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i4d is a monthly publication. It is intended for those interested and involved in the use of Information and Communication Technologies for development of underserved communities. It is hoped that it will serve to foster a growing network by keeping the community up to date on many activities in this wide and exciting field.

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**Editorial**

**ICTs help assert human rights**



Human rights are universal rights held to belong to individuals by virtue of their being human, encompassing civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights and freedoms, and based on the notion of personal human dignity and worth. The United Nation's Commission on Human Rights, with Eleanor Roosevelt, as chair, created the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This declaration reasserted the concept of human rights after the horrors of World War II. Human rights have since become a universally espoused yet widely disregarded concept.

The various dimensions of human rights assertion by the civil societies are not so easily understood, and the common man often becomes an ignorant victim of violations. With societies increasingly getting globalised there are new challenges to ensuring that human rights are guaranteed. Human rights activists have always felt that timely and accurate information could be a valuable resource for asserting the rights.

In the last few decades, freedom of information has been recognised as an internationally protected human right, and societies across the world have been moving away from opaque and secretive administrative systems to open and transparent systems. Sweden is supposed to have put in place the first set of laws for transparency in public affairs nearly two centuries ago! The 1810's Right to Know act got replaced in 1949 by a new Act, which enjoyed the sanctity of being a part of the country's Constitution itself. The principle is that every Swedish citizen should have access to virtually all documents kept by the State or municipal agencies. Several developed countries and of the Commonwealth nations have enacted these acts, in an effort to increase transparency and to build state accountability.

The Indian Government has finally enacted the Right to Information Act 2005. The Act has been passed after hectic lobbying by civil society over the last year, since the new Government came into power with an explicit commitment to making the old law 'more progressive, participatory and meaningful'. But it must be remembered that the bill, passed by Parliament is named as 'The Freedom of Information Bill' and it evoked intense debate, including a wrangle over terminology. It was largely felt that the phrase 'Right to Information' (RTI) conveyed the idea better, by placing the onus of maximum disclosure on the government, than the term 'Freedom of Information', which implied a mere lack of interference.

In this issue, we have focussed on how human rights and ICTs are closely linked and how organisations working in this field are using various tools for advocating their issues. We look forward to learning about more initiatives and other resources from our readers.



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