Information Access in the Digital Age - the case of RTI & Open Data

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- Information/Data access is limited by varied factors

- RTI & Open Data have contributed a great deal to democratization of access

- Information Asymmetry leads to multiple issues

- You are at the forefront of enabling access

Movement for Transparency

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RTI – 14 years on

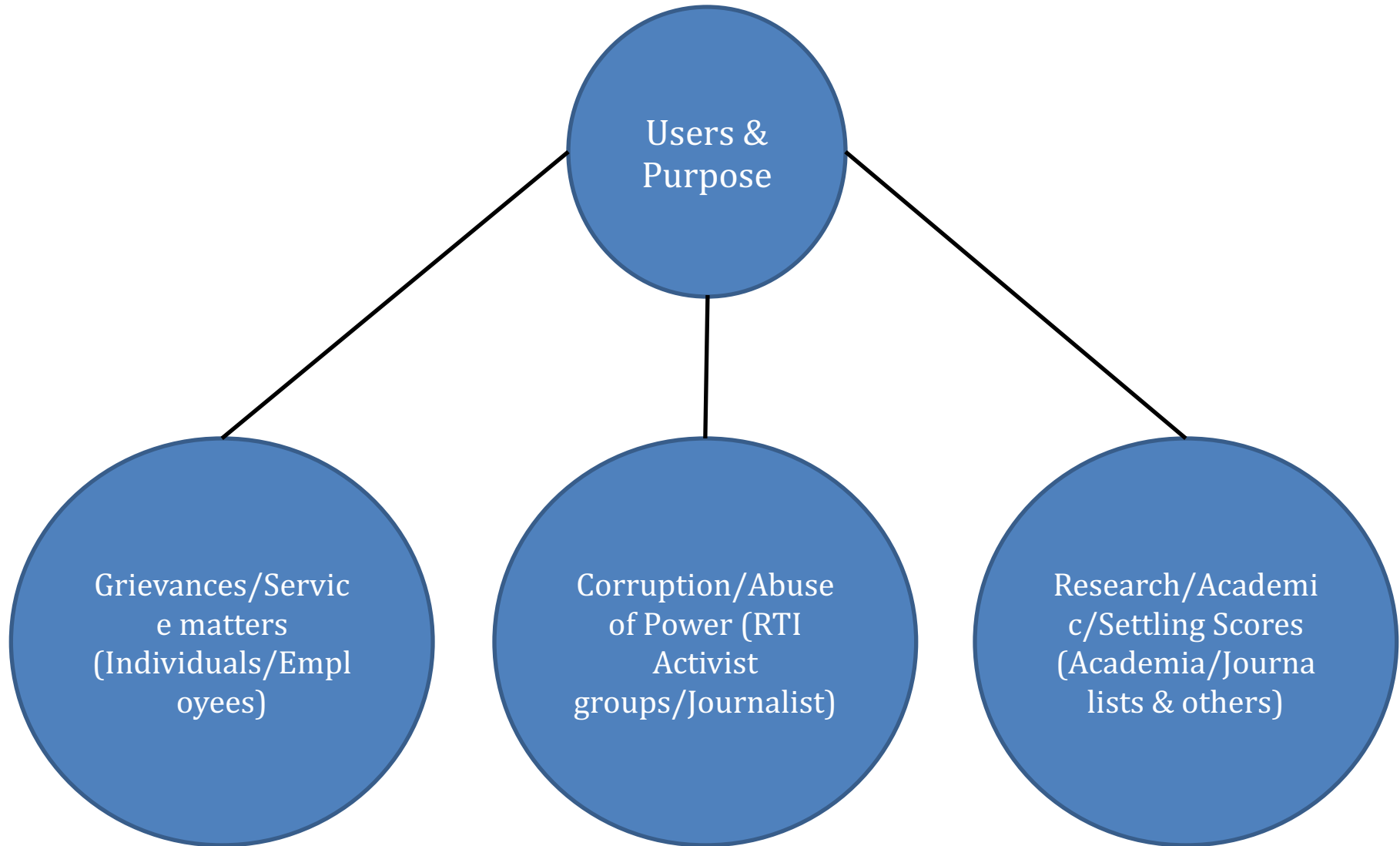- ~ 7 million applications annually (only 10% women applicants)

- Varied Users & user groups

- Few public authorities receive bulk of the applications

- Better implementation directly linked to Political & Bureaucratic Intent

- Most applications for grievances & proactive disclosure related issues

- Only reactive disclosure, very little progress on proactive

Numbers related to RTI applications

- Ministry of Finance (~ 2 lakh in 2017-18)

- MEITY , Railways , MHRD (close to a lakh each in 2017-18)

- At the state level – Revenue, School Education, Panchayati Raj, Municipal Administration etc.

RTI – Users & Purpose

Users & Purpose

- Grievances/Service matters (Individuals/Employees)
- Corruption/Abuse of Power (RTI Activist groups/Journalist)
- Research/Academic/Settling Scores (Academia/Journalists & others)

Issues

- Allegations of Misuse

- Record Management

- Understanding Information needs. Towards customized 'Proactive Disclosure' – even to counter 'Misinformation'

- Grievance Redressal/Service matters & other such expectations from RTI

- Basket of Measures – Need of the hour

- Role of 'Open Data'

Essential elements of Proactive Disclosure

- Available through multiple channels (forms)

- Findable/Searchable

- Relevant

- Comprehensible

- Cost of access

- Up to Date

Open Data

- The GoI Policy & other State Policies

- Challenges

  - Culture of Secrecy

  - Fear

  - Lack of the big picture

  - Lack of Capacity & Understanding

  - Reliability

  - Lack of Granularity & Localization

  - Lack of Standards

Government & Official Data Sources

- The Census
- The Agricultural Census
- Representative Surveys
    - NFHS - National Family Health Survey
    - DHS – Demographic Health Survey
    - NSS – National Sample Survey
    - SRS – Sample Registration System
    - CRS – Civil Registration System
    - PLFS – Periodic Labour Force Survey
- Annual Surveys or Reports
    - Annual Survey of Industries
    - Annual Employment –Unemployment Survey
    - Statistical Year book of MoSPI
    - National Accounts Data
    - NCRB Reports
    - Annual Reports of Ministries/Departments/Organizations
    - Annual Statistical Publications by States
    - CACP reports for MSP

Government & Official Data Sources

- Lok Sabha & Rajya Sabha Questions (more than 5 lakh)

- Parliament Standing Committee reports

- Ministry/Department Websites (MHA – padma, casualties, IAS IPR etc.)

- Press Information Bureau & NITI Aayog (aspirational districts)

- Official Gazette

- CAG Reports & annual reports/outcome budget reports of ministries

- Large scheme specific websites and relevant reports

- State Level
  - Directorate of Economic & Statistics (Eco Stat)
  - State Archives & State Gazettes & Legislative Assembly Questions
  - State Level reports & DISE Data
  - Scheme specific websites
  - Department websites & annual reports

- Open Data portals

My Advice

- Have an 'Open Mind'

- Follow the 'Spirit' not the 'Letter'

- Put yourself in the applicant's shoe

- Provide comprehensive information not piecemeal, think of the potential conflicting information

- Always prioritize 'Public Interest'

- Focus on customized 'Proactive Disclosure' – don't limit yourself to Section 4

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