Role of RTI in governance
What is a good government?

A good government encompasses some basic and essential features like Transparency, Accountability, and Legitimacy.

Transparency is about exposing all the inner workings, current tasks taken up by the government, its current expenditure, future budgets, and information about development factors to mention a few. Govt should account for people’s funds.

Legitimacy is a trait which apprises about validity of all the above said information by the government. The leaders should have a sense of responsibility towards people and work for their betterment. A legitimate govt should refrain from spending people's money on futile purposes.

Accountability ensures power remains in the hand of the people. Leaders do their job to enhance development of each and every action of officials should be documented and made available to public. People should have power to speak out openly.
Why do we need a good government?

- Government is the sole non-profit body which supports the development of a country.
- It ensures availability of all services and resources to the people, like health, education, food, transport and many more.
- Laws created by government improve the standard and security of the people.
- Government supports small industries and organizations thereby making them develop.
- Provides support to minority groups by ensuring reservations in jobs, colleges, schools etc

And numerous others which will be depicted in further slides....
How does RTI ensure good governance?

RTI is an extremely powerful tool to monitor the governance in our country. People don’t realize that the enquiries when framed properly can be used to complain against commonly faced grievances.

Subsequent slides elucidate how each feature of a good government is aggrandized by RTI (right to information act).

1) Transparency:

- RTI asserts that every government organization maintains duly cataloged records about their day to day activities. These should be accessible to the citizens.

- People can enquire about the decision making processes. These include file noting, records of recruitment, promotion of staff and documents related to tenders outsourced by the government.
• New schemes like digitalizing and web dissemination of this data are being taken up to improve the outreach. Videos of parliamentary sessions are also released on the web.

• Providing information about any new initiatives enacted by government for the people below poverty line. This enhances their awareness and develops their life. Some common initiatives by govt are subsidized schemes on food grains, water and electricity, shelter for the poor, health insurance schemes.

• Information about expenditure during election campaigning, working of electoral commission are also made available to people.
An example of Transparency

1. Please provide the following details for all the works awarded during previous 2 years for this whole constituency out of the MLA Constituency Development Fund:
   a. Name of work
   b. Brief Description of work
   c. Amount sanctioned
   d. Date of sanction
   e. Status of completion
   f. Name of agency
   g. Date of start
   h. Date of completion
   i. Rate at which work awarded
   j. Amount paid
   k. Copy of sketch
   l. How was the decision taken to carry out this work?

2. How much money was allotted to him during the current year and how much has been carried over from previous years?

3. Out of the above, projects worth how much money have already been sanctioned?

4. How many projects worth how much money are awaiting sanction?
2) Legitimacy:

- RTI goes a long way in curbing corruption in a country. Duplicate documents and bills are drafted in the event of corruption. RTI exposes these to public.

- The government officials are constantly worried about an enquiry from the people related to their department. Hence they ensure that all the paperwork pertaining to them are pristine.

- There are ample of untold stories of corruption and misuse of tax payer’s money concealed in many government documents and reports. With the help of RTI law, we can expose them as well. This sends a message to the officials regarding the intolerance towards corruption in India.

- RTI answers show that for every rupee given by government, only 15 paise reaches the public. This signifies the grave condition of corruption in India. People who are fully aware of RTI capabilities are albe to expose the corrupt officials.
3) Nurturing Citizen-government relationships:

- Public grievances like delay of paperwork, demand of exorbitant bribes, absence of essential services like garbage collectors can be brought to government’s notice. RTI rules do the rest of the job by ensuring that answers are given.

- RTI spreads awareness about education and health programmes. This increases people’s confidence and belief on the government.

- RTI also helps government in its decision process. Its provides feedback about its decisions from the people. This vastly improves the quality of decisions and laws that govern our country.

- RTI encompasses methods which enable people below poverty line also to participate in the enquiry process. This greatly reduces the difference between the rich and poor. This also indirectly reduces the rural to urban migration which results in efficient distribution of resources.
4) Accountability (power with the people):

Until the advent of RTI in 2005, the common people were oblivious to matters pertaining policy planning, supervising and assessment of schemes.

• Now the people can questions the government’s decisions and the officials are bound to answer.

• Severe punishments to those who deny information.

• Power to people ensures that the policies and rules are more people oriented.
An example of accountability

Sidhakahna Jot Keshav village in Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh is one such example. Five inspired residents of the village filed RTI applications and questioned the district administration about the conditions of the village roads and drains. They also raised questions as why there were no allotments under the Indira Awaas Yojna.

The administration immediately acted and the construction of the roads and drains began in the village. Since then, 32 villagers have been allotted the houses under the Indira Awaas Yojna and the administration has displayed a list on the village wall, containing the names of the villagers eligible for the allotments under the scheme.
Reduction in corruption: In Chaibasa, the tribal village in Jharkhand there was a complaint against the post master who didn’t come to the post office regularly and there were charges of bribe against him also. An RTI application was filed against him and he was immediately sacked.

Himal Khabarpatrika exercised the RTI law to reveal shocking misuse of funds by the Investigation Commission formed to study the killing of J P Joshi, a Kailali-based journalist. The funds were used for personal purposes. A 485 page report full of solicited bills and vouchers were produced to account for the funds.
Day to Day benefits out of RTI

- Enquiries about the number of doctors present in the primary health clinic per day. This ensured that the doctors actually turned up at the hospitals. A large improvement in health care facilities was observed especially in rural areas.

- Opening the details about the supply and distribution of food grains from ration shops ensured that the entitlements reach the people. The sellers and quantity of commodities are also subject to scrutiny when complaints are received regarding the matter.

- People can enquire about the income that they should get per day under the employment guarantee schemes. This restricts the corruption that would ensue had RTI not been enacted.
Why do we need RTI ?..

- Even though our constitution has equipped us with freedom of expression and speech (u/s 19) we had no legal power to question the government or look into the details of development programmes intended for our development.

- Access to information held by a public authority was not possible until 2005. Lack of Information barred a person to realize his socio-economic aspirations, because he had no basis to participate in the debate or question the decision making process even if it was harming him. Official Secret Act, 1923 acted as a relic of colonial rule covering everything in secrecy. The common people did not have any legal right to know about the public policies and expenditures.
Why do we need RTI ?

- It was quite ironical that people who voted the persons responsible for policy formation to power and contributed towards the financing of huge costs of public activities were denied access to the relevant information. This culture of secrecy resulted in fertile growth of corruption. In face of non-accountability of the public authorities and lack of openness in the functioning of government, abuse of power and corrupt diversion of the public money was the order of the day.

- It has been realized by most of the countries that greater access of the citizens to information enhances the responsiveness of government to community needs. In turn, this facility provides a platform of public grievances and thus improves feeling of goodwill towards the government.
Poverty Alleviation

- RTI gives common man the power to seek information about their entitlements and subsidies intended for them, accordingly, to take informed actions in development issues affecting them so as to ensure equity and justice for him.

- If we look into the statistics of the number of people who are exercising their RTI act we can see that at least 20% of the people belong to BPL (below poverty line). If we analyse the present information people sought for consists of the information about services, subsidies and development projects meant for them and the reasons as to why the services assured for them are not reaching them.
Education and Health Care

- Education and health care are critical services for empowerment of people, in general, and the poor, in particular.

- The implementation of relevant policies and programmes in the past has yielded less than desired results due mainly to lack of people’s lack of information or participation in delivery of services that empower the poor.

- The use of RTI has contributed to improvements in quality and quantity of services under the following flagship programmes.
  - Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
  - National Rural Health Mission
  - Aam Admi Insurance Scheme
The Central and State government have been launching various schemes for providing wage employment to the poor, the services of which have hardly reached the common man due to ineffective implementation of programmes, including rampant corruption.

Most of the poverty alleviation programmes are made expecting that a citizen looks into the policy or programme designed by government and gives back the crucial feedback to the government which plays a crucial role in restructuring the policy such that the benefits assured to the people are maximized.

Examples: Implementation of NREGA, Mid-Day Meals, Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), grant of Food Security and Pension for the Poor Senior Citizens.
Basic Economic Infrastructure

- Right to Information has armed the citizen with a right to demand for his basic infrastructure like roads, drinking water, electricity, sanitation.

- Over two hundred fifty public enterprises under the Central Sector have been engaged in development of infrastructure. All the information regarding to the issues of these enterprises pertaining to costs and pricing policies, use of resources, choice of technologies, competition strategy, fairness and objectivity in finalization of tenders, recruitment and promotion of staff is made available to people.
Basic Economic Infrastructure

With a view to ensuring maximum disclosure of information regarding government rules, regulations and decisions, every public authority is mandated to `maintain all its records duly catalogued and indexed in a manner and the form which facilitates the right to information under the Act’.

In this regard, the following specific nature of cases may be mentioned:

- Manipulations in tendering processes or outsourcing of various services have been major source of corruption or diversion of funds for private purposes. Scrutiny of the decision making processes have discouraged the Government companies from their indulgence in corrupt practices;
- People showed their interest in scrutinising the selection method of retail enterprises such as domestic gas, etc. By this the black market of these goods is eradicated
- By the RTI act people started looking to into the environmental pollution caused by the industries.
Even the most backward sections are seeking information related to Prime Minister’s Employment development scheme which include basic infrastructure, Indira Awas Yojna, ration card, midday meal, uniform distribution in the schools and conditions and the conditions of village roads.

Sidhakana jot keshav village in Uttar Pradesh is an example in which five inspired residents of the village filed RTI applications and questioned the authorities about the poor conditions of their village roads and drains. With the help of RTI they got their basic infrastructure.
Coming to the empowerment of weaker sections the development programmes are formed to assist socially and economically certain targeted people who are vulnerable to discrimination.

The development initiatives have duly laid emphasis on protection of vulnerable sections of the society, mainly women, SC/ST, minorities and disabled persons.

Any deficiencies in the formulation of development programme are reported by people serves as crucial feedback which helps in restructuring the policies.

The government is helping them by positive discrimination (reservations, subsidies).
Empowerment of Weaker Sections

**Example:** In Ghara Katra village of Shankar block in Allahabad daily wagers had a tough tome arranging a proper meal as they were not receiving rations. The frustrated villagers prepared RTI application and questioned the authorities concerned. The immediate day villagers were given their rations.
Environmental Protection

- The environmental cleanliness is more or less depended on the powers and rights of a citizen to be able to question the polluting units.
- RTI induced people’s pressure on the public authorities has led to:
  (a) closure of certain polluting units
  (b) stoppage of projects having adverse impact on environment
  (c) adherence to the norms and standards prescribed by the regulatory bodies
  (d) exposure and identification of officials who are responsible of violation of environmental norms.
Thank you ...