



i-points

Measuring the Transparency in Public Organizations and Extent of their Compliance with RTI Act

**Prasann Thatte
Centre for Good Governance
Hyderabad**

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1 Introduction

While a lot of work is happening in the direction of promoting transparency in the government organizations and the application of the powers available to citizens under the RTI Act in India, measurement of the efforts of these organizations to comply with the provisions of the Act and recognition of the best efforts remains an area where much more is yet to be done.

There is no organization at the national level that has been made responsible for the measurement of such compliance. It is left to the Central Information Commission/ State Information Commissions to find the cases of non-compliance or respond to the cases brought to their notice from time to time and penalize organizations for such non-compliance. This paper marks an attempt to design a system that would serve to fill this gap.

The author visualizes a **national system of rating of organizations** that fall under the purview of the RTI Act. Under this system, rating points (called *i-points*) would be awarded to each organization. These points would represent the position of the organization in a homogenous listing of similar organizations. The system would review the position of each organization periodically and announce fresh rankings every time.

2 Steps involved

The process of assigning the i-points and ranking the organizations based on i-points involves the following steps:

Step 1: Listing of eligible organizations

The first step would be to prepare national listings of organizations. Each list would be homogenous, i.e. it would only include organizations that are similar in nature. For example, all home departments across the states can be in one list; all municipal corporations across the country may be put together in one list; and so on. Further, within each list, only the features/parameters that are common to all organizations would be considered for comparison.

Like-to-like comparisons would bring in an element of fairness into the system. The jurisdiction/ scope of organization (national/ regional/ local), volume of information generated, capacity to disseminate information, and size of the stakeholder population vary from organization to organization. Hence, diverse organizations should not be placed in the same league for ranking.

Within a list, there may be elite sub-lists or ‘super leagues’ of organizations. For example, the 8-10 largest PSUs or largest municipal corporations may be clubbed into a super league. This would allow us to focus specifically on organizations where the stakes involved – for the government and the public – are particularly higher.

There are thousands of organizations across the country, which come under the purview of the Act. These include small organizations such as schools and health centers as well. It will be a gigantic task for a single Assessment Organization (AO) to list and track all of these organizations, which is why the coverage of the assessment organization may be limited to

organizations that offer themselves for the assessment. Hence, while preparing the listings, the public organizations may be invited to get themselves listed¹.

Participant organizations would be expected to inform the AO about the disclosures they plan to make in the forthcoming quarter/ six months.

Step 2: Defining the i-points

Identify 100 i-points (i.e. information points). Each i-point represents a standard piece of information or fact about the organization which the organization has chosen to disclose about itself, its work, etc.

Choice of i-points may be made by involving the stakeholders as well. This would add to the credibility and relevance of the information points.

The choice of i-points should take into account the following considerations:

Include points that give a reader some crucial insights into the performance of the organization. Facts such as the organograms, job charts, details of branch offices, legal status of the organization, etc. may be excluded since these mostly carry ‘innocuous’ information.

Information such as the number of pending cases/ complaints, number of employees against whom an enquiry is pending, cost incurred per rupee of revenue earned, revenue per employee, etc which can be used to evaluate an organization’s performance should be included in i-points system and converted into i-points.

The following can be some of the bases for awarding i-points:

1. Whether the key information about the organization has been computerized
2. Whether the details listed in Chapter-II, 4(b) were published within 120 days from the enactment of the Act (entirely/ partly/not at all)
3. Proportion of information made available in local language of the state/ national language of the country (as applicable)
4. Whether public authorities (PIOs/ APIOs) have been appointed in required number
5. Proportion of them appointed within 100 days as PIOs/APIOs
6. Whether the names of PIOs/APIOs were disclosed through public media
7. Whether the persons appointed were eligible/ qualified for the position (e.g. full time functionaries, adequately senior, etc)
8. How long after the Act came into force were these public authorities appointed?
9. Extent of IT preparedness, which is key to the effective implementation of RTI Act

In addition to i-points given for disclosures made, points can also be assigned for the following actions/ gestures/ decisions:

1. Written commitment to make future disclosures

¹ CGG may play the role of an Assessment Organization to begin with.

2. Mean number of days taken to respond to applications seeking information under RTI Act
3. Establishing additional channels for information dissemination, such as web sites
4. Disclosures made/ payment of fines imposed in response to interventions by CIC/ SIC

Step 3: Allocation of weights

Identify the i-points that are more important than others and assign weights accordingly. The calculation of points aggregate would incorporate these weights. Here, the following issues become important:

- Which disclosures are more important than others? Can this be stated objectively?
- Can this importance be reflected through a system of weights?
- Does the Act itself provide the basis for any such weights?
- Should there be a special weight for voluntarily disclosing information that is not listed under mandatory disclosures?

Step 4: Compliance Assessment

Once the list of information points is ready, a Compliance Assessment needs to be undertaken. (A note on methodology for compliance assessment is attached).

The need for constant reassessment must be stressed. Information is dynamic. Everyday, new information gets created in an organization and parts of old information become redundant. Hence, an organization will constantly have new information to disclose and will have to be reassessed on such disclosures. The points-aggregate of the organization might change accordingly. No organization would enjoy immunity from downgrades.

The system would also have a component of penalty points and bonus points. Organizations that volunteer to be part of the process may be awarded a number of bonus points. Bonus points will also be awarded to organizations found to employ certain innovative methods/ technologies that enhance the transparency in their processes or make sharing of information with the public more effective.

Similarly, there would be penalty points for each recorded case of non-compliance where an action was initiated or recommended by the state/ central information commission against a PIO/APIO of the organization. There would also be penalty points for each information request that is left pending beyond the stipulated period of 30 days/ 45 days (as applicable).

Step 5: Award of i-ranks and grades

Based on the results of the assessment, ranks can be assigned to organizations.

The system also provides for relative ranking in addition to absolute ranking. In relative ranking, all organizations in a list would be assigned ranks in relation to the score attained by the top-ranking organization.

Within the set of 100 information points, a system of promotions/ upgrades can be built in. A certain number of i-points may together add up to a grade. Once an organization has achieved a certain level (say, Grade-I) and remained at that level for a certain number of days/ weeks/ months, it would become eligible for a higher grade, say, Grade-II, and so on. Similarly, organizations may also get downgraded, if they lose a certain number of i-points after an assessment round.

Grades or levels may also be assigned names such as green, black, yellow, etc.

Step 6: Dissemination of i-ranks

The calculation of i-point scores and i-ranks of organizations would be followed by the dissemination of ranks at a national level. The dissemination may take place through the visual media such as Internet, television channels and newspapers. Dissemination can be in both forms – full lists as well as truncated (top-10) lists.

Also, the portals and websites of the participant departments, undertakings and ministries may carry the respective ranks of these organizations prominently, just as they carry information on their ISO certifications.

Step 7: Verification of i-ranks

The process does not end with the award and dissemination of i-ranks. In order to enhance the objectivity of the process, i-ranks will also be verified by the AO through field visits, physical observation and document review. The verification may be taken up either by the AO directly or by accredited organizations authorized by the AO for this purpose. The concerned organization would be awarded penalty points for disclosures found by the AO to be misleading/ wrong after verification.

3 Key Analyses Possible

Following are the analyses which the data available from the i-points system will make possible.

3.1 Degree of Compliance

The most basic analysis would be that by comparing the results, we can find out the degree of compliance of different organizations, i.e. to what extent a particular organization has been able to make important disclosures to its stakeholders. By comparing this information for two consecutive assessment rounds, we can see which organization improved its performance vis-à-vis the previous round and thus, moved up the rankings.

3.2 Analysis by Territory and Sector

The results can also be analyzed by zone, state, category of organization, etc. For example, the analysis may demonstrate which state leads in terms of compliance by its public authorities with the RTI Act. It can also show which particular sector performed the best or worst in comparison

to others; e.g. whether a regulatory organization such as a police department did better than a revenue earning organization such as a transport corporation.

3.3 Identification of Best and Worst Cases

The analysis of bonus points earned by organizations would help identify organizations that have been innovative or proactive in their approach. Similarly, the analysis of penalty points earned by organizations would show a list of organizations that attracted negative remarks or disciplinary actions more often than others.

4 Transparency in the process

Citizens and civil society groups may wish to know the process by which a rank was assigned to a particular organization, how weights were computed and applied, etc. The AO would allow all such stakeholders to know complete details of this process.

5 Rating of State Governments

Ratings assigned to individual organizations in a state can be aggregated to formulate a composite rating for the state government. A formula needs to be evolved for such composite rating.

Apart from these individual ratings, the following parameters may also be used to evaluate the performance of the state government in the context of RTI Act:

1. Strength and composition of the state information commission
2. Number of PIOs/ APIOs appointed as against the number required/ targeted for the year
3. Steps taken by the state government to recognize good work of its organizations in the field of RTI implementation, etc

Concluded