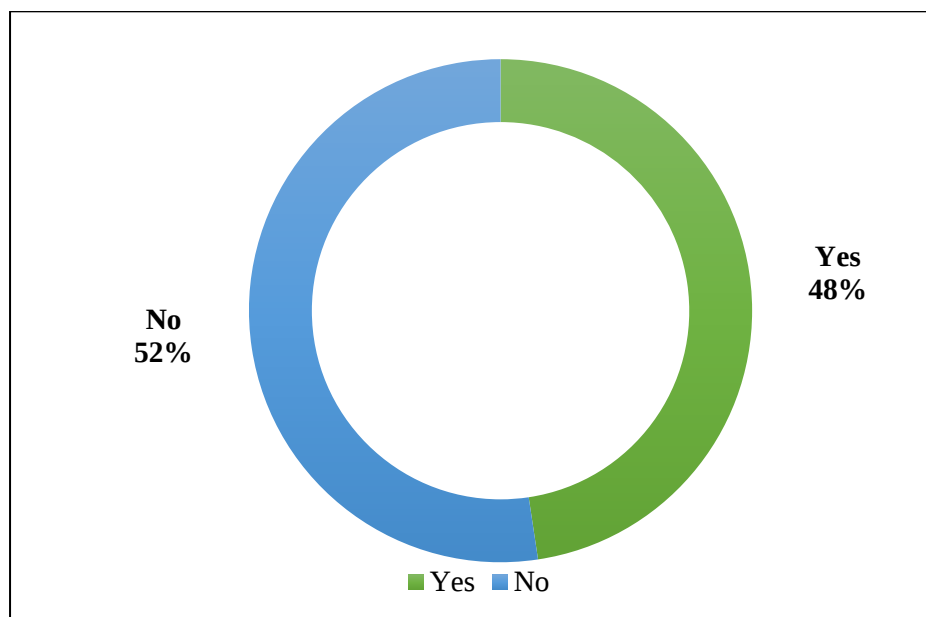


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 14: Information Receiving Days

The above column chart represents the days of receiving information. Though the Act stated that the authority was to give the information to the applicant within 20 working days after receiving the applicant request, the study revealed that only 10% of the people receive the information within 20 working days. This is the least unit in the column chart. It has also announced in the Act- where over one department are coupled with the process, it will require 21-30 working days. But the study found that 24% respondents get desired information within 21-30 working days. 33% respondents have received information within 31- 40 days where 19% and 14% receive information within 41-50 and 51-60 working days respectively. If the authority is able to provide information within the required time, it will increase the effectiveness of RTI Act in rural level local government institutions in Bangladesh.

4.10 Self-contained Information

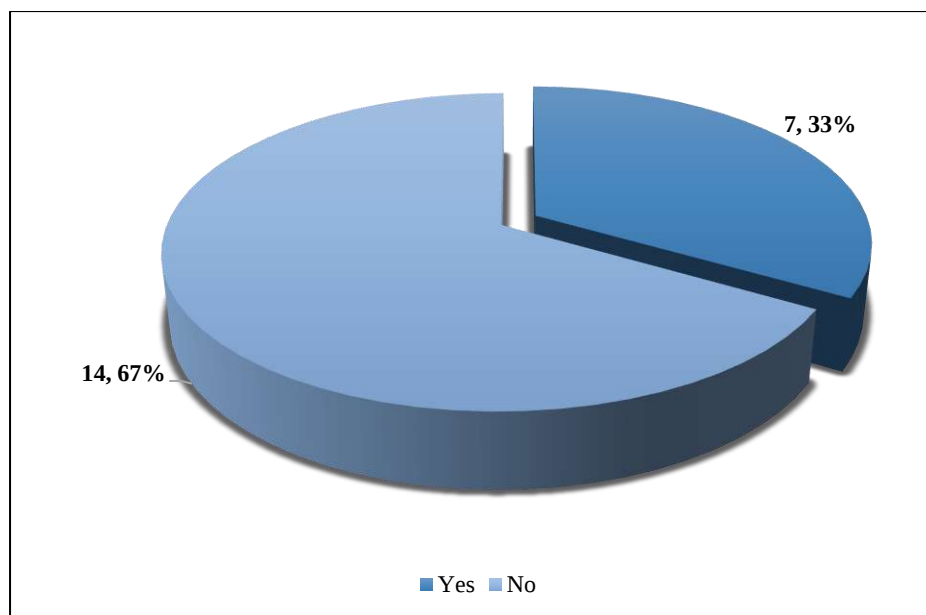


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 15: Self-contained Information

The above figure denotes the matter of self-contained information. It is found that 48% people get information through self-contained where 52% people said that they have not get the information through self-contained. RTI Act has enacted to obtain information from government offices without any help from third party and get relevant information through self-contained.

4.11 Taking Help from Third Party for Getting Information

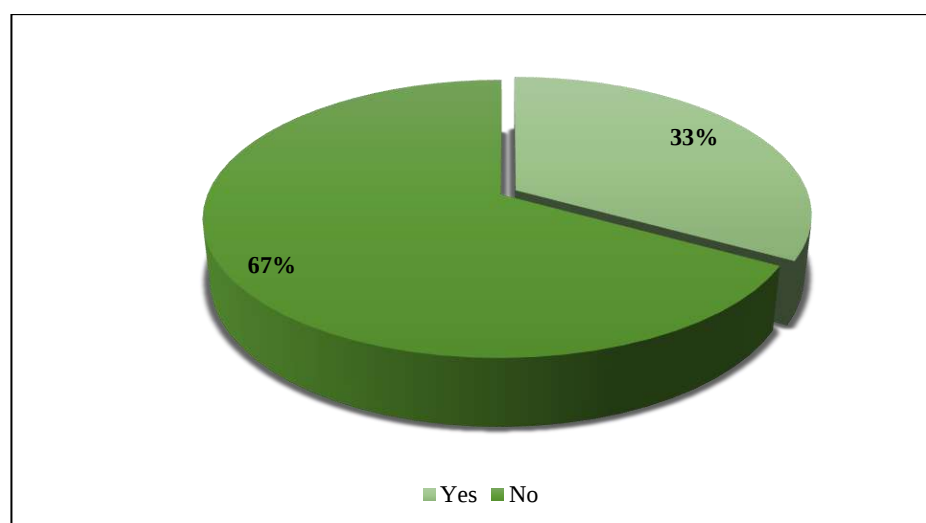


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 16: Taking Help from Third Party

The above pie chart illustrates about getting help from the third party for the application to obtain the information. The study found that 7 respondents (33%) have taken help from third party where 14 respondents (67%) do not take any help from third party. As RTI Act has make information receiving process shorter than before, it has also reduced third party engagement.

4.12 Matter of Harassment in Getting Information from Government offices



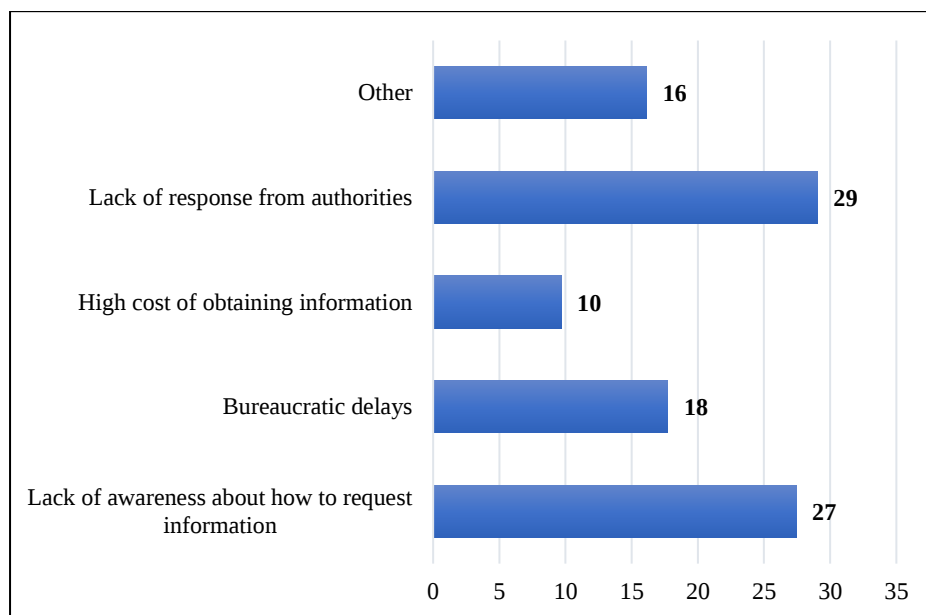
Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 17: Matter of Harassment

The above pie chart portrays the matter of harassment for obtaining information in government offices. The

study found that 33% people have been harassed in government offices while obtaining information. 67% respondents have not been harassed for obtaining information.

4.13 Challenges Faced by Respondents While Trying to Get Information



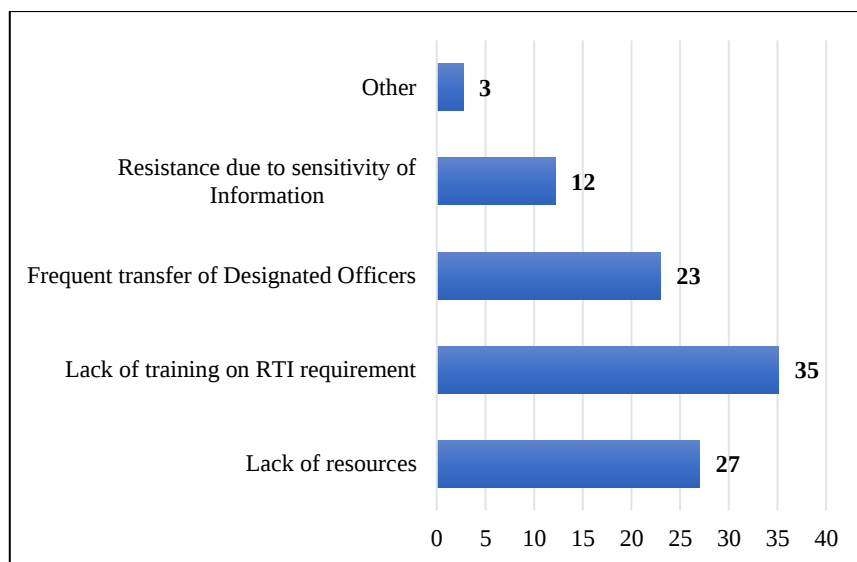
Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 18: Challenges faced by respondents

The above bar chart denotes the challenges faced by respondents while trying to access information. Maximum respondents (29%) of the study encountered the challenge of lack of response from authorities. Lack of awareness about the application process placed the second position with percentage of 27. In addition, 18% respondents faced bureaucratic delays to get information. 10% people faced the challenge of high cost of getting information where 16% people faced other challenges. In addition, Chowdhury and Pandey (2018) found in their study that lack of awareness of general public, lack of responsiveness of the UP functionaries, lack of training and education etc. creates obstacles to implement the provisions of RTI Act in Bangladesh.⁸

⁸S Chowdhury and PK Pandey, 'Ensuring Transparency Through Citizen's Charter and Right to Information' (2018) 45 <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73284-8_7> accessed 14 August 2026.

4.14 Barriers Faced by Public Authorities to Respond to RTI Request

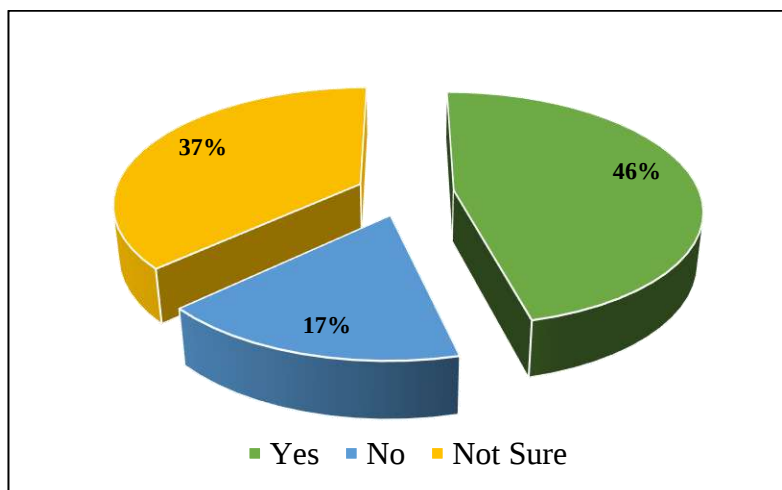


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 19: Barriers Faced by Public Authorities to Respond to RTI Request

The above bar chart represents the challenges encountered by public authorities in case of fully respond to RTI request. Most of the respondents (35%) think that lack of training on RTI requirement is one of the major reasons for this. Lack of resources placed second position as barrier with obtaining 27%. In addition, 23% respondents think that frequent transfer of Dos is another reason for not responding to the RTI request. Sensitivity of information is also a barrier faced by public officials for not fully respond to RTI request. 3% respondents think that the situation is affected by other barriers.

4.15 Found Changes in Public Service Delivery After RTI Act Implementation

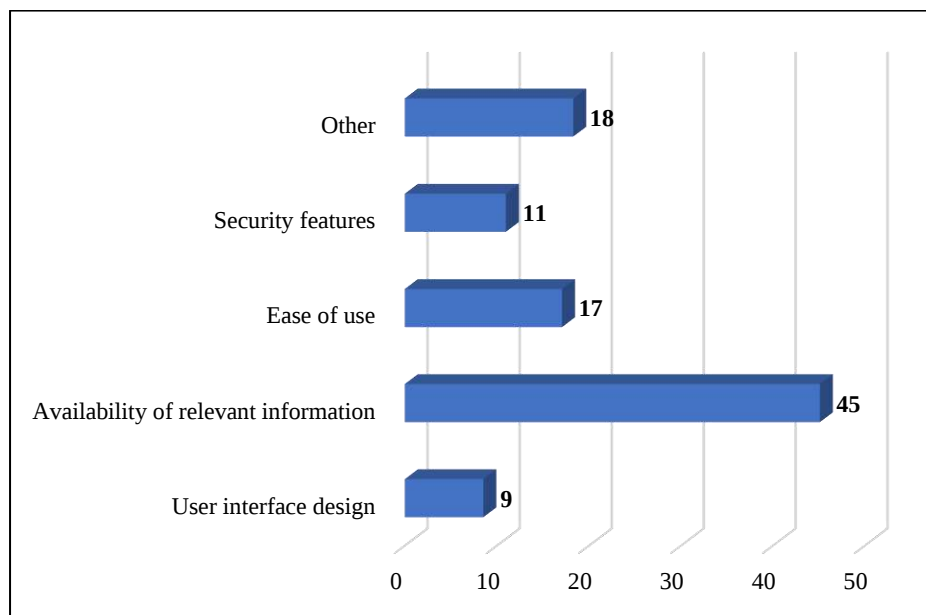


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 20: Found changes in public services delivery

The chart represents the matter of change in public service delivery after the implementation of RTI Act. 46% respondents said that they have noticed changes in public service delivery. 17% respondents have not noticed any changes in public service delivery after the RTI act's implementation and 37% are not sure about the change matter.

4.16. Major Changes in Public Service Delivery After Enactment of RTI Act

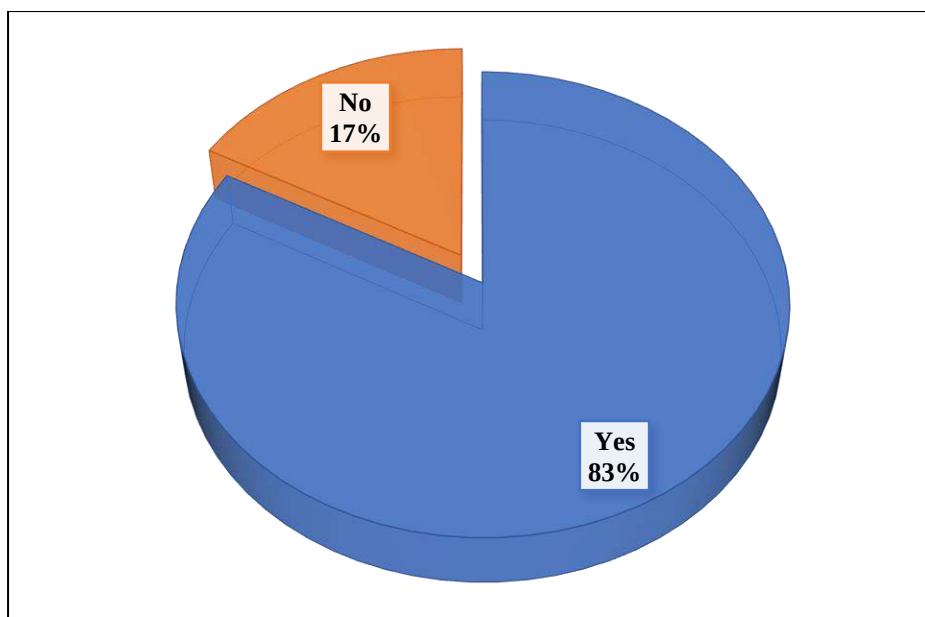


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 21: Major changes in public service delivery

The above bar chart shows some major changes in public service delivery after the implementation of RTI Act. Notable change has found in availability of relevant information. 17% respondents put ease of use as major change where 11% people put security features as major changes. Some changes are also found in user interface design with 9% where other option is selected by 18% respondents. It is notable that maximum respondents found changes in getting access to relevant information. It is one of the special features of Right to Information act. Changes in public service delivery will improve the implementation of the Act in rural level local government institutions in Bangladesh.

4.17 Contribution of RTI Act to Reduce Corruption



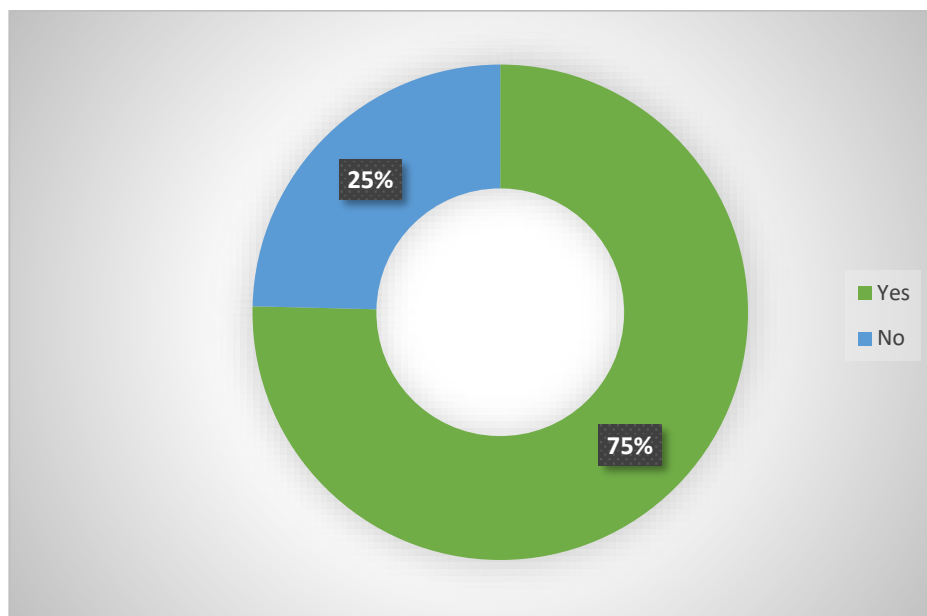
Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 22: Contribution of RTI Act to Reduce Corruption

The chart above indicates the impact of RTI Act to minimize corruption in government offices. The research study discovered that 83 percent of the respondents believe that the RTI Act has helped in curbing corruption in the government offices. Conversely, 17% of the respondents believe that the RTI Act does not assist in curbing corruption. In many instances, the activities of corrupted offices are still being carried out by the public offices. Other studies found the same result in their studies viz- 90% people from Gaibandha District and 77.7% people think that RTI Act is a powerful tool to fight against corruption in Bangladesh.⁹

⁹MA Rahman, R Ullah and SA Asif, "Right to Information Act 2009' to Tackle Corruption in Bangladesh: Citizens' Perception' (2022) 9(1) International Journal of Social Political and Economic Research 26, 5.

4.18 Contribution of RTI Act to Enhance Transparency



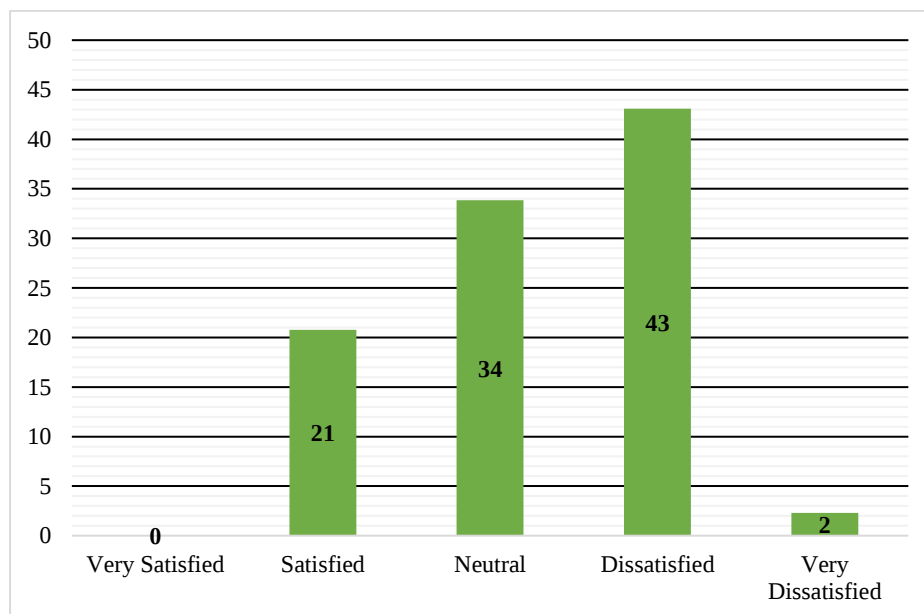
Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 23: Contribution of RTI Act to Enhance Transparency

The above donut chart represents the contribution of RTI act to enhance transparency in public offices. 75% respondents think that RTI Act can largely contribute enhance transparency in public offices. On the other hand, 25% respondents think that RTI Acts doesn't contribute to enhance transparency in government offices. Mallik et al. (2024) found that RTI Act helps people to get access to official records (databases, documents, laws, recordings, expenditures etc.) easily and it allowed them to identify the limitations of the government.¹⁰

¹⁰MR Mallik, Z Khandoker and A Ahmad, 'The Right to Information Act of 2009 in Bangladesh: Understanding the Accountability and Transparency of Public Information Officers' (2024) 3(9) Journal of Intellectual Property and Human Rights 87, 89.

4.19 Level of Satisfaction on the Current Process of Getting Information Under Right to Information Act

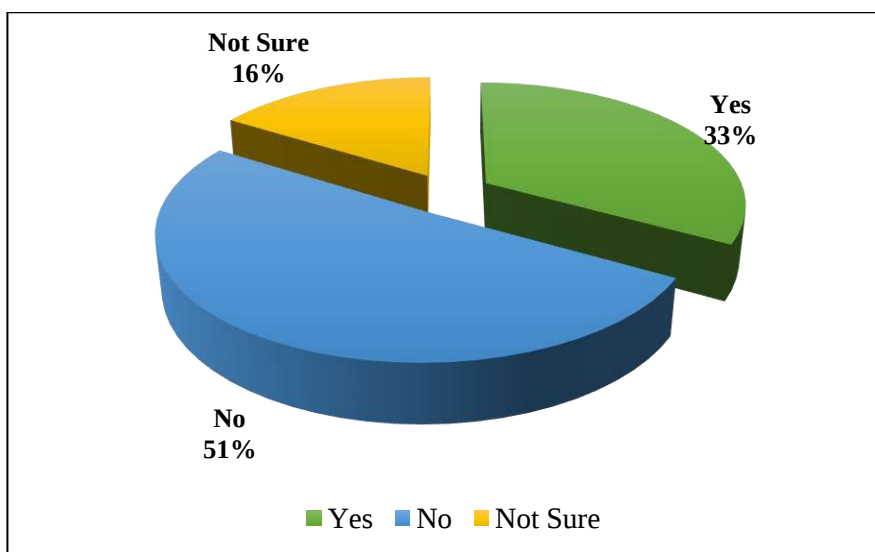


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 24: Level of Satisfaction with the Current Process of RTI

The above column chart illustrates the level of satisfaction of people with the current process of getting information under RTI Act. The study found that 21% people are satisfied with the current process. No people are found to be very satisfied. 34% respondents put neutral option to their satisfaction level. Majority of the respondents (43%) are dissatisfied with the current process where 2% are very dissatisfied.

4.20 Implementation of RTI Act Effectively in Selected Unions

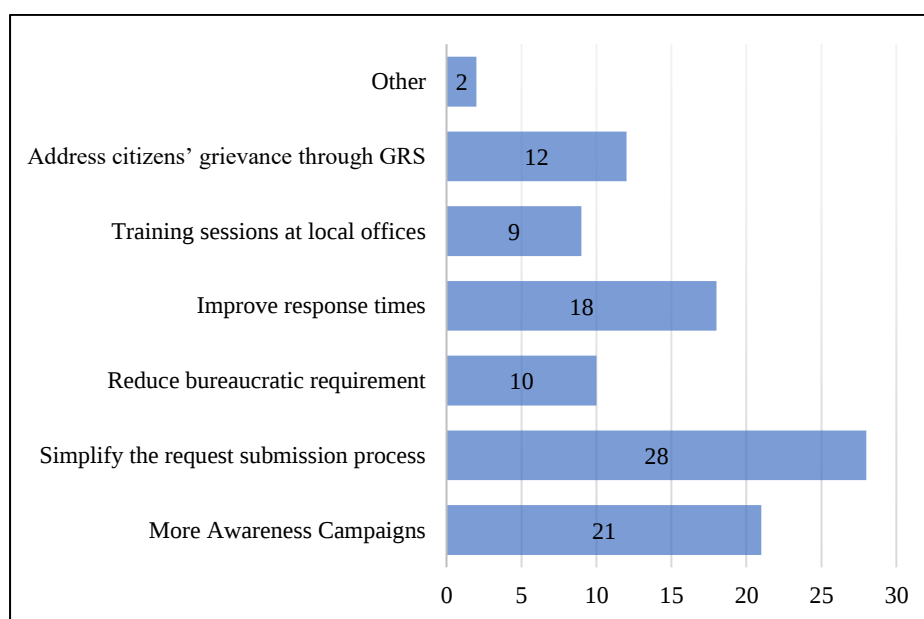


Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 25: Implementation of RTI Act Effectively

The pie chart above will estimate how well RTI Act has been put into action in the chosen field of my research. The majority of the respondent (51%) indicated that there is an absence of effective implementation of RTI Act in their locality. Only 33% of the respondents replied that RTI Act is not properly practiced in their region. 16 percent of the people do not know whether the Act has been properly being practiced in their region. When the Act will effectively be implemented in rural area, it will empower citizens to obtain relevant information under the RTI Act and lead to participatory governance. According to the Report of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2011), a large portion (65%) of population in UPs are illiterate. Other studies found that it can be a barrier to implement the RTI act effectively in Bangladesh. Inactivity of UPs to make people aware of the significance of RTI Act can be another barrier to implement the Act effectively.¹¹

4.21 Actions to Make RTI Act Effective and Make it Easier for Citizens



Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 26: Actions to Make RTI Act Effective & Easier for Citizens

The above bar chart shows the actions that can make RTI Act more effective and make it easier for citizens to use the Act. The study found that a large number of respondents (28%) suggest to simplify the RTI request submission process. As well as, 21% people support to more awareness campaign to make aware both citizens and public officials. As the authority make delay to provide information, 18% respondents demanded for improving response times. They (12%) also want GRS system to address their grievance. 10% people suggest to reduce bureaucratic requirement. Training at local offices can improve the service delivery process. Respondents (9%) suggest for arranging training session and 2% people suggest other ways to make RTI Act effective and easier for citizens.

¹¹AK Ahsan, MS Chowdhury and PK Pandey, 'Do Legal Prescriptions Ensure Public Accountability? Insights and Lessons from Local Governments in Bangladesh' (2018) 40(1) Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration 57, 62.

4.22 Findings from Interview

As the study aimed to explore the effectiveness of Right to Information Act in rural-level local administration, 8 service providers have been interviewed from Bhabanipur union at Fulbaria upazila and Trishal union from Trishal upazila in Mymensingh district.

Union	Male	Female	Total
Bhabanipur	4	1	5
Trishal	3	0	3

Table-4: List of Number of Respondents for Interview

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study generated from face-to-face interview with public officials from two selected unions from two upazilas.

4.23 Findings from the Public Officials from Bhabanipur Union at Fulbaria Upazila

4.23.1 UP Secretary said that he is aware of the RTI Act and he provides information following the provisions of RTI Act. He said that people are not aware of the RTI Act. People come to him and asked for information verbally. Most of them do not know the formal written procedure of the Act. He often needs to guide them about the correct process for submitting RTI requests. He said that they do not receive many requests. He gets request may be two or three in a month, mostly from educated individuals. Most request are about land disputes and development projects. He depicted that the biggest challenge is lack of proper documentation in their office. Because sometimes it is impossible to locate old files. To improve the effectiveness of RTI Act, he suggested that government should simplify the process for filing requests especially for rural people who are not literate or familiar with the process.

4.23.2 Deputy Assistant Agricultural Officer said that the RTI Act is an important law, but general people are not fully understanding the law or its scope. She recognized that many of them including herself, know the basic provisions of it. She said that she gets some training a few years back which was very brief and didn't cover practical implementation. She pointed out that more public awareness campaigns help to educate people about RTI Act and increase its effectiveness in the union level.

4.23.3 Deputy Assistant Agricultural Officer acknowledged that he has a basic understanding of the RTI Act. He honestly said that he has not read the Act in detail. He suggests that government should run public awareness campaigns about the RTI Act and provide more training for officials like them. He thinks that without these efforts, potentials of RTI Act will remain unrealized in the rural level like union.

4.23.4 Entrepreneur (Director) of UDC claimed that the RTI Act is a powerful tool but people are not aware of it. He said that in UDC, they act as a bridge between the citizens and government. People often come to them for helping them to file RTI requests as they don't understand the process. He said that they (UDC operators) are trained in RTI-related tasks. But the training isn't frequent enough to keep up with evolving practices. He suggested that government should focus on digitizing union records and claims more regular workshops and updates. If records were digital, it would be much easier for them to provide information in a timely manner.

4.23.5 Account Assistant Cum-Computer Operator said that he has not heard about the RTI Act. But he knows that people can get information in the union when they sell or buy land. Other information is taken from him for this study. He said that UDC in Bhabanipur union perform well. They have Citizen Charter where they disclose information about the services they provide. The study did not find any Citizen Charter anywhere in Bhabanipur union parishad. In response to a question about CC, he said that they had citizen charter. After July revolution, some local people have defiled the charter. Because, there is no boundary around the UP. He thinks that proper steps should be taken to make people more aware about the RTI Act.

4.24 Findings from the Public Officials from Trishal Union at Trishal Upazila

4.24.1 Union Land Assistant Officer said that he is quite familiar with the RTI Act. It frequently overlaps with his responsibilities because many citizens seek land related information from him every day. Most requests related to land ownership disputes, mutation applications and allocation of khash land. Sometimes, people use RTI requests to harass officials by filing multiple requests on the same issue. He thinks that RTI Act has improved accountability. As citizen can requests for information, it makes officials more cautious to maintaining proper land records by following procedures. He suggests that digitization of all land records and accessible through an online portal will save time and reduce burdens. Training for both officials is essential. Because, people need to understand the Act and officials need regular updates on how to process RTI requests efficiently. If these challenges are addressed, it will help to increase the effectiveness of RTI Act in rural level local government institutions in Bangladesh.

4.24.2 Entrepreneur of UDC said that he is aware of the RTI Act. As many people in rural areas are unfamiliar with the Act, he acts as the intermediaries to make RTI Act easier for citizens. He said that they receive 3-5 requests per month. He said that he assists citizens in filing RTI requests and submit the request to the relevant authority. He depicts that they do not have a dedicated officer for RTI requests. So, it gets added to their heavy workload that are already exist. He thinks that the RTI process is not as citizen-friendly as it could be. He suggests that government should simplify the application process and making it available online, especially for those people who can't visit the union office frequently.

4.24.3 Account Officer of Union Parishad said that he heard the name of RTI Act. He doesn't have any broad idea of the Act. As the UP Secretary is on leave, he preserves various files on RTI requests. He suggests to take necessary steps to make citizen aware of the Act. He thinks that the responsible authority should arrange meeting in every month in the UP to discuss the matter of RTI.

5. Discussion of the Study

This chapter mainly discusses the results from key findings of the study. Discussion have been elaborated based on the objectives of the study and other relative contexts.

To conduct the study, relevant data have been collected from 138 respondents from two selected unions. For survey, the number of respondents was 130. They were both male and female whose age range was 18 to more than 55. Most of the respondents' (32%) age range was between 36-45. Most respondents have completed primary education (26%) and SSC (20%). Most of them are housewives (23%) and small businessmen (18%). In addition, interview is conducted from 8 public officials from two unions. Of them, 7 respondents were males and only one is female. As earlier mentioned, the general objectives of the study are to know the effectiveness of RTI Act in rural-level local government institutions. The findings of the study from survey depicts that most of the respondents (87%) are not aware of the Act. Only 13% respondents heard about the Act from newspaper, social media and other ways. But most them (71%) doesn't know the main objectives of RTI Act.

According to the survey, citizens have no broader idea about the Act. For this reason, majority of them (84%) have never applied for information. Only 16% respondents have applied for information by following written procedure for once, hardly for twice or thrice. In addition, interview depicts that responsible authorities get 3-5 RTI requests per month. But the study found that only 10% people get their desired information within 20 working days and 24% people get the information within 21-30 working days. In addition, findings from interview represents that people usually request for development projects and land related information. As the land records are not digitized, it takes more time to find out old records. Delay can be happened in such cases. As one of the specific objectives of this study is to identify the barriers and challenges in implementing RTI Act, key findings depict some barriers and challenges faced by both service providers and service receivers. From survey, the study found that 33% respondents harassed while they trying to obtain information. Most of them encountered the challenges of lack of response from authorities (29%), lack of awareness about how to request information (27%), bureaucratic delays (18%). Rest them encountered the challenges of high cost of information (10%) and other (16%). The study also found that 43% respondents are dissatisfied with the current process of getting information under RTI Act where only 21% respondents are found to be satisfied with the current process. In addition, it has found through interview that RTI Act

can help to increase accountability. As citizen have the right to question authority about any information, officials become more aware while filing or keeping records.

6. Recommendations

The findings and discussion of the study delineate that people are not aware of the RTI Act in rural areas. They do not know the provisions of the Act, even most of them do not hear about the Act. They have no large idea on the main objectives and scopes of the RTI Act. As they have limited idea on the Act, they do not ask for information from government offices. If the citizen is not engaged with the Act, it will not possible to meet the main objective of the Act in local governance in Bangladesh. Moreover, both service receivers (citizens) and service providers (public officials) face some barriers and challenges in implementing the RTI Act. This study also shows that people are not satisfied with the current process of request submission due to some causes. This creates barriers to effectively implementation of the Act.

To strengthen the effectiveness of RTI, I recommend following initiatives as short-term or long-term measures-

- a. **Promote Awareness of RTI Act:** As most of the people are not aware of the Act, proper steps should be taken to raise awareness among people and public awareness. For this, more awareness campaign should be conducted which discusses the main objectives of RTI Act, provisions and scope of RTI Act. As media has a broader impact on today's generation, it can be an effective tool to promote the importance of RTI Act through media. Media can highlight the use of the Act to obtain information from both public and private offices. NGOs can play a major role to build awareness of RTI Act through Open Hearing, Open Budget System, Implementation Audit, Monitoring and Documentation etc. (Baroi, 2018).
- b. **Establish RTI Implementation Cell:** To strengthen the effectiveness of RTI, a RTI implementation cell should be established by the government. The cell will be monitored by senior level bureaucrats. This cell will take effective strategies and arrange training programs for officials to implement the RTI Act in a better way. When the upper body will take such strategies, it will obviously increase the use of RTI Act by citizens to obtain information. It will largely contribute to meet the main objective of RTI Act in Bangladesh.
- c. **Inclusion in School/College Curricula:** To strengthen the effectiveness of RTI Act, government should take proper steps to include the basic information of the Act in the school /college curricula. If the students have enough understanding of the objectives and basic provisions of RTI Act, they could motivate their parents to use the Act to get any information from government offices.

7. Conclusion

No Doubt the Right to Information Act, 2009 is a tool to protect society from the bite of corruption (Rahman, Ullah, & Asif, 2022). It's true value will come when citizen from all sphere start to use the Act (Anam, 2010). This study shows that most of the people are unaware of the Act. Only few of them file RTI request to obtain information. Most of them seek information verbally without following any formal procedures. When the government officials along with citizen and CSOs participate together, the success of RTI will come. For this, accountability, transparency and collaboration among the stakeholders are essential. This study provides some recommendations to improve the effectiveness of RTI Act. It also requires realization of full potentials to promote good governance in Bangladesh. Good governance can be ensured through media by broadcasting news and government projects with fairness and authenticity.¹² Besides, media can put pressure on government so that they are hold more accountable and transparent to conduct public operations (Baroi, 2018). All these measures will improve the situation to better access to information and will increase the effectiveness of Right to Information Act in Bangladesh.

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