



RAJIV GANDHI INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

Annual Report

2012-13

Profile

Over the years, the Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS), as a policy think tank has evolved into a unique space, having made significant contributions in the domain of public policy. In the present-day context, the RGICS has chosen to address what in its view is the biggest challenge facing the nation today – namely, the way in which a policy is formulated. This in turn raises a number of complex issues such as the following:

- Who has a voice by right in the policy making process;
- How is the voice of the people to be channelled;
- How a sound policy outcome can be ascertained.

Hence the RGICS's main focus in 2012-13 was to strengthen the efforts it began two years ago to work toward democratising the process of public policy. It aims to do so by:

- Strengthening the capacity of political leaders;
- Strengthening the policy capacity of social movements;
- Increasing the sensitivity of public officials towards democratisation of public policy;
- Widening public awareness of public policy; and
- Strengthening institutional frameworks and systems of public policy decision-making through public policy innovations.

The quality of any public policy rests on the following six safeguards:

- The extent to which it is receptive to the voice of the people;
- Technical soundness;
- A consistent espousal of non-negotiable values and rights;
- Clear and measurable goals and policy objectives;
- A transparent and accountable decision making process;
- A sound implementation framework.

In the year 2012-13, the RGICS organised several seminars, workshops, conferences and brainstorming sessions on significant social, political and economic issues facing the nation. Aided by its vibrant academic environment and a team of motivated individuals with considerable expertise in domains like economics, sociology, political science and law, the RGICS produced high quality briefs, reports, research papers and newsletters, among others, throughout the year.

Augmenting the capacity of political leaders

- Several briefings for Members of Parliament (MPs) were prepared by the RGICS on challenging issues such as Demand for Grants, Finance Bills, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) report on coal allocation, the problem of black money, SC/ST reservation in the Promotions Bill, the Lok Pal Bill, issues of social justice, the economic situation in India, and the Union Budget 2012-2013 (*refer to Annex 2 for a detailed list of briefings prepared during the year*);
- A series of monthly seminars were organised for members of youth organisations on significant socio-economic issues such as the emerging Indian economy, the National Food Security Bill, the political economy of India, reservations in promotion for SC/ST candidates, and violence against women; and
- The RGICS assisted a group of youth organisations through a series of more than 10 meetings on developing a national students' movement on quality and equality of education. Meetings were organised as a mandate to enhance knowledge of various student and youth representations on various such issues.

Bolstering the capacity of social movements to impact policy

- The RGICS organised national seminars in Delhi and Bangalore on the theme of ‘Strengthening the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act’ for NGO representatives from across the country;
- A series of meetings were organised with the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights on strengthening the law against manual scavenging;
- The RGICS assisted the Delhi-based Lawyers’ Collective on evaluating the effectiveness of the Protection of Woman Against Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) and the Justice Verma Committee on Violence Against Women; and
- A consultative workshop on the theme of ‘Women’s access to justice’ was organised with a view to addressing issues related to women’s legal rights and access to justice. This was organised in collaboration with Prof. Roop Rekha Verma former Vice-chancellor, Professor & Head of the Philosophy Department and Dean, Faculty of Arts Lucknow University. She is the founder Secretary of social organisation called Saajhi Duniya which initially function under the name Nagrik-Dharam Samaj. It was also attended by many NGOs, CSOs and academicians.

Communicating the nuances of democratisation of public policy to public officials

- The Director, RGICS, played a significant role in providing conceptual and information inputs to government officials on important areas including education reform, the Lok Pal Legislation, reform of the Corruption Act, to name a few.

Enhancing public awareness of public policy challenges

- The organisation emerged as a platform to disseminate knowledge on public policy issues and initiated interactive sessions with students from the New York University as well as the University of Delhi.

Towards strengthening the institutional framework and systems of public policy decision making

- Several public consultations on electoral reforms were organised by the RGICS. These consultations engaged a large number of civil society representatives and experts;
- Several workshops were organised on important issues like genetically modified food, protection of the tiger and forest conservation;
- The RGICS organised a consultation meeting on 30th July 2012 to discuss the issue of state policy vis-à-vis folk art traditions, in view of their increasing marginalisation in the mainstream art and culture in India. It was attended by academicians and practitioners of folk art in India. They are Prof. Jyotindra Jain, director, National Craft Museum, New Delhi; Dr Molly Kaushal, head, Janapada Sampada, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi; Prof. Roma Chatterji, visiting ICCR chair, Prof. Parul Mukherji, former dean, School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU.
- A two-day conference was organised to build on the take-away of brainstorming sessions on the theme of ‘Balanced regional development in India’ that took place in 2011, attended by the authors of papers as well as by political leaders;
- As an extension of the 2011 brainstorming session on internal migration in contemporary India, a research project, ‘Internal migration in India’, was initiated. A two day conference on the research project was organised during which subject experts presented papers;
- A brainstorming session followed by a midterm review meeting in 2012 took place on the theme of ‘Regionalism: issues and concerns’. The findings of the project were shared by the researchers at a conference in 2013, where issues of Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Northeast India and Jammu Kashmir were discussed;

- The RGICS organised brainstorming sessions on the themes of ‘Caste in contemporary India: ideas, institutions, practices and policies’, ‘Rights-Based Approach’, and ‘Left-wing extremism’. Projects based on these topics were initiated;
- Based on an Advisory Group meeting on ‘Response to insurgency’, a research project followed by a conference on ‘Response to insurgency in Northeast India’ was organised; and
- A two-day brainstorming and workshop event was organised on the theme of ‘Mapping the adverse consequences of sex selection and gender imbalance: findings and policy implication’.

Towards public policy innovations

- Two talks under the Cutting Edge Series Programme of the RGICS were organised on the themes of ‘Aerial robot swarms -- technology that will shape the future’ and ‘The future of the internet - 1.2 billion empowered Indians’. These events were attended in large numbers by students, social organisations and interested MPs; and



- A public conversation on ‘State, culture and human imagination’ was held between Prof. Ashis Nandy, Indian political psychologist, and former director of Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi and Prof. Hamid Dabashi, professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, New York. This event elicited a very positive response from academia (*refer to the events calendar for details (Annex 1)*)

Providing policy research assistance to MPs

The RGICS started the Rajiv Gandhi Research Assistants to Legislators (RG-RAL) programme in 2012. A team of eight youngsters were selected and trained to provide policy research assistance to MPs. This initiative helped the MPs access research assistance on various issues arising in legislative work such as:

- Preparing questions and other interventions in Parliament on policy matters, including committee work, through close interaction with various MPs;
- Analysing draft Bills presented to Parliament;
- Preparing background papers and briefings for MPs on key policy issues;
- Conducting briefings, seminars and consultative meetings with concerned stakeholders on contemporary issues;
- Attempting to strengthen the political voice of neglected regions like Northeast India and marginalised communities by providing assistance in the form of research materials and attempting to bridge the knowledge gap.

Starting a weekly newsletter

The RGICS started a weekly newsletter, ‘Policy Watch’ during the year. The newsletter was a compilation of articles from around 300 sources like various national and international newspapers, journals, magazines, internal websites, covering domains like governance, science and technology, legal, social, economic and international affairs. As of March 2013, the RGICS had produced 23 issues of ‘Policy Watch’ which has been highly appreciated in several quarters.



Annex 1: RGICS Events: April 2012-March 13

1.	April 7, 2012	Brainstorming on ‘Regionalism: issues and concerns’ Principal Researcher, Prof. Bhupinder Zutshi, and six others participated in the brainstorming session to outline the scope and methodology of the project. It was decided to base the project on fieldwork reports so as to bring out regional perspectives more clearly. The regions earmarked for study included Jammu & Kashmir, Northeast India, Uttar Pradesh, and the Telengana issue.
2.	April 30, 2012	Briefing for MPs on Demand for Grants (Urban Development)
3.	May 1, 2012	Briefing for MPs on Demand for Grants (Home Affairs)
4.	May 2, 2012	Briefing for MPs on Demand for Grants (Commerce)
5.	May 4, 2012	Briefing for MPs on the Finance Bill.
6.	May 10, 2012	National Consultative Meeting on Amendment to SC/ST Atrocities Act
7.	May 21, 2012	Caste in contemporary India: ideas, institutions, practices and policies A brainstorming session, attended by academicians, was held to identify the focal areas of the research project. While there was a consensus on the existence of caste, and that caste matters, there was a view that the ways in which caste operates today bears revisiting. It was decided to examine the principles underlying policies and the state’s response to the caste structure and politics constructed around it.
8.	22 nd May, 2012	Brainstorming: Rights-based approach The meeting on a Rights-based approach (RBA) concluded that there should not be an attempt to homogenise the struggles of people, and that a new RBA was required, which would throw some light on the negatives as well. It was decided to invite papers with a view to revisiting the concept of RBA. This would include defining the scope of the approach -- individual versus collective, ideological, civil and political rights; the history of the RBA – the context of its emergence, and its impact on state policy, state and citizen, as well as an advancing market economy; and the positives and negatives of the RBA.
9.	June 23, 2012	Left-wing extremism A brainstorming session was held for academicians to identify the key areas of the research project. It was decided to focus on the two important issues: justice and reconciliation, and enhancing tribal self governance.
10.	July 13, 2012	Consultative workshop on ‘Women’s access to justice’ Access to justice is to be understood as more than just financial

		ability and the ability to access the justice system. Access to justice implicitly consists of two components: that the legal-judicial system should be equally accessible to all irrespective of gender and caste, among others; moreover that these systems are seen as socially just. With regard to the attitude towards women in terms of violence, neglect and exploitation, one way of bringing about an improvement in the status of women is to bring about legal remedies, both in terms of laws and access to justice. One of the most important international human rights law document for the recognition of women's rights is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The aim of the workshop was to examine all these aspects and suggest ways forward.
11.	June 20, 2012	Meetings on land reforms policy with Ekta Parishad
12.	July 16 to July 26, 2012	A 10-day training programme for Rajiv Gandhi - Research Assistants to Legislators (RG-RALs). Twelve RG-RALs were selected after an exhaustive selection process. They were given an orientation in Parliamentary procedures and trained to handle research and writing methodology, write policy briefs/ summaries, analyse Bills and prepare speeches, among others.
13.	July 19, 2012	Meeting with students from the University of Birmingham Students from the University of Birmingham had a meeting with RGF members and RG-RALS. About 12 students from the universities of Delhi and Birmingham visited the RGICS. They were briefed about ongoing projects on education. This was followed by a one hour meeting with the RGICS Fellows on their various research projects. The students had a very lively discussion with the RALS on various issues.
14.	July 30, 2012	Strengthening the traditions of folk art A consultation meeting was held to chalk out the main issues affecting folk art and folk artists. It was attended by academicians and practitioners of folk art. The discussion focused on the relationship of the state vis-à-vis culture.
15.	February 4, 2012	Briefings were organised for Congress MPs on the Consultative Group of DOPT on the Lok Pal Bill.
16.	June 20, 2012	Briefings organised for Congress MPs on the Consultative Group of Ministry of Rural Development on the Land Acquisition Act
17.	December 2012-February 2013	Series of meetings with youth organisations on developing a national students' movement on quality and equality of education.
18.	April 2012-	A series of meetings on strengthening the law against manual

	February 2013	scavenging
19.	August 7, 2012	State, culture and human imagination: A public conversation between Prof. Ashis Nandy and Prof. Hamid Dabashi. This well-attended dialogue was also telecast online.
20.	August 21, 2012	Briefing on the economic situation in India for MPs: Congress MPs were briefed by the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission on the prevailing economic situation in India.
21.	August 27, 2012	Briefing for MPs on CAG's performance audit of coal block allocation and augmentation of coal production
22.	Aug. 27, 2012	Briefing on reservation in promotion
23.	28 August 2012	Seminar on social justice for youth organisations
24.	September 4, 2012	Briefing on social justice issues for MPs
25.	September 12, 2012	Economic opportunities for marginalised communities in India: The first phase of a field trip was completed by a group of experts from the College of Social Work in Mumbai. The report would be finalised on the basis of this field survey.
26.	September 18, 2012	Workshop on an institutional framework for democratic decision making on forests: addressing the democratic deficit
27.	September 30, 2012	Seminar on the economic situation in India for youth organisations.
28.	October 24, 2012	Seminar on the political economy of India for youth organisations.
29.	October 29, 2012	Monthly seminar for youth organisations on the political economy of India
30.	November 9-10, 2012	A workshop on 'Mapping the adverse consequences of sex selection and gender imbalance: Findings and policy implication' was organised at the RGICS and attended by various representations including the researchers of RGICS.
31.	November 12, 2012	Workshop on decision making on GM Food
32.	November 24, 2012	Monthly seminar for youth organisations on the economic situation in India.
33.	December 3, 2012	A briefing on FDI in retail was organised for political representatives.
34.	December 17, 2012	Cutting Edge talk, 'Aerial robot swarms: technology that will shape the future' by Prof. Vijay Kumar
35.	December 25,	Briefing for representatives of demonstrators on punishment for

	2012	rape
36.	September 3-5, 2012	Field visit to Mandsaur by two scholars and director from RGICS to involve the SC community of Mandsaur on proposed amendments to the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act of India.
37.	January 7, 2013	Regionalism: issues and concerns At this mid-term review meeting of the project, held at the Centre for the Study of Regional Development, the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, experts reported their findings from the field visit and discussed scope of improvement.
38.	January 22, 2013	One day seminar on 'Violence against Women'
39.	January 29, 2013	Cutting edge talk event on the 'Future of the internet: 1.2.billion empowered Indians' by Vinton. G. Cerf, Vice President and Chief Internet Evangelist, Google
40.	February 8-9, 2013	Conference on 'Balanced regional development: challenges and the way forward'. All the research papers were presented and discussed.
41.	February 22-23, 2013	Conference on the research project "Internal migration in contemporary studies". Several research papers were presented.
42.	February 26, 2013	Monthly Seminar on 'Countering Violence against women'
43.	March 1, 2013	Workshop on 'Response to insurgency in Northeast India' was organised by the RGICS and attended by authors of the project, academicians and political representatives.
44.	March 6, 2013	Economic opportunities for marginalised communities in India: A follow-up meeting with a group of people from the Koli community was held. It was decided to conceptualise the next workshop on the issue of fisher rights in India.
45.	March 8, 2013	Briefing on the 2012-13 Union Budget for MPs by the Finance Minister
46.	March 20, 2013	A consultation meeting on electoral reforms was organised and attended by the Director of the RGICS and political representatives.