



## Right to information (RTI): a tool for SDG achievement, transparency and good governance in Uzbekistan

### KEY MESSAGE

- In Uzbekistan, RTI can enhance government accountability and transparency aligned with the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan 2030.
- Embedding RTI principles into digital governance reforms can foster greater trust in public institutions and encourage good governance.
- Effective enforcement of RTI can assist Uzbekistan in fulfilling international commitments such as the UN SDGs and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

### INTRODUCTION

The Right to Information (RTI) plays a vital role in Uzbekistan's ongoing journey towards a more transparent and democratic society, part of the broader 'New Uzbekistan' reform movement that values

openness, citizen involvement, and the responsible functioning of institutions. This policy paper highlights how the Right to Information (RTI) serves as a valuable tool that links transparency, good governance, and the successful achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Uzbekistan. Transparency provides the essential foundation for accountability, while good governance ensures its effective execution. Together, they accelerate progress toward SDGs. The analysis focuses on how RTI can strengthen these three crucial pillars simultaneously across the country.

The Right to Information (RTI) is one of the essential pillars of open government, enabling citizens to access information held by public authorities and promoting accountability in policymaking. The Right to Information is grounded in *Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression and to seek, receive, and impart information. That is the

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foundation on which the right to information is founded, a principle that safeguards all other liberties. The Right to Information (RTI) is a fundamental human right that is implemented through various mechanisms and instruments, such as information disclosure laws, online portals, and open data initiatives. Such citizen empowerment eventually enhances institutional effectiveness, as decision-makers can rely on empirical facts and credible data when making decisions that impact society. Although rights-to-information laws clearly enhance institutional transparency and accountability, empirical studies suggest that their effect on government decision-making quality, public understanding of decisions and citizen trust is far more limited. For example, empirical evidence from Latin America suggests that while the exercise of RTI increases trust in the specific institution that responds and perceptions of transparency, it does not reliably increase overall trust in government or lead to greater citizen participation or improved decision-making.<sup>1</sup>

Evidence from India indicates that even a well-designed RTI law may not achieve full transparency or accountability if underlying socio-political factors are

<sup>1</sup> Rodríguez, R.P., Muñoz, P., Rosenblatt, F., Rossel, C., Scrollini, F., & Tealde, E. (2023). How the exercise of the right to information (RTI) affects trust in political institutions. *Government Information Quarterly*, 40(4), 101838. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2023.101838>

weak. For instance, Relly found that in the case of India's RTI, political will, bureaucratic culture and civil-society engagement were the most significant determinants of implementation, and that technocratic mechanisms alone (e.g., training, sanctions, administrative procedures) were insufficient to overcome entrenched secrecy.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that for Uzbekistan, strengthening the legal framework for RTI must be accompanied by reforms in institutional culture, oversight, and citizen engagement to ensure the law produces real impact. In the Uzbek context, where institutional culture, oversight mechanisms and public awareness remain developing, the Indian experience underlines the importance of focusing not just on the law but on the enabling environment: training of information officers, ensuring proactive disclosure, improving coordination between agencies, and stimulating civil-society demand for information.

Right-to-Information laws have been instrumental in revealing inefficiencies, reducing corruption, and improving policy implementation in various environments.<sup>3</sup> However, scholars also observed that in

<sup>2</sup> Relly, J.E., Rabbi, M.F., Sabharwal, M., Pakanati, R. and Schwalbe, E.H., (2020). More than a decade in the making: A study of the implementation of India's Right to Information Act. *World Development*, 136, p.105088

<sup>3</sup> Calland, R. & Bentley, K., (2013). The impact and effectiveness of transparency and accountability initiatives: Freedom of information. *Development Policy Review*, 31 (s1), pp.69–87. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12021>

the United Kingdom, while the Freedom of Information Act improved transparency, there was little evidence it enhanced policy quality, public understanding, or trust in government. This suggests that Uzbekistan's RTI reforms should be paired with civic-education and participation mechanisms to generate broader democratic benefits. Implementing RTI mechanisms in Uzbekistan can present a significant opportunity for advancing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This policy assessment outlines the RTI's contribution to achieving specific SDGs by promoting evidence-based decision-making, enhancing resource allocation, and strengthening institutional efficiency. Specifically, RTI facilitates poverty alleviation (SDG 1) by promoting transparency in welfare schemes for the citizens<sup>4</sup>, enhances public health systems (SDG 3) via access to healthcare data, advances quality education (SDG 4) by augmenting information accessibility<sup>5</sup>, fortifies gender equality (SDG 5) through enhanced policy scrutiny<sup>6</sup>, stimulates eco-

nommic growth (SDG 8) by improving investment transparency, bolsters climate action (SDG 13)<sup>7</sup> and supports good governance (SDG 16)<sup>8</sup> through improved access to environmental data. The SDGs, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, represent a universal commitment to end poverty, ensure environmental sustainability, and promote sustainable prosperity by 2030. Achievement of these goals is anchored on good governance, under which access to information is central to accountability and public participation. Despite the governance reforms undertaken in Uzbekistan, the application of RTI is limited in its ability to inform policies related to the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the overall aim of this policy study is to present key examples of RTI and their impact on specific Sustainable Development Goals. Setting up RTI mechanisms can contribute to sustainable development by promoting public participation and harmonising policies with national and global development priorities.

<sup>4</sup> Elek-BenMoshe, F. and Rafaeli, S., (2025). Readability of online government information about welfare rights and benefits: the Israeli case. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 24(2), pp.1659-1671

<sup>5</sup> Afridi, F., Barooah, B. and Somanathan, R., (2020). Improving learning outcomes through information provision: Experimental evidence from Indian villages. *Journal of Development Economics*, 146, p.102276

<sup>6</sup> Pinney, C., Raj, A., Hanna, A. and Ekstrand, M.D., (2023). Much ado about gender: Current practices and future recommendations for appropriate gender-aware information access. In *Proceedings of the 2023 Conference on Human Information Interaction and Retrieval* (pp. 269-279).

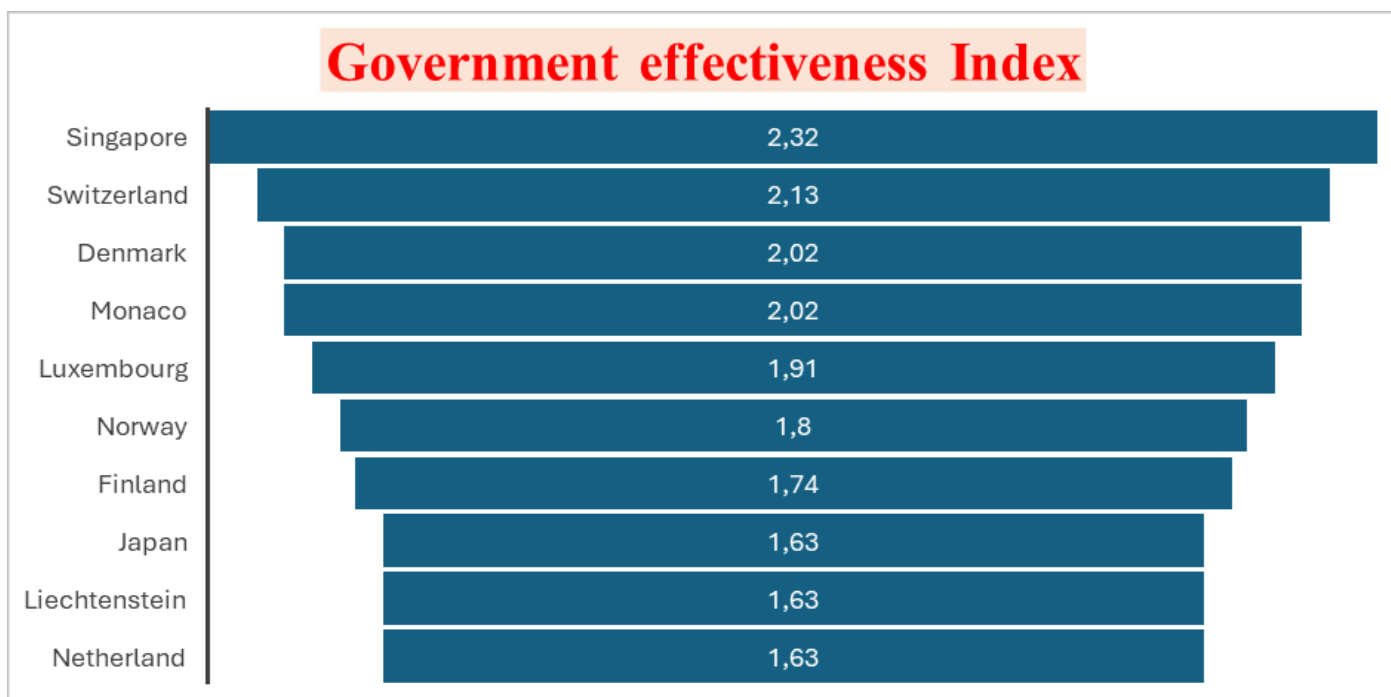
<sup>7</sup> Ageyo, J. and Muchunku, I.G., (2020). Beyond the right of access: a critique of the legalist approach to dissemination of climate change information in Kenya. *Sustainability*, 12(6), p.2530.

Bhatty, K., (2006). Employment guarantee and child rights. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp.1965-1967

<sup>8</sup> Gomez, M., (2019). The right to information and transformative development outcomes. *Law and Development Review*, 12(3), pp.837-864

<sup>9</sup> Umidjon, A., (2023). Prospects for improving the right to information in the Republic of Uzbekistan. *The American Journal of Political Science Law and Criminology*, 5(11), pp.52-56

Figure 1. Government Effectiveness Index (Top 10 countries)



Source: The Global Economy, 2024

### Government effectiveness (global context)

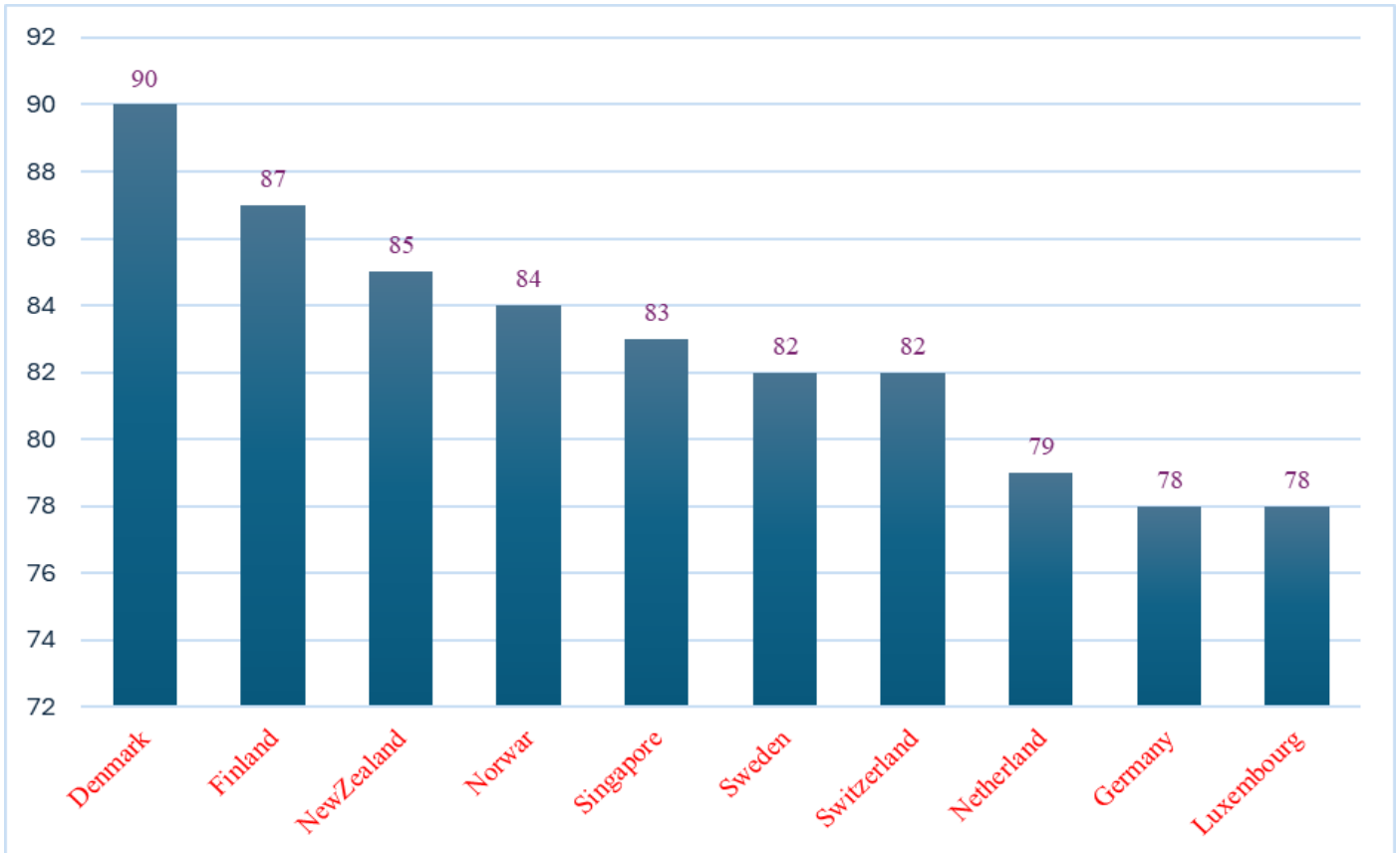
The RTI is indeed related to government effectiveness, which is measured by certain indices, including the one by The Global Economy.<sup>10</sup> The index is a measurement that reflects perceptions of government quality in terms of government services, the quality of civil service with political independence, the quality of decision-making and implementation, and the quality of government commitments towards decisions. The mean score in the index for 193 nations in 2023 is -0.04 points. The score in Singapore is 2.32 points, whereas in Yemen is -2.28 points. There is no Asian nation in the top 10, as in Figure 1. Similarly, according to the

<sup>10</sup> The Global Economy (2024) *Transparency & Corruption - Worldwide Rankings*. Available at: <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/>

Transparency International report, the average score for 2023, based on 176 countries, was 43 points. The highest value was in Denmark, 90 points, and the lowest was in Somalia, 11 points. Below is a chart for the top 10 least corrupt countries. The Corruption Perceptions Index measures perceptions of public sector corruption, encompassing both administrative and political corruption. Unfortunately, none of the Asian countries is in the top 10, as depicted in Figure 2.

In the modern era, bribery, a lack of transparency, and corruption significantly undermine the fundamental principles of democracy. However, as soon as citizens are endowed with the right to information, it will lead towards good administration and transparency because a government will be accountable to the ordi-

Figure 2. Corruption Perceptions Index, 100 = no corruption, 2023 (Top 10 least corrupt countries)



Source: The Global Economy, 2024

nary people. The right will facilitate active participation and monitoring of the common man. Ordinary men are empowered with this right to be informed about their grievances, updated on laws, and understand why these laws are made in administrative work. Active participation by ordinary men in administration will consolidate democracy in a nation. In modern times, most nations have enshrined the right to information as a human right in their constitutions, which is a key component in establishing checks and balances of power. The right also ensures that the essential flavour of sovereignty in ordinary men is not diluted. While these global indicators highlight some positive prac-

tices, Uzbekistan's performance remains relatively moderate. According to the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators in 2023, Uzbekistan's government effectiveness score was  $-0.28$ , indicating ongoing administrative reforms but also some challenges with transparency.<sup>11</sup> The Corruption Perceptions Index in 2024 ranked Uzbekistan 121 out of 180 countries.<sup>12</sup> By strengthening RTI, Uzbekistan can further improve accountability and make data more openly accessible, helping to close these gaps.

<sup>11</sup> World Bank (2023) *Worldwide Governance Indicators*. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/worldwide-governance-indicators>

<sup>12</sup> Transparency International (2024) *Corruption Perceptions Index 2024*. Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024>

Table 1. PRIME Methodology

Attributes/Regions	Asia Pacific	Europe & Central Asia	Latin America and the Caribbean	Africa	Middle East and North Africa	Around the world
Countries adopted the RTI law	18	48	23	22	7	118
Countries pending RTI Bills or other initiatives	7	2	7	11	6	31
Countries include RTI in their constitutions	14	35	14	27	4	90
Countries join the open government partnership	10	32	10	25	4	75
Countries do not have RTI legislation but informally give information to their citizens	4	46	21	NA	NA	46
The population lives in a country with an RTI law/policy (%)	96%	98%	90%	64%	47%	> 90%

### Current Status of RTI at the Global Level

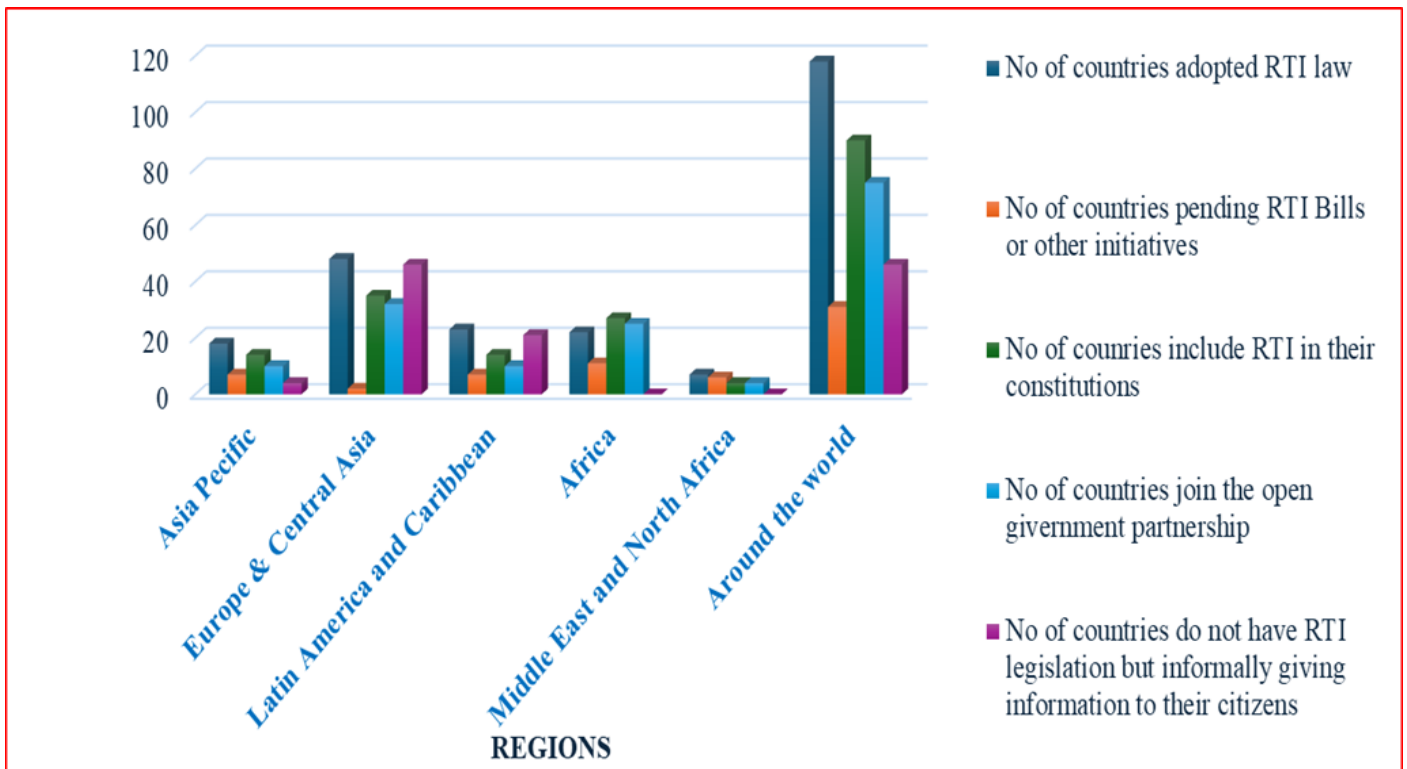
As of 2022, 133 countries have a Right to Information (RTI) law or policy. More than 90% of global citizens are represented in these 133 countries. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encourage all countries to adopt RTI legislation. The quality as well as the application of RTI legislation vary in various countries. Some challenges are inappropriately broad exemptions, lack of independent scrutiny, inadequate personnel and technical competence, inadequately trained

<sup>13</sup> Article 19 (2018) *Right to Know Day 2018: Progress on information access around the world*. Available at: <https://www.article19.org/resources/right-to-know-day-2018-progress-on-information-access-around-the->

officers, and a culture of secrecy. Table 1 and Figure 3 depict the situation of RTI in regions of the world. For Uzbekistan, joining the global RTI trend means aligning domestic reforms with international best practice, establishing an independent information commissioner, enforcing disclosure deadlines, and integrating RTI with e-government platforms. Uzbekistan's *Law on Openness of Activities of Public Authorities and Administration* provides a legal basis for RTI but lacks clear enforcement and sanction mechanisms.<sup>14</sup> Although several ministries publish data

<sup>14</sup> Republic of Uzbekistan (2014) *Law on the openness of the activities of public authorities and administration* (No. LRU-369, 05 May 2014). Available at: <https://www.lex.uz/docs/6819401>

Figure 3. RTI status at the global level



Source: author's compilation

online, compliance remains inconsistent. Public awareness of the right to request information in Uzbekistan remains limited despite a formal legal framework, reflecting weak implementation and low public engagement.<sup>15</sup> Public officials' limited training and a lingering culture of secrecy continue to restrict access.

### RTI in Uzbekistan: Current Landscape and Challenges

Research on international best practices, combined with Uzbekistan's nascent transparency framework, presents both opportunities and challenges in implementing Right to Information (RTI) initiatives. Uzbekistan has undertaken significant efforts to develop its RTI system, es-

<sup>15</sup> IREX (2022) *VIBE 2022: Uzbekistan*. Available at: [https://www.irex.org/files/VIBE\\_2022\\_Uzbekistan.pdf](https://www.irex.org/files/VIBE_2022_Uzbekistan.pdf)

pecially in light of the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2030. This strategic plan emphasizes the importance of RTI in promoting transparency, accountability, and participatory governance. Since 2016, the government has increasingly recognized access to information as a key element of an active and engaged society. Despite legislative progress, Uzbekistan's *Law on Openness of Activities of Public Authorities and Administration* lacks precise enforcement mechanisms and penalties for non-disclosure. Although ministries are required to publish annual transparency reports, compliance with this requirement remains inconsistent. Furthermore, the E-Government Development Index in 2022 ranked Uzbekistan 69th globally, indicating moderate progress but

also revealing ongoing gaps in public access to data.<sup>16</sup> Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in 2023 ranked Uzbekistan 126th out of 180 countries, indicating that RTI mechanisms have yet to significantly reduce corruption perceptions.<sup>17</sup> Public awareness of RTI remains low, as shown by local surveys: less than 30% of citizens know their right to request public information. This limited understanding hampers citizen participation in decision-making and policy oversight.

Despite this, institutions' ability, social expectations, and enforcement gaps still present significant challenges. Several factors have hindered the adoption of the Right to Information (RTI) effectively. Public officials' resistance, institutional capacity constraints, and social resistance to openness represent key barriers.<sup>18</sup> A recent study by Kumar highlights that the quality of electronic services provided through digital redressal platforms has a significant impact on users' satisfaction, particularly among Indian youth.<sup>19</sup> It highlights the importance of user-centric de-

<sup>16</sup> United Nations (2022) *UN E-Government Survey 2022*. Available at: <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/reports/un-e-government-survey-2022>

<sup>17</sup> Transparency International (2023) *Corruption Perceptions Index 2023*. Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023>

<sup>18</sup> Usmanov, A.S., Khamdamov, S., Samadov, A.E. & Nosirova, N.J., (2023). Problems of ensuring sustainable development goals in Uzbekistan. *British Journal of Global Ecology and Sustainable Development*, 16, pp.106–110. Available at: <https://www.journalzone.org/index.php/>

sign and underscores the crucial role of responsiveness in facilitating digital transparency and accountability. Additionally, the understanding of RTI rights among ordinary people remains limited, which hinders civic participation and the effective use of information access mechanisms. For RTI to be a strong driver of sustainable development in Uzbekistan, these challenges must be overcome. By combining the fight against corruption with public engagement and informed decision-making, RTI has become a revolutionary instrument for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The analysis concludes with policy recommendations aimed at strengthening RTI mechanisms and driving Uzbekistan towards sustainable development.

### Policy Implications—RTI and Its Impact on Specific SDGs (Key Cases)

The quality of access to information can define a government as being more or less democratic.<sup>20</sup> Controlling information is power, and maintaining a good relationship between those who govern and those who are governed is key to effective governance. The lack of infor-

<sup>19</sup> Kumar, A., Tiwari, A.A., Singh, R.K. & Nag, T., (2023). Does e-service quality of online grievance redress portals lead to satisfaction? An outlook from the perspectives of Indian youth. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 23(1), p.e2822. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2822>

<sup>20</sup> Twizeyimana, J.D. & Andersson, A., (2019). The public value of e-government—A literature review. *Government Information Quarterly*, 36(2), pp.167–178.

Table 2. RTI and Its Impact on Specific SDGs (Some examples)

Sr No	Sustainable development goal	Successful RTI Impact cases	Country
SDG1	<b><i>Poverty reduction</i></b>	RTI has enhanced transparency in social assistance programs, reducing corruption and improving the effectiveness of poverty-reduction initiatives (Fox, 2007). RTI uncovered discrepancies in ration distribution, prompting systemic reforms that have improved the program's efficiency and outreach (Peisakhin & Pinto, 2010).	Mexico  India
SDG3	<b><i>Good Health and Well-being</i></b>	RTI has been used to identify discrepancies in healthcare funding, leading to policy reforms that have enhanced service provision and improved patient outcomes (Peisakhin & Pinto, 2010).	Uganda
SDG4	<b><i>Quality Education</i></b>	RTI has contributed to higher teacher engagement, better infrastructure allocation, and overall improvements in educational quality (Bhatty, 2006).	India
SDG5	<b><i>Gender Equality</i></b>	RTI has been used to expose gender disparities in workforce participation and access to social services, prompting more inclusive policy interventions (Rahman, 2012). Women utilized RTI laws to obtain salary records of their male counterparts, leading to legal reforms that improved wage transparency and promoted gender equality in the workplace (OECD, 2017). RTI has been instrumental in addressing wage discrimination.	Bangladesh  Sweden
SDG8	<b><i>Decent Work and Economic Growth</i></b>	RTI has been pivotal in exposing labour rights violations, leading to improved working conditions and stricter enforcement of labour laws (Calland & Bentley, 2013).	South Africa
SDG13	<b><i>Climate Action</i></b>	RTI has empowered communities to access information on industrial emissions and environmental clearances, leading to more robust regulatory enforcement and sustainable environmental management (Singh, 2018).	India
SDG16	<b><i>Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions</i></b>	Embedding RTI within human rights frameworks enhances public participation and strengthens accountability in SDG implementation (Duyck & Duyck, 2023). RTI laws have exposed corruption, leading to legal prosecutions and governance improvements.	Indonesia

mation negatively affects the development of active citizenship and the structuring of more responsive governments and a more transparent environment.<sup>21</sup> As I can point out, in times of pandemic, qualified public information was essential not only for citizens but also for the production of knowledge to mitigate and combat the virus and seek an effective vaccine. There are numerous benefits to implementing the RTI Act in general, and access to information is essential, serving as a facilitator of sustainable development, particularly in areas such as health, the environment, poverty eradication, and anti-corruption, as shown in Table 1.

Apart from the above, some scholars have additionally emphasized the importance of accessibility of Public Information in combating and preventing corruption,<sup>22</sup> environmental preservation<sup>23</sup> and poverty reduction.<sup>24</sup> Implementing RTI affects the daily perception of public power, the efficiency of public services, and the administrative improvement of

<sup>21</sup> Silva, J.I.A.O., (2020). Public access to information for sustainable development. In: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp.1-13.

<sup>22</sup> Faulkner, N., Jorgensen, B. & Koufariotis, G., (2019). Can behavioural interventions increase citizens' use of e-government? Evidence from a quasi-experimental trial. *Government Information Quarterly*, 36(1), pp.61-68.

<sup>23</sup> Silva, J.I.A.O., (2020). Public access to information for sustainable development. In: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp.1-13.

<sup>24</sup> Zhang, J., Zhang, Y., Cheng, M., Yu, N., Wei, X. & Zhang, Z., (2019). Impact of information access on poverty alleviation effectiveness: Evidence from China. *IEEE Access*, 7, pp.149013-149025

the government, promoting an open and transparent government. Zhao and Fan argue, based on their research, that a successful government will inevitably depend on the quality of access to information and the level of transparency toward the population, other actors, and partners.<sup>25</sup> Information about the environment is essential to know the moment and the need to act, to pressure governments and private entities to protect environmental factors necessary for the survival of ecosystems, and to Public Access to Information for the Sustainable Development of human life on the planet.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, it is impossible to discuss sustainable development without addressing poverty eradication. The lack of information may create a cycle that traps people in a situation of financial vulnerability, denying them access to essential services, such as water, energy, and sewage and basic daily food.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, research demonstrated the positive impact of access to information on poverty reduction in Chinese communities, particularly in rural areas.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Zhao, Y. & Fan, B., (2018). Exploring open government data capacity of government agency: Based on the resource-based theory. *Government Information Quarterly*, 35(1), pp.1-12.

<sup>26</sup> Rantala, S., Swallow, B., Paloniemi, R. & Raitanen, E., (2020). Governance of forests and governance of forest information: Interlinkages in the age of open and digital data. *Forest Policy and Economics*, 113, p.102123.

<sup>27</sup> Silva, J.I.A.O., (2020). Public access to information for sustainable development. In: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp.1-13.

<sup>28</sup> Zhang, J., Zhang, Y., Cheng, M., Yu, N., Wei, X. & Zhang, Z., (2019). Impact of information access on poverty alleviation effectiveness: Evidence from China. *IEEE Access*, 7,

In Uzbekistan, RTI implementation should focus on sector-specific transparency—especially in public procurement, health, and education—where citizen oversight can directly cut inefficiency. The government should also create a central information portal that consolidates disclosure requirements and standardizes response timelines. Independent monitoring by civil society organizations and academia would help ensure accountability. By embedding RTI into Uzbekistan’s digital-governance strategy and aligning it with SDG 16, the country can strengthen good governance, improve policy outcomes, and build public trust in its institutions.

In conclusion, enhancing RTI in Uzbekistan requires legal reforms, institutional capacity building, and increased civic awareness. By positioning RTI as a core component of transparency and good governance, Uzbekistan can make clear progress toward achieving its Sustainable Development Goals and strengthening its democratic transition. Development Goals and consolidating its democratic transition.

### A way forward

Uzbekistan can strengthen its RTI framework by implementing the following measures, empowering citizens and driving progress toward sustainable governance and development. For making substantive changes, the following points are

For making substantive changes, the following points are recommended for consideration.

First, free and quality access to the internet has become essential for making public access to information a public policy priority. This point should serve as the foundation for public access to information as a public policy. This would ensure public access to information for sustainable development and improve citizenship. Another important step is to consider establishing an independent Information Commission. This body would oversee implementation, handle appeals from citizens, and monitor how public institutions proactively share information with the public. It is also beneficial to integrate RTI provisions into broader governance reforms, such as anti-corruption initiatives and digital government strategies. The need to foster a culture of openness and accountability within government agencies through performance incentives, transparency benchmarks, and leadership commitment to information disclosure.

Another important point, based on public access to information, is the importance of citizen participation. It is hoped that the universalization of information systems and the expansion of virtual access will also improve citizens' participation in the formulation and implementation of

public policies. The quality of democracy depends on access to quality public information. This means that the existing RTI laws should be amended to align with international best practices, establishing clear guidelines for information disclosure and enforcing penalties for non-compliance.

The RTI also requires the implementation of targeted training programs for public officials to improve their ability to process RTI requests efficiently and cultivate a culture of openness within government institutions. At the same time, there is a need to increase citizen engagement by launching media initiatives, workshops, and digital platforms to educate the public on their RTI rights and the benefits of transparency. For the practical implementation of the SDGs, the work can begin by developing tailored RTI policies for critical sectors, such as healthcare, environmental protection, and social welfare, to enhance transparency and address sector-specific challenges.

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