

Barefoot College (Social Work and Research Center)
Tilonia
Rajasthan, India
Transparency and Public Audit

“Truth never damages a cause that is just.”

Mahatma Gandhi

“A lack of transparency results in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity.”

Dalai Lama

Context

“There are myths that corruption is peculiar to certain civilizations and cultures. However the contemporary Indian discourse recognizes that corruption and arbitrary use of power are dominantly defined by political and corporate systems and governance. It is in this context that transparency and accountability and inclusive decision-making becoming critical to realizing democratic and civil rights for all Indians, but particularly for the poor. Bad policy, legislation and an ill functioning system of delivery can have a catastrophic impact on the life and livelihood of the poor and marginalized.” Indian RTI Activist

The rural poor suffer the most in such situations. Barred access to information and decision-making processes, their voice is marginalized and drowned out by powerful local people and complex Governmental structures. There are no platforms where they can legitimately question, participate and be heard, to make informed democratic choices .

The Barefoot College/SWRC joined the Campaign and helped to create more inclusion for the rural poor in India. Transparency demands that the person who seeks must be ready to give information. The SWRC/Barefoot College defined standards by pro actively disclosing information about themselves, while joining and strengthening the demand for transparency of government and other structures.

Barefoot College/SWRC

We are a Community based organization, committed to the principals of equality and an inclusive participatory process inspiring and promoting confidence at many levels, when taking decisions or determining processes. Our focus has for 40 years been on rural communities in Rajasthan, throughout 13 states in India and more recently around the world.

Our Non Negotiables

- Decisions are taken by people who are going to be impacted by it the most..
- All initiatives are decided after participatory deliberation and endorsement of the community. Information necessary to make informed choices are disseminated to the community to enable collective and democratic decisions.
- Questions and suggestions are elicited, and problems as well as critique of past action are part of the deliberative process .
- All stakeholders are represented in any process of transparency and accountability.

Preach what you practice : a Barefoot College approach

The organization facilitates transparency at its own initiative and under the RTI Act 2005. We set an example for communities to follow. We define transparency beyond the discussion of money and financial matters and extend it to all processes of decision-making and reporting on activities.

- We provide controlled initiatives such as Transparency Meetings (Melas), so as to provide support and structure for these processes.
- We facilitate these with village and regional coordinators to ensure correct process is followed.
- We publicly publish & display basic information about the organization, painted on the walls of our building.
- We use communication tools such as charts, posters, banners, puppetry, street plays, songs, and exhibitions to support democratic process and to convey information.
- We encourage and support rural communities to contribute and play an active role in organizing the Transparency Meetings, and Public Audits.

Even before the Right to Information act was promulgated, Barefoot Collage (SWRC), Tilonia organized a Transparency Meeting in 1997 in village Buharu, Silora Block, Ajmer District Rajasthan. We put forth our 10 years of financial accounts for Public Scrutiny as part of that Transparency Meeting. It was for the first time that any NGO in the Not for Profit sector had organized such a Transparency Meeting. An independent panel was present in the Meeting consisting of elected representatives, educationists, legal luminaries, social activists, government officials and workers. More than 5,000 people from 200 villages participated in this Transparency Meeting. Barefoot College has continued to organize Transparency Melas in field and sub-centers of Barefoot Collage (SWRC) as well as in the main campus in Tilonia. In this context whenever there has been information requested and a need expressed to access it; Barefoot College has provided unlimited access to any and all requests.

Barefoot College has organized 6 such Transparency Meetings, in which more than 2845 persons from 115 villages has actively participated. Barefoot college had put before the rural community for public scrutiny financial income and expenditures incurred over the past 10 years. Financial records, documents, information regarding grants bills, vouchers information related to all the programs and projects were made available to the public.

Transparency and Public Audit has been integrated as a value, in all community managed and controlled initiatives at Barefoot College and is an ongoing continuous process. Transparency Meetings, Melas and Public Audits have been the strength of all programs, projects and initiatives as well as all collaboration between Barefoot College and the communities we work with throughout the world. This is also links with the Right to Information Campaign in India (NCPRI- National Campaign for People's Right to Information)