

The right to know: The foothold of transparent and accountable governance

A series of worldwide actions for International Right to Know Day, 28 September 2013

Coinciding with the anniversary of the International Right to Know Day, 28 September 2013, The Global Movement for Budget Transparency, Accountability and Participation (Global BTAP) organised worldwide actions to strengthen public awareness of the need to advance transparency, accountability and budgetary participation around the world. Around 55 civil society organisations from over 40 countries – who work primarily to strengthen transparency, accountability and budgetary participation – organised a parallel activity calling on (1) the government to make a stronger commitment and (2) citizens to raise awareness of the right to know public information.

Referring to Article 19 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, access to information is a human right. “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”.

The principles of the right to know are:

1. Access to information is every person’s right
2. Access to information is key, secrecy is an exception
3. The right to know applies to all public bodies
4. Requests for information must be simple, quick and free
5. Public officials have an obligation to supply the applicant with information
6. Refusals of requests for information must be based on law
7. Public interests are most important, more than confidentiality
8. Everyone has the right to criticise decisions and adverse public policies
9. Public bodies must be proactive in publishing information about themselves
10. The right to information / the right to know must be guaranteed by independent institutions

The anniversary of the International Right to Know Day was initiated by FOI Advocates Network in 2002 in Sofia, Bulgaria, who aimed to strengthen public awareness of the rights of every person to access public information, including information within budget policies. Because of this, Global BTAP asked governments and the international community to apply best practice towards transparency and budgetary participation.

At Global BTAP, we believe that transparent and inclusive budgets are key to fixing public services, reducing poverty, fulfilling human rights, social justice and environmental sustainability. The public have the right to know and determine public policies that are made by the government using public money, which falls within the framework of a people’s mandate. Participation in the adoption of budget policies is a basic right and the responsibility of all citizens.

Within this framework, five institutions in Indonesia have already become members of Global BTAP – Pattiro, Seknas FITRA, Perkumpulan Inisiatif, PP Lakpesdam NU, and Perkumpulan IDEA – who have joined with the OGI network (Open Government Indonesia). Alongside these institutions, the Freedom of Information Network Indonesia (Koalisi FOINI), Publish What You Pay (PWYP) Indonesia, as well as civil society networks, academics, and the Information Commission were involved in the worldwide actions.