

**Mass Awareness Campaign on Right to Information
Report of Pilot Project in Andhra Pradesh**

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THE RTI ACT

The Indian Right to Information, Act 2005 is one of the most advanced Information legislations in the world. In India, after many deliberations over the years, the RTI Act was passed by the parliament in October 12, 2005, thus opening up the governance processes of our country to the public. The Act is based on the principle that all government information is the property of people. It takes democracy to the grass root level and is also a step towards ensuring participatory governance in the country. RTI Act is a source of strength for all citizenry as it would ensure timely response to their information needs on government functioning and lead to greater transparency in governance. 'Right to Information' (RTI) refers to the right of every citizen to access information held by or under the control of public authorities. Information is crucial for good governance as it reflects and captures Government activities and processes. It is said that information is the oxygen of democracy. If people do not know what is happening in their society, if the actions of those who rule them are hidden, then they cannot take a meaningful part in the affairs of the society. Access to information not only promotes openness, transparency and accountability in administration, but also facilitates active participation of people in the democratic governance process.

This legislation provides opportunities to CSOs to be involved in governance and social transformation processes by using the Act as a weapon to monitor, review and evaluate Government policies, programmes and schemes. CSOs can infuse greater transparency and accountability in the administration of developmental programmes and arrest the abuse of power and misuse of public resources with the help of the RTI Act.

"I believe that the passage of this bill will see the dawn of a new era in our processes of governance, an era of performance and efficiency, an era which will ensure that benefits of growth flow to all sections of our people, an era which will eliminate the scourge of corruption, an era which will bring the common man's concern to the heart of all processes of governance, an era which will truly fulfill the hopes of the founding fathers of our Republic."

*- Shri. Manmohan Singh,
Prime Minister of India in
his intervention speech on
RTI bill debate in Lok
Sabha in May 2005*

RTI & THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The process of governance encompasses the political, social and economic aspects of life which have an impact on each individual, household, village, region or the nation. Governance improves when the processes of decision-making and implementation of decisions enable the key actors like the Civil Society. Good Governance is the equivalent of purposive, responsive, participatory, development-oriented, citizen-friendly, citizen-caring, public management committed to improvement in quality of life of the people. Civil society has a very important role in ensuring good governance. Using RTI CSOs can:

"It is what citizens do together in their own right at the bidding of no higher authority, for the common good, and apart, generally speaking, from direct party political affiliation or alignment. The civil society is not concerned primarily with power, although it may be ranged against the excessive concentration or abuse of power in any quarter."

- Robin Guthrie
On Civil Society in his exploration of "Civic, Civil and Servile?" in 1994.

1. be involved in basic service delivery & provide necessary institutional basis to the RTI movement
2. act as grassroots organisations to promote collective action using the RTI
3. take up education and awareness programmes to mobilise people
4. represent and negotiate citizens' interests vis-à-vis the State
5. promote social equity by accessing information
6. use the RTI in promoting rule of law, good governance, and respect for human rights
7. use RTI to audit the performance of a public authority
8. demystify RTI to provide for access to information
9. work closely with government as 'strategic partners
10. keep a vigil on how the law is being interpreted by PIOs, Public Authorities and Information Commissions
11. disseminate important decisions of Information Commissions
12. facilitate learning by publishing relevant information

REACHING THE MASSES

The experience of the RTI regime since its enactment has been rather mixed. While significant positive developments have taken place at both supply and demand ends, the most glaring deficiency at the demand side has been the lack of awareness on RTI and community mobilisation, particularly in the rural hinterland. Massive efforts are required to raise citizens' awareness of their right to demand information. While the resourceful citizens are in any case able to access information, it is the disadvantaged groups for whom support systems need to be put in place to encourage and enable them to perceive, articulate and successfully obtain information which typically impinges on their livelihoods and survival.

Mass awareness campaign on RTI assumes importance when strategies are planned to reach the larger masses and disseminate basic information on the Act and how to use it. It involves utilization of all mass media channels (TV, radio, press, general print materials) to disseminate a sequence of basic messages on RTI in a coordinated fashion aimed at a loosely segmented target population. It is important that a campaign is recognized by the general population as a cohesive programme no matter which channel of the mass media is used. This section gives a brief insight and introduction to mass awareness and a step-by-step process involved in undertaking such a campaign. The steps include the following.

1. **Identifying Target Population:** Identifying segments of population to be reached is an important decision to make.
2. **Drafting a Strategy:** The overall theme and tone of the campaign should be developed based on the philosophy of the Act and research undertaken.

"... the Act is the most powerful act in the world. It deepens the democratic spirit and people should take up the campaign openly for its effective implementation."

"Despite all the hiccups, the act is revolutionary... and it will force the public authorities to be accountable and slowly become powerful with the growing awareness, collective pressure and a few good officers who will show the way"

*- Dr. Sandeep Pandey
Ramon Magsaysay Award
Winner and RTI Activist,
addressing the press on
RTI during the Mass
Awareness campaign in
Andhra Pradesh.*



3. **Developing Messages:** Catchy, innovative messages should be developed on the basis of the philosophy of RTI, which could include posters, banners, advertisements, radio jingles, booklets, pamphlets etc.
4. **Implementation:** The campaign can be planned depending on exhaustion and comprehension of the messages by the target groups. All media materials should be ready and disseminated at the same time.
5. **Monitoring:** It is essential to carefully monitor the implementation and impact of the campaign to ensure that the materials have been disseminated, and to assess the target groups participation.
6. **Evaluation and Documentation:** Documentation of the activities undertaken as part of the campaign and an evaluation should be planned to assess the campaign, reprogramme, and re-launch it with greater knowledge. For a visible impact awareness campaigns must be continuous undertaken over a period of time.



MASS AWARENESS CAMPAIGN IN AP

The mass awareness campaign in Andhra Pradesh was implemented with the joint efforts of the United Forum for Right to Information (AP) and the Centre for Good Governance.

The Beginning

The idea of forming a United Forum for Right to Information came from group of social activists in Hyderabad. These activists were working on disseminating RTI and helping the community in demanding their rights and entitlements using RTI, since its enactment in 2005. They in time were able to communicate and work with a number of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) across the state and formed a strong network. It is during these campaigns and planning for RTI awareness that it was felt that if more NGO networks are brought under the RTI campaign, the community would largely benefit from such an activity. The idea was to educate and create consciousness among the community so as to equip and instigate them to use RTI to demand their rights and entitlements. Invitations were sent to 4 to 5 networking organisations to reflect upon the idea and also how such an activity can be planned. After a series of meetings and discussions a schedule was planned and a core team formed to coordinate the event. Soon all the member organisations of the networks were contacted and by January 2007 they were able to bring more than 70 NGOs, CBOs, Unions and networks under a single networking forum which was named the United Forum for Right to Information (AP).

The structure of the United Forum is democratic and provides a broad platform of CSOs working on rights, entitlements, Communal Harmony to use RTI for the benefit of the masses. Any organization can join or leave the consortium whenever

“Corruption is mainly due to secrecy in government. Transparency accountability and responsiveness can only be achieved through informed citizenry. RTI is the only way out.”

*- Mr. Venkateshwar Rao
RTI activist and one of the
convenors of the mass
awareness campaign
undertaken in Andhra
Pradesh.*



they felt like it. The united forum includes organisations of various sizes including individuals.

Planning the Campaign

After the training in consultation with the members of the forum the dates for the mass awareness campaign were fixed. The mass awareness campaign was planned in the following phases.

1. The Training of Trainers (ToT) – (7th – 9th April)
2. The Mass Awareness Campaign – (10th April – 20th May)
3. Filing of Application (21st May – 26th May)
4. Follow up activity for 1st appeals (1st week of July)
5. Follow up activity for 2nd appeal (1st week of August)
6. Public Hearing (December 2007)

Once the planning took shape the United Forum approached Centre for Good Governance (CGG) to partner and help the them in undertaking the campaign. CGG promised to provide the Information Education and Communication (IEC) material required for the campaign.

Training the Volunteers

United Forum for Right to Information was formed with a purpose of undertaking a state wide mass awareness campaign on RTI. For this purpose the convenors of the United Forum approached the Director General of Dr. Marri Chenna Reddy Human Resources Development Institute of Andhra Pradesh (MCR HRD IAP) which is also the State Administrative Training Institute (ATI) of the Government to train the members of the United Forum. As a response to this request the State ATI conducted a Three-Day free Training of Trainers (ToT) Programme from 7th to 9th April 2007, for 80 volunteers representing 50 organisations across the state. The emphasis was

Training Content

Training of Trainers (ToT) conducted for the volunteers of the United Forum included a number sessions. Some important sessions are listed below.

- RTI and good governance
- Introduction to concepts like transparency, accountability and participation
- Orientation on the history of the RTI legislation
- Proactive Disclosure under the RTI Act (Section 4(1)(b))
- Public authorities and their functionalities for disclosure of information (PIOs, APIOs and Appellate Authority)
- Information Commissions – Central and State
- RTI and the role of Civil Society Organisations
- RTI and the role of Media
- Procedures of filing applications and appeals under the act
- Fees and charges applicable under the Act
- Information availability in various departments
- Civil Society Organisations as public authorities
- Case studies and success stories on RTI
- Mass awareness and RTI
- Social Accountability tools: Social Audit and RTI
- RTI training (ToT) etc.



on a ToT to facilitate participating institutions to further train their cadres working at the grass roots. The participating organisations are grassroots organisations working on a number of issues like rights, health, education, agriculture, weaker sections etc.

CGG and the United Forum on RTI (AP)

Centre for Good Governance (CGG) is part of its mandate under the Capacity Building for Right to Information (CBAI) Project funded by UNDP has been conducting a number of training programmes on RTI for the community as well as the government machinery. CGG designed and printed the IEC material for the campaign and supported the United Forum on RTI in undertaking the mass awareness campaign across the state. Resource persons from CGG participated in the public meetings, discussions and consultations with the NGOs and the community which were undertaken as part of the campaign. They were able to share their experiences and also educate the community on RTI Act. CGG undertook the activity of documenting the campaign and preparing a process document that can be used to undertake similar activity elsewhere in the country. As the National Implementing Agency (NIA) under the CBAI project, CGG is preparing a framework for Mass Awareness on RTI which can be used by all the states in disseminating the Act.

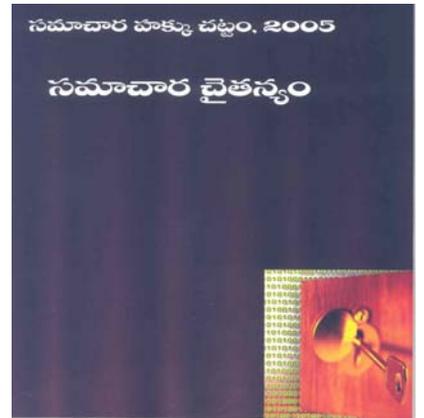
Preparing for the campaign

The state-level coordination committee of the united forum took stock of the IEC material which was centrally printed at CGG and then sent to the headquarters of the united forum in Hyderabad. The material was then distributed to the CSOs working in the districts through courier. Volunteers who had attended the ToT at the state ATI had time to share their learning and prepare the volunteers at the grassroots. The

Material provided by CGG

The following IEC material was provided by CGG for the Mass Awareness Campaign.

- Stickers: 30,000 11 inch bold print stickers containing a slogan on RTI.
- Poster: 30,000 A4 size adhesive posters with a slogan and a message stating that every public authority has a PIO in place to provide information to the community.
- Pamphlet: 2,00,000 A4 size pamphlets listing important provisions of the RTI Act
- Booklet: 30,000 pocket size booklets of the RTI Act



campaign began once the IEC material was received by the CSOs.

The Implementation

Targets Achieved

The following are some of the important milestones achieved under the campaign.

- Districts covered – 23
- Mandals Covered – 600
- Volunteers participated – 1500
- Govt. offices covered – 1600
- Govt. officials met – 2300
- Kiosks installed – 1800
- **Applications filed – 7000**

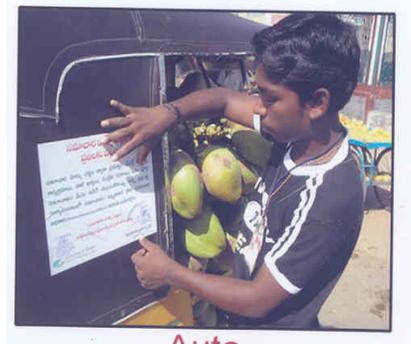
Initially the CSOs thought that the campaign should be limited to only the district headquarters. But with more local CSOs joining the campaign it was extended from district headquarters to mandals. Depending upon the availability of funds, manpower and publicity material the number of mandals to be covered were selected. The campaign began in all the 23 districts of the state at the same time around the second week of April. The selection of mandals was however left to the CSOs working in the respective districts. Depending upon the size of the NGOs the number of mandals within each district was covered. For example in NGOs in districts like Ananthapur, Warangal, Mahboobnagar, Nalgonda, Chittoor, Vijayanagaram, Srikakulam etc., were able to cover approximately around 60 to 70 percent of the mandals. All the remaining districts except Adilabad and Nizamabad were able to cover around 30 to 40 percent and in Adilabad and Nizamabad the coverage accounted for only 10 percent of the total mandals in the district.

A total of around 600 mandals were covered under the campaign. Coverage of such a large number of mandals was possible due to a few CSO networks that could work across

Community Mobilisation

The following are some methods used for community mobilisation.

- Cycle Rallies
- Padayatras
- Door-to-door campaigns
- Public meetings
- Press conferences & press meets
- Effective usage of local print media
- Effective usage of local electronic media (local TV)
- Songs
- Street plays
- Posters
- Pamphlets
- Stickers
- Booklets



districts. These institutions in the past few years have been able to wield considerable influence in the districts that they are operating. Some of them include:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. MV Foundation | - 11 districts |
| 2. AP Mahila Samatha Society | - 9 districts |
| 3. COVA | - 7 districts |
| 4. SACIR | - 5 districts |
| 5. APVVU | - 3 districts |

RTI has been the driving force for all the CSOs who volunteered to be a part of the campaign. The appeal to the CSOs while forming the United Forum was to create opportunities and help deliver benefits to the community through access to information.

Resource Mobilisation

Majority of the CSOs which participated in the campaign have come forward voluntarily. Hence resources spent locally in various districts for costs like, volunteers training and field visits, establishing kiosks/stalls, travel and to some extent publicity was met from the funds of the respective CSOs. Requests were also made for sponsoring or funding the campaign. A number of CSOs have invested their resources in terms of manpower, time and money. However the united forum got principal support from CGG in terms of IEC and publicity material for the campaign across the state.

Application Filing

The application filing activity under the campaign was undertaken from the 21st to 26th May 2007. It was during this phase of the campaign, a number of public meetings were conducted. The purpose of these meetings was to help the community file applications requesting information. Meetings,

Type of CSOs participated

CSOs which participated include:

- Rights-based organisations
- Farmers unions
- Issue-based institutions
- Voluntary Associations
- Citizen's Groups
- Activist Organisations



and discussions were conducted to attract the attention of community in this regard. In addition to the community, the public meetings were attended by representatives of a variety of CSOs in the district.

These meetings were convened to discuss the process of filing applications for information. This was the critical phase of the campaign where problems encountered were shared and strategies were planned to address them. Issues of convergence were also discussed. For example, institutions working on farmers or primary education were able to discuss how RTI can be useful for the activities that they are undertaking as part of their organizational objectives. A number of issues were raised by the participants and the community in these public meetings. In addition to discussions on RTI issues raised by the community in the public meetings include:

1. Land related issues (MRO & MPDO functionaries) (Rangareddy)
2. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (Ananthapur)
3. Special Economic Zones (Visakhapatnam & East Godavari)
4. Schemes and entitlements (Hyderabad & Rangareddy)
5. Community Housing (Hyderabad)
6. Public Distribution System & Health Services (Warangal)
7. Loans and subsidies provided by banks (Mahboobnagar)
8. Services provided by rural and urban local bodies (Guntur)
9. Child Rights and Labour (Nalgonda)

The community was also guided by the resource persons on application filing. For example the community was informed to pay the PIO in cash and also take a copy of the application form

Community Issues Captured

People attending the public meetings flagged a number of problems. Important ones being:

- *offices do not have notice Boards displaying the names of the PIO, APIO and Appellate Officer. This has hindered their access to inform*
- *There was lack of clarity on the fee to be paid for filing applications. There were instances where the PIOs have asked the applicants to pay Rs. 50 as application fee*
- *How and where to pay to the fee for applications. Though the act says that cash can be accepted as fee the PIOs are forcing the applicants to deposit the fee into treasury account by way of challans and Demand Drafts*
- *Instances of non-acceptance and resistance to information requests were also reported by the community.*
- *There were a mixed response from the officials towards people filing applications. Officials acted apathetic, forestalled and in some instances even threatened the applicants.*



along with them as an acknowledgement of the information request. (The copy should be attested by the PIO). The agenda of such public meetings included detailing the objectives of the campaign, inspiring the community in filing applications, insight into key provisions of the Act etc. The venues chosen for such meetings were always the public offices, preferably district and Mandal headquarters.



In addition to the public meetings a number of kiosks and stalls were setup in a number of public offices. The stall operators interacted with the community visiting these offices. In two instances the District Collectors of Warangal and Mahboobnagar Participated for more than two hours in the deliberations that took place in their office premises. What ever the response of the officials an estimated 7000 application were filed under the campaign within a period of 1 week across the state.



Review Workshop and Documentation

The Mass awareness campaign and filing of applications activity was completed by the 26th of May 2007, across the state. To assess the implementation and success of the campaign a review workshop was organised at Centre for Good Governance (CGG) in Hyderabad on the 18th of June 2007. The workshop also aimed at initiating discussion on mass communication strategies that can be used to disseminate and spread awareness on RTI.

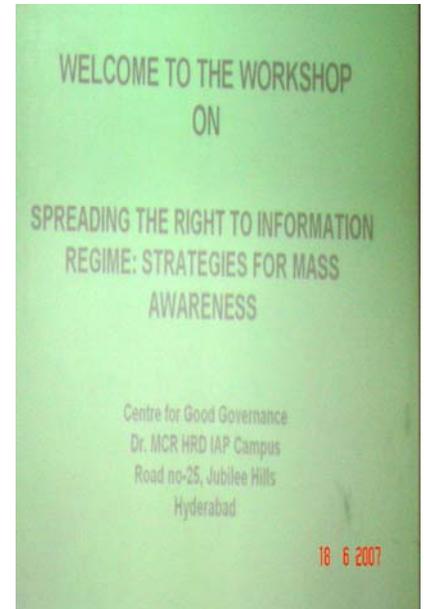


This workshop was critical as it provided important inputs and value additions on the mass awareness campaign which can be documented and disseminated to governments and CSOs which can undertake such campaigns elsewhere in the country. The workshop was titled "Spreading the Right to Information Regieme: Strategies for Mass Awareness". All the CSOs which participated in the campaign were invited to the workshop to share their experiences and also discuss the future agenda of

the campaign. Around 60 organisations participated in the workshop. RTI activist and Ramon Magsaysay Award winner Dr. Sanddep Pandey also participated in the campaign.

The workshop was inaugurated by the Director General and Executive Director, CGG Dr. Rajiv Sharma. In his inaugural address he detailed the purpose and the reason for which the workshop was organised and also listed the expected outcomes.

The agenda primarily included individual presentations by representatives of most of the participating CSOs on their role in the mass awareness campaign. The final session concluded with key suggestions and observations made by CSOs on sustaining and disseminating right to information.



KEY PROPOSITIONS

Generic Propositions

1. Display boards containing the names of the PIOs, APIOs and Appellate Authority in public offices should be displayed more prominently.
2. Provision of acceptance of cash should be facilitated. Receipt books can be printed for accepting application fee by all public authorities.
3. The head of accounts must be communicated to all the PIOs where the collected fee can be remitted after a substantial amount is collected.
4. PIOs and APIOs interacted with lack awareness on the act and require exposure and training. They are still apprehensive and suspicious of the information seeker.
5. Training of CSOs and the public officials can facilitate information sharing to a great extent.
6. More than 90 percent of the government offices visited have not started section 4(1)(b) disclosure. Public authorities require guidance on proactive disclosure.
7. Specific orders and rules are to be issued to the all the PIOs of the concerned departments on information disclosure. A number of PIOs are still uninformed.
8. Record maintenance and retrieval should be taken up immediately by all public authority and if possible soon make this information available online.
9. Every district headquarters, preferably the district collectorate should have an RTI information cell where literature on RTI should be made available to the community.
10. A State-wide and District-wide directory of all the PIOs, APIOs and Appellate Officers should be made available freely by the government
11. Government can also think of developing a directory of CSOs working on RTI. This would networking easier.
12. Information Commissions should be more active and fast in disposing information petitions. A lady commissioner should be made mandatory in the information commissions.
13. As mandated by the Act all public authorities should make information on RTI available

14. Politicians and local political parties should also adopt the Act and initiate discussion on the Information Commissions Annual Report in the Assembly.

Specific Proposition

1. Pictorial illustration on the pamphlets, simple language, catchy captions , attractive pictures can make people more curios in a mass awareness campaign
2. Undertaking small awareness programmes at the village level can broden the reach of the RTI Act
3. Governments should strive to attract more funds and undertake campaings by fostering Public Private Partnerships
4. Dovetail RTI onto the primary activities that CSOs handle. This can help the CSOs concentrate on the issues they work on
5. More number of user guides, manuals and material should be distributed among both CSOs and Public Authorities
6. Funding to NGOs at least in kind should be thought of, especially in the form of IEC material
7. More efforts should be directed to attract media into the campaign
8. An exclusive web-portal on RTI should be centrally maintained at the state level. It should also act as an information resource centre and library
9. Call centre with a toll free number for clarifications and enquiries on RTI should be put in place at the state level.
10. Mass awareness campains should be undertaken at least once every six months. Only then will the impact of the campaign seen
11. More organisations should be brought under the RTI network for greater reach
12. CSOs need to concentrate on raising the awareness at the grassroots and adopt villages to train the community.

PARTNERS IN THE CAMPAIGN

Centre for Good Governance (CGG), Marri Chenna Reddy Human Resources Development Institute of Andhra Pradesh (MCR HRD IAP), Actionaid India, Asha Parivar, Centre for Media Studies (CMS), PRIA, Loksatta, ADDS, Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha Society (APMSS), Ankita, APDS, Society for Integration and Rural Inspirity (SIRI), SPACE, APPS, Association for Promoting Social Action (APSA), Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Vruttidarula Union (APVVU), ARD, ARTS, ASDS, BREAD, CAMEL, CAPCO, CASA, CHATRI, Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA), Dalit Bahujan Front (DBF), DBSU, Consumer Information Centre, DHWDS, FAPSCO, FFA, Forum for Better Visakhapatnam, Forum for Better Hyderabad, Forum for Better Kukatpally, FVPS, GAMANA, Consumer Guidance Society (CGS), Support U, GSS, Padmavati Tribal Development Society, HCHW, HRF, Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), Jana Chaitanya Vedika, Jana Vignana Vedika, Kadali Network, KARD, Keratam, Lok Kalyan Trust, SWARD, Seva Sangham, Mamatha, MMM Network, Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiah Foundation (MVF), NFF, Network of Voluntary Organisations of Kuddapa (NOVOK), Orugallu Network of Voluntary Associations (ONVA), PEARLS, Pragathi, Praja Alochana Vedika, Navajyothi Rural Development Society (NRDS), PSS, PUCAAR, PWRP, PWS, Raksha, RISE, Social Audit Council for Information Right (SACIR), Sajjani, Sannihita, Social Educational and Economical Development Society (SEEDS), Senior Citizens' Forum, Jaatiya Shanthi Sangham, SNIRD, SPACE, STMKU, Sujana, United Federation of Resident Welfare Associations (U-FERWAS), VOICE, WAASAN, Young India Project (YIP), Commitments.

Campaign to educate people on RTI from May 21

Applicants to be helped to approach appellate authorities

Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD: A campaign to educate people about merits of Right to Information Act will be launched across the State by various NGOs from May 21 to 26.

Volunteers of 73 NGOs will sit outside district collectorates and mandal and municipal offices to assist people in filing applications

would be followed up with another round of assistance to applicants next month to approach appellate authorities in case of no response. Finally, a public hearing on the performance of Andhra Pradesh Information Commission would be held in six months to one year.

Assessment

that the Commissioners were soft towards the Public Information Officers and not so sympathetic towards public.

Disclosures

M. Padmanabha Reddy, State Coordinator of Satya, said the campaign also aimed at studying whether all Government

