

The Autonomy for SBP: Demystifying amendments to SBP Act 2020

On April 5, 2021, Transparency International Pakistan and Independent Economists and Policy Practitioners Forum jointly organized a webinar on The Autonomy for SBP: Demystifying Amendments to SBP Act 1956, to discuss the proposed amendments to the State Bank of Pakistan Act 1956 and its implications for Pakistan.

The speakers included among others Prof Dr. Shahida Wizarat Dean Institute of Business Management and President Independent Economist and Policy Practitioners, Dr. Arshad Zaman former Chief Economist, Government of Pakistan, Syed Adil Gilani, MD TI Pakistan and participants from different sectors.

The session was moderated by Mr. Kashif Ali, Program Manager, TI Pakistan. The webinar deliberated on the questions of the implications of the proposed amendments on the economic stability, economic growth and more importantly accountability of the Central Bank.

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Empowering women through use of RTI Act

In a remote village (Chak No. 319 GB) of Tehsil Pir Mehal, District Toba Tek, Punjab, Zahida Bibi lives in a mud-bricks house with her four daughters and a son. To make her ends meet, she works as domestic workers in different households to earn money and support her husband who is differently abled. But she also makes sure to provide education to her children. The two elder daughters have completed intermediate (12 grade) while others are studying in 6th and 9th grades. Zahida Bibi is known to be among those few women who never give up and keep fighting against the odds of life. However, due to the pandemic, the last two years have not been easy for the family as they experience serious financial stress.

Zahida Bibi's two elder daughters want to play their part to financially support the family. However, they neither have required minimum education to get a decent job, nor the skills to start their own home based business venture. One day, Sumera (the elder daughter) heard about a vocational training institute, a government-run institute in the area that trains women to acquire skills needed to start home based businesses. When Sumera told her mother (Zahida Bibi) about the institution, she immediately hesitated to give her the permission. Zahida Bibi had no idea about the institute; how it functions, whether it is safe or not, how will the offered courses help her daughter and etc.

During the same time, Transparency International Pakistan organized a Right to Information workshop in Pir Mehal. In all our outreach activities, we encourage equal participation of women. In this event, which was held on 30th May 2021, 11 females including Zahida Bibi participated. She learned how RTI law enables citizens to acquire information from public bodies. After the event she decided to file an RTI application with the Vocation Training Institute, Punjab to acquire necessary information. Our partner NGO,

Social Welfare Society, helped her draft and file an RTI application under Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013. Her RTI application requested the following information:

- When was the institution established?
- How many students have graduated from Vocation Training Institutes in Punjab?
- How many graduates of VTIs in Punjab have acquired jobs
- How many graduates of VTIs in Punjab are running their businesses and which courses they offer?

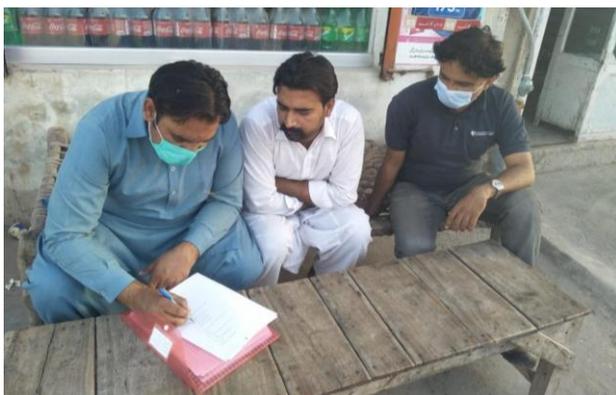
To her surprise, the Punjab Vocational Training Institute (VTI) department provided her the required information which established her confidence in the functioning of such institutions. Normally, public institutions are reluctant to provide any sort of information verbally, let alone in writing under the RTI law despite the fact that the law mandates them to provide the requested information.

A simple act of the provision of information regarding the functioning of the institution enhanced Bilqis confidence and she not only felt comfortable with her daughter taking admission in the institute, but strongly felt that such an opportunity to acquire vocational training will empower her daughter to initiate her business venture and help overcome family's financial woes.

The institute offers free of cost courses and provide a monthly stipend of Rs.500/- to its students. Sumera has taken an admission in the Beautician course, and aspires to open a Beauty Parlor at home to support her family. On a broader scale, the whole story motivates mothers like Zahida Bibi to confidently send her daughters to these institutes where they can learn different skills and start supporting their family during the tough times of Covid-19. TI Pakistan will continue empowering women so they can exercise their rights and make good use of the opportunities to change their social status.

Citizen Report Card Study: Education Sector During Covid-19 - District Layyah and District Jhang – Punjab

From 29 March to 1st April 2021, Transparency International Pakistan conducted a Citizen Report Card Study focusing on the education sector in district Layyah and district Jhang. The objective of the research is to take citizens' feedback to analyze the impact of various government COVID-19 related decisions (such as the lock down, closure of schools, online education, and implementation of SOPs) on education particularly at primary and secondary level.



The data was taken from 400 respondents from Tehsil Chobara, Tehsil Layyah, Tehsil Athara Hazari, Tehsil Ahmed Pur Sial and Tehsil Jhang by Experienced enumerators who were properly briefed about the scope and objectives of the survey before the data collection.

CSOs Provincial Coordination Meeting for Enhanced Awareness and Implementation of Right to Information Laws in Sindh

27 May 2021, Transparency International Pakistan organized CSOs Provincial Coordination Meeting for Enhanced

Awareness and Implementation of Right to Information Laws in Sindh. The meeting which was held in Sukkur was attended by 14 females and 16 males. The objective was to discuss the current situation of RTI law in the province and to coordinate with civil society organizations on how to play an enhanced role for the effective implementation of the law.



Participants discussed the role of Public Information Officers and Information Commission, and the procedure of getting information according to the law. It was also discussed that in the instances where the information is not given, how the citizens can proceed with their complaints to Information Commission. In the end, the participants also wrote RTI applications to various public bodies including Commissioner Sukkur, Deputy Commissioner Sukkur, Education Department, Municipal Corporation, Public Health Engineering, and Administrator Sukkur. In total 25 RTI requests were filed by the citizens and sent to the relevant departments to seek information under the RTI law. Q&A session was held at the end of the workshop.



CSOs Provincial Coordination Meeting for Enhanced Awareness and Implementation of Right to Information Laws in Punjab

On 30 May 2021, Transparency International Pakistan organized a CSOs Provincial Coordination Meeting for Enhanced Awareness and Implementation of Right to Information Laws in Toba Tek Singh, Punjab. The representatives from the following CSOs attended the meeting: Aman Welfare Association Sindlia Wali, Pir Mehal Development Council PirMeahal, Iqbal Eagle Foundation Pir Mehal, Peace and Environmental Cooperation Circle Pakistan, Holy Human Development Organization, and Social Welfare Society. The meeting took place in strict compliance to the COVID-19 SOP's.



Mr. Nasir Saleemi from Social Welfare Society gave a detailed presentation Punjab RTI Laws. After that the participants discussed the challenges faced by the civil society in the implementation of the law such as low level of awareness among the citizens and public officials, lack of information sharing attitude in government departments, the role of Information Commission and the poor state of implementation of proactive disclosure.

Towards the end, the participants identified governance related issues and wrote applications to different departments which will be sent by Transparency International Pakistan and the partner organization after review.

CSOs Provincial Coordination Meeting for Enhanced Awareness and Implementation of Right to Information Laws in Baluchistan

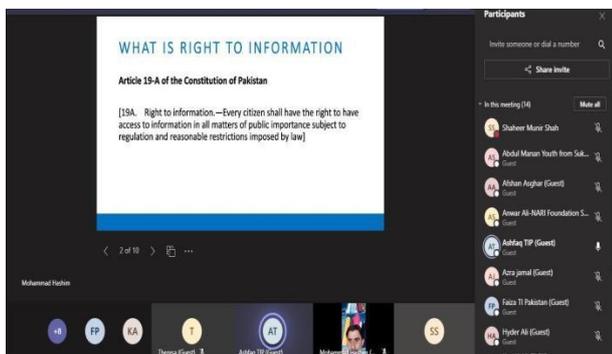
On 11 June 2021, Transparency International Pakistan organized a CSOs Provincial Coordination Meeting for Enhanced Awareness and Implementation of Right to Information Laws in Baluchistan. The Government of Balochistan has recently enacted Balochistan Right to Information Act 2021. So, it is important for stakeholders to know salient features of the law. In this regard, the participants were briefed on various sections of the law including definition of act, maintenance and indexing of records, publication and availability of records, process for requesting of information, assistance to applicants, and offences.



The presentations were followed by a detailed Q&A session in which the participants asked various questions regarding the revised Balochistan RTI law from the speakers. They also deliberated upon a collective advocacy by members of the civil society for the implementation of RTI law in Baluchistan.

Webinar: Good Governance and Youth Leadership

On 15 June 2021, TI Pakistan arranged a webinar on Good Governance and Youth Leadership. The session was attended by 25 civil society members and general citizens. Mr. Kashif Ali, Program Manager TI Pakistan discussed the importance of youth and their role in building the society with democratic values. Mr. Ashfaque, Project Coordinator discussed the importance of Access to information for youth. After the presentations, the forum was opened for discussion. In the open discussion, the forum discussed that such awareness should be given in rural areas which have been hopeless due to COVID situation. Participants highlighted youth unemployment in these areas as a key issue. Towards the end, TI Pakistan appreciated the active engagement of youth and their recommendations. It was highlighted that TI Pakistan will continue this engagement with youth through various platforms with an aim to hear their voices and collectively draft recommendations for enhancing the role of youth in the decision making.



Webinar: Strengthening CSOs Capacity on Sustainable Development Goal 16

On 24 June 2021, TI Pakistan successfully organized a Webinar on “Strengthening CSOs Capacity on Sustainable Development Goal 16”. Mr. Kashif Ali, Program Manager – TI Pakistan, gave a presentation on the “Role of CSOs in the implementation of SDG 16” and explained that civil society groups strongly advocated for an ambitious and holistic agenda covering a wide set of objectives across social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Then, Mr. Ashfaque Ahmed, Project Coordinator – TI Pakistan gave a detailed presentation on the Progress towards SDG 16.10 which is “Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedom”. Mr. Raza Ali, Executive Director Peace & Justice Network, talked about “Evaluating SDG 16 Implementation Post-Pandemic Civil Society Advocacy Strategy – Lessons Learned”. Mr. Raza said that the pandemic impacted the progress of every target in SDG 16. Towards the end, the webinar was open for general discussion in which participants including Mr. Kashif Siddique from CARD Foundation and Mr. Anwar Mehar from NARI Foundation shared their views as to how civil society can collaborate and work for the implementation of SDG targets.



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