Case Study 2: Anganwadi Centre in Raghupati Nagar

Raghupati Nagar is a slum community on the outer edges of Brahmapur. Composed of 35 households, the village’s residents are mostly construction laborers, rickshaw drivers and househelpers. In 2010, the community filed an RTI application at the Brahmapur Municipal Corporation regarding the absence of reliable source of drinking water in their village. It led to the installation of a water source which made them recognized the use of RTI in demanding for their basic rights.

This success inspired Banita Benera, a mother of two to file an RTI application at the Child Development Project Office (CDPO) to know why they were not receiving any benefits under the ICDS programme. There was no Anganwadi Center in her village and to their knowledge none of her neighbors were enrolled at the centers in adjacent villages. The community members observed that three nearby slum communities have each functioning Anganwadi Centers and were receiving ration items.

On 10 October 2011, she inquired with the CDPO (1) the guidelines for opening an Anganwadi Center in a community, (2) the Anganwadi Center where she and her neighbors were enrolled, (3) list of beneficiaries of that Anganwadi Center (if any) and (4) record of rations items Sabitri Panda, the Anganwadi worker at the nearest center, has received from the CDPO and distributed.

Sabitri was informed by the ICDS Supervisor that a complaint was filed against her by Banita. Alarmed with the information, she confronted and convinced Banita, accompanied by a local corporator and member of the vigilance committee in their ward, to withdraw the complaint. Banita clarified that it was not a complaint against Sabitri but rather an inquiry on ICDS. Banita out of fear of conflict, agreed to withdraw the RTI application. Since there is no withdrawal process in RTI, she agreed not to respond to the notice from CDPO to pay the RTI application fees and postage, rendering it cancelled.

Despite not getting the information, the CDPO promised Banita that they will look into the issue and will provide appropriate rations to qualified beneficiaries in her community. It was also explained to Banita that due to deficient budget, the Sabitri was compelled by the CDPO to screen out some enrolled beneficiaries. However, the criteria for doing so were not made clear.

At present, Banita, her two children and other residents of her community are enrolled in the Anganwadi Center managed by Sabitri. They are receiving appropriate ration items as promised by the CDPO. Their children are also attending the pre-school education classes at the Anganwadi Center.

Once again, the RTI as a tool to demand for basic rights has been beneficial to Banita’s community. Yet Banita is determined not to stop here. With support of her neighbors and YSD, she is planning to use RTI to know more about other government programmes such as Integrated Housing and Slum Development Programme (IHSDP), National Family Benefit Scheme, Handicapped Pension Scheme and so on. Banita is also assisting other slum communities by educating them about RTI and how it can be used to claim entitlements and thereby improve the lives of their families and community.