
Advocacy toolkit case studies

RAISING AWARENESS OF RIGHTS IN INDIA

THEMES:

Governance
Human rights

ADVOCACY APPROACHES:

Educating community members
Government officials: meeting with
Right to Information frameworks
Social contracts and social accountability
Using human rights

India has a national law that gives its citizens the right to access government information about their legal entitlements freely. Under the provisions of the law, any citizen may request information from a public authority or government body and expect a response within thirty days.

One of Tearfund's partners, Emmanuel Hospital Association (EHA), runs a project called 'Sayhog' (meaning 'cooperation' in Hindi), which raises awareness about the law among people living in informal settlements. This is important because many poor and vulnerable communities are not aware that the law exists and do not know how to use it. Through community meetings and training, EHA helps people to understand that they have a right to information, and teaches them the procedures to follow to access it.

In one slum in Delhi, EHA helped the community to exercise their right to information. They showed them how to complete the paperwork, where to send it and how to follow it up. As a result, the community discovered that they were entitled to a bus service, a tarmac road, an electricity connection, water, sanitation, a health clinic and a school. They also found out that each person had a right to an identity card, which would enable them to access health care and education.

At the community's request, EHA showed community members how to use this information to write to the relevant local government officials in Delhi and ask for provision of these services. This led to the community having several meetings with the officials. It was not always easy because the slum had developed on government land and the officials were fearful about losing ownership of the land. However, the community persevered because they knew their rights under the law. Eventually the local government paid for the services requested. At the same time, the empowered community members continued to use the law on an ongoing basis and to tell others about it.