



NATIONAL ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN ON THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION

TRAINING MANUAL FOR HALF-DAY WORKSHOP

COURSE OUTLINE

Half-Day Workshop on the Right to Information

- 9.00 am – 9.30 am - Meet at venue / Tea
- 9.30 am – 10.00am - Session One:
Introductions / Course Outline / Expectations
- 10.00 am – 10.10 am - Session Two:
Introduction to Right to Information and why it is important
using overheads and slides
- 10.10 am – 10.40 am - Break into groups of 5-6 to discuss:
1. Was the Right to Information denied to you?
 2. How did you try to access the information?
 3. How would have used the information?
 4. What was the effect of not having the information?
 5. What did you do when you did not get the information?
- 10.40 am – 10.50 am - Groups report back. Trainer to record important points of stories on magi-board
- 10.50 am – 11.00 am - Trainer to lead discussion back into larger group by highlighting the commonalities between individual stories
- 11.00 am – 11.30 am - Session Three:
Trainer speaks on the situation of the Right to Information in Sri Lanka / restrictions on access to information in Sri Lanka based on handout by Article 19
- 11.30 am – 11.45 am - Group discussions on the Right to Information / Discussions of case studies
- 11.45 am – 12.00 pm - Break / Informal Discussions
- 12.00 pm – 1.30 pm - Session Four:
Training and group activity specific to target groups
- 1.30 pm – 2.00 pm - Session Five
From information to accountability, re-cap on the importance of the Right to Information and encapsulation of the lessons of the day

COURSE OUTLINE

Introduction: Trainers Notes

Aim

A community's right to know and right to access information are the lifeblood of a democracy and journalists are most often the instruments through which citizens practice these rights.

The aim of this course is to give journalists a practical understanding of freedom of information principles, the legal and constitutional guarantees needed to underpin this right, and what it means for the practice of journalism and the role of media in an open and participatory democracy.

The course gives journalists the opportunity to contribute to the campaign for right to information.

It will also provide participants with valuable training on effective communication and campaigning for the Right to Information in local constituencies.

Who is the course for?

The course is primarily designed for journalists working in the media, including those active in journalists' unions.

How the course works

The course is designed to operate over one day with approximately 20-25 participants. These Trainers Notes are a step-by-step guide for how to conduct the course.

The Course Outline identifies each session, and refers the trainer to these Training Notes, Overheads and Handouts. The Course Outline should be reprinted for participants without the italicised directions to the trainer.

Each session is stand alone, so trainers can design a course of shorter duration if time is restricted.

SESSION ONE

Lecture: Introductions, Course Outline, Expectations

AIM

To introduce participants to each other, understand expectations and introduce the concepts of the course.

EXPLAIN

Introduce yourself, and ask participants to introduce themselves. Use an ice-breaker to relax participants. An example, apart from the usual round of introductions, is to ask participants to speak to the person next to them for five minutes and find out:

- Their name
- Their workplace / occupation
- Something personal about the person (e.g. they play the tabla, they like Buriyani or whatever)

Then each person must introduce the other person to the group using this information (only about 30 second per introduction). This is not a good method for larger groups however.

Ask participants to write down their expectation for the course and give them a few minutes to do this. When finished, write the expectations on large sheets of paper and paste around the room. At the end of the workshop, the group can check whether their expectations have been met.

Give a brief outline of the course aims and the agenda, including details of CPA and the British Council.

TRAINERS NOTE

Use slide to introduce the two organisations.

SESSION TWO

Lecture: Introduction to Right to Information

AIM

Introduce the Right to Information, what it is, and why it is important

TRAINERS NOTE

After the slides have been displayed and explained, follow with the YA-TV video on the Right to Information as an ice-breaker and introduction to the Right to Information. Follow this video presentation up with questions that draw out the main points from the video.

Paste these points on a large sheet of paper for all to see. Link these points up with the slides and summarise.

WHAT IS FREEDOM OF INFORMATION?

- Access to information
- Obligation of public bodies to publish information
- Obligation to produce information

WHY IS THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IMPORTANT?

- Importance of good implementation of any Right to Information legislation
- Narrow concept of accessing information concerning oneself
- Improving government accountability and transparency
- Exposing wrong doing and corruption
- Facilitating research and advocacy which in turn may contribute to improving government
- Enable public participation in the democratic process and decision making

WHY IS THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IMPORTANT FOR JOURNALISTS?

- A free press depends on the free flow of information from the media to the people and from the people to the media.
- The media needs access to information for public benefit.
- Engendering accountability not only in government, but also in civil society and media institutions themselves.
- Helps expose corruption and malpractices.

SESSION TWO

Group Work: Experiences related to Right to Information

AIM

Group work that will draw out the experiences of participants on instances where the right to information has been denied.

TRAINERS NOTE

30 minutes for discussion. This session, being the first group exercise, will need more time than others since participants will need to get comfortable with each other. The trainer will have to briefly facilitate each of the groups to ensure that they are on track.

Ask the group to break into groups of five or six and explain you want them to discuss the following questions:

1. Was the Right to Information denied to you?
2. How did you try to access the information?
3. How would you have used the information?
4. What was the effect of not having the information?
5. What did you do when you did not get the information?

Allow 15 minutes for discussion, then each group to appoint one or two people to report back to the broader group. You could give them large sheets of paper to be taped to the wall/flip chart to help them in the report back. Allow each group to report back for five minutes.

The trainer will have to record the most important points of these experiences on a magi-board, possibly in the following format.

Story / Experience	Outcome

SESSION TWO

Lecture: Legal Framework of Right to Information

AIM

To explain to participants the importance of a legal framework underpinning the Right to Information and provide an appreciation of the rights of journalists to access information.

TRAINERS NOTE

Trainer explains why it is necessary to have a legal framework to guarantee access to information and the progression from constitutional provisions to specific laws and regulations.

“Open Questions” – ask these from the participants and stimulate discussion

- What legal provisions do journalists in Sri Lanka need?
- Why do you think journalists need these legal provisions?
- Do you think that journalists are adequately aware of existing legal provisions?
- If not, why do you think they are not adequately aware?
- What practical support do we need?
- How could the information we needed for the stories highlighted in the first session have been accessed?

Engage with the group whilst outlining the necessity of having a legal underpinning for the Right to Information.

Link this to the experiences of the group brought out by the previous group exercise.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY TO HAVE A LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION?

- Many countries already have constitutional provisions guaranteeing this right, although some limit this right to journalists.
- However, constitutional provisions on their own are not enough to guarantee the right of access to information. A legal framework is needed to specify a process and clarify exceptions etc. An increasing number of countries have therefore adopted specific laws generally referred to as ‘freedom of information’ or ‘access to information’ laws.
- Having adopted specific laws, many countries go on to adopt secondary legislation in order to enact the primary legislation. Internal codes of conduct and guidelines to lend further guidance to public officials can also be adopted.

SESSION THREE

Lecture: Principles of Right to Information

AIM

This section will look specifically at the Right to Information in Sri Lanka and current restrictions on journalists accessing information. The section will also encourage participants to consider the implications of Right to Information to development, political participation, transparency and accountability.

TRAINERS NOTE - Principles

Trainer first explains the basic principles which underlie a freedom of information law.

Principles underpinning the Right to Information (use slides):

1. Maximum Disclosure
2. Obligation to Publish
3. Promotion of Open Government
4. Limited scope of exceptions
5. Process to facilitate access
6. Costs
7. Open Meetings
8. Disclosure takes precedence
9. Protection for whistleblowers

TRAINERS NOTE – International Standards

International standards in the Right to Information (use slides):

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
2. The International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, 1966
3. The International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, 1966
4. The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950
5. The American Convention on Human Rights, 1978
6. African Charter on Human and People's Rights, 1981
7. Commonwealth Principles, 1971
8. The Johannesburg Principles on National Security, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, 1995

Trainer will then highlight flag the UDHR and the ICCPR and look at them in some detail.

See next page....

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

The International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, 1966

Article 9 (2): Anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him.

Article 19 (2): Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

TRAINERS NOTE – Sri Lankan situation

The **constitutional provisions on access to information in Sri Lanka** (use slides):

1. Article 10
Every person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
2. Article 14(1)(a)
Every citizen is entitled to the freedom of speech and expression including publication.

TRAINERS NOTE – Sri Lankan situation

Constitutional restriction on the access to information in Sri Lanka (use slides):

1. Article 15(2)
2. Article 15(7)
3. Article 15(8)
4. Official Secrets Act No. 32 of 1955
5. Sri Lanka Press Council Law No. 5 on 1973
6. Official Publications Ordinance No. 47 of 1946
7. Public Security Ordinance No. 25 of 1947
8. Prevention of terrorism Act No. 48 of 1979

TRAINERS NOTE – Sri Lankan situation

Using the points above, you should ask participants on how these restrictions impact of their work.

End discussion by asking

- What are the main limitations on your work?
- What are the main rights you can rely on to aid your work?

SESSION THREE

Lecture: The Right to Information and Public Authorities

AIM

The trainer presents the responsibilities of the public authorities and conditions which should ideally be established to support the work of the information officer.

TRAINERS NOTE

Generate interest on the obligation of public bodies to give out information, and respond quickly to requests for information.

1. Public bodies have an obligation to disclose information and every member of the public has a corresponding right to receive information; "information" includes all records held by a public body, regardless of the form in which it is stored
2. Freedom of information implies that public bodies publish and disseminate widely documents of significant public interest, for example, operational information about how the public body functions and the content of any decision or policy affecting the public
3. The cost of gaining access to information held by public bodies should not be so high as to deter potential applicants and negate the intent of the law itself

WHAT DOES A PUBLIC BODY NEED TO DO IN ORDER TO MEET ITS OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION LAW?

- Allocate responsibility to an information officer
- Train the information officer and personnel on the Right to Information and the obligations of the law
- Setup / Improve existing record management systems / databases
- Setup a database for entering requests and recording decisions etc
- Proactive publication of information (according to the terms of the law and also a matter of good practice to publish information regularly requested)
- Publicise the existence of Right to Information by putting up posters, printing leaflets, explaining the contents of the law in everyday language.

Discuss what is important to journalists here? What do journalists think they need?

- Good/easy to find Contact points
- Acceptable Level of knowledge among public officers
- Reliable information
- What form should the information be accessible in? Print / Electronic?
- What languages should the information be given out in?

SESSION THREE

Group Activity: Discussion on the principles and situation of the right to information in Sri Lanka

AIM

The aim of this session is to encourage a debate and discussion that evaluates the different sources of information that journalists rely on, particularly in the context of the nexus between the Right to Information and development, political participation, transparency and accountability.

TRAINERS NOTES

Distribute article by Aruna Roy. Aruna Roy has written an article on the Right to Information and its importance for journalists. The article flags many important points on the use and advocacy of the Right to Information in the media. Although the article is on India, many of the points are applicable in a broader context.

The key points of her article are (show slide):

- At the time of the framing of the constitution we had the right to freedom of expression, but no right to information.
- It is only in seeing ourselves as citizens and exercising our rights as citizens that we strengthen our specific categories, whether as activists working with the poor, or as journalists.
- Traditional systems of information access in India have made journalists dependent on sources, who are people in power they must cultivate. Whether bureaucrats or politicians, much depends on the privilege and patronage of the individual source.
- What does a relationship of patronage do? Not only does it make journalists depend on very feudal relationships, it also makes them use the information they are fed regardless of the veracity of that information. Much of government information is so badly collected that the data is unreliable and useless. Much of it is falsified data.
- What are the facts behind terrorism? Do we really know them?
- If we want peace, then we also need ethics in public life.
- Accountability is required not only of the government or of NGOs and movements but also of the press.

- To stop corruption and achieve greater equity and social justice in our society, we have to have transparent governments, since they will be accountable. Without an accountable government there is no future. For transparency and accountability we need to exercise the right to information law, and governments have to organize themselves to deliver information speedily.

TRAINERS NOTES

Trainer will then lead open discussion that will include:

- An evaluation of current reliance on people in power as sources – how reliable and independent is this information?
- What are facts? Why do we accept them? And what happens when we report them? Eg. Figures on literacy, health, war casualties etc?
- Understand that by free access to official information a journalist (and therefore the public) has a more equal relationship with government
- Look at protection of confidential sources as a precondition for whistleblowers
- Aim is to get group thinking about alternative sources of information and the advantages and disadvantages of both.

END OF SESSION THREE

Group Activity: Tea Break / Information discussions

AIM

Break the monotony of discussions and lectures

TRAINERS NOTE

Elicit feedback from participants on the progress so far. Determine areas that need to be covered in more detail.

15 minutes