

# **THE VIOLATION BY KPU OF THE PUBLIC INFORMATION DISCLOSURE ACT CONCERNING THE BLIND CITIZENS IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2014**

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**W**e need to know our responsibilities and rights, so that we can play our role in society and live meaningful lives. To fully understand our responsibilities and our rights we need information. Information is essential for each component of citizenship or through information, governance distributes power and rights to citizen in order to conduct good governance. It has consequences in transparency - citizen must have knowledge about the governance, it is not just the governance which must have knowledge about the citizen. Furthermore, good governance involves distribution of information for every citizen, not just single collective groups. No groups should be neglected. In Indonesia the General Elections Commission has the responsibility to hold general elections, and it has signed an agreement with The Indonesian Parliamentary Center. The agreement says that KPU will be committed to apply The Public Information Disclosure Act to their services, but on the presidential elections of 2014 six organizations representing the blind community held a conference in Gedung Menggugat Indonesia to focus on the lack of clarity of information and socialization of the blind citizens in relation to the presidential elections. On the conference KPU was accused of discriminating the blind citizen, not giving them sufficient information, and thereby, violating their political rights. In the following we will analyze some weaknesses within The Public Information Disclosure Act itself and the implementation of the act by the KPU, and then, secondly, we will analyze the implementation of the act in relation to the concept of good governance.

**Keywords:** Information, information policy, The Public Disclosure Act, good governance, and the blind community

## **INTRODUCTION**

A citizen is a member of a political community, which is defined by a set of rights and obligations. Citizenship therefore represents a relationship between the individual and the state, in which the two are

bound together by reciprocal rights and obligations (Heywood, 1994). As a citizen, we need to know our responsibilities and rights, so that we can play our role in society and live a meaningful life. To fully understand our responsibilities and our rights we need information. Information is essential for each component of citizenship: civil, political, social and economic, or we can say that through information, governance distributes power and rights to citizens in order to conduct good governance.<sup>1</sup> It has consequences in transparency - citizens must have knowledge about the governance, it is not just the governance which must have knowledge about the citizens. Furthermore, good governance involves distribution of information for every citizen, not just single collective groups. Or put the other way around: no groups should be neglected or kept out. An important part of good governance involves the regulation of information between citizens and governance stated in information policies.

An information policy is comprised of laws, regulations, and doctrinal positions - and decision making and practices with society-wide constitutive effects - also involving information creation, processing, flows, access, and use (Bremner, 2011). Hence, the scope is comprehensive. Whether the subject under discussion is access to government information, mass media, the census, research funding, or network neutrality, this approach makes it possible to analyze the issue at hand through a common lens. Indeed, it provides a means of identifying information policy issues that may not have been historically evident despite their constitutive impact, such as export controls, the census, and rules for accounting systems (Bremner, 2007).

The Public Information Disclosure Act is a part of the Indonesian information policy regulating the creation, processing, flow, access and use of information from the Public Agency to the citizen in order to empower the last mentioned. The act warrants the public agencies must provide information to the citizens of Indonesia. A Public Agency is an executive, legislative, judicative agency or its functions and main duties are related to the organizing of the state (Public Information Disclosure Act, article 1 (3), 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> “It is expected, therefore, that the citizens, armed with information obtained through their exercise of right to know, would be able to protect life and liberty as well as secure equity and justice before the law. An attempt is therefore made below to examine the extent to which the Information right has been successful influencing some major principle of good governance; transparency, accountability, and participation”. (M.M Ansari 2006)

In 2014 the presidential elections were held in Indonesia. The General Elections Commission (KPU) was in charge of organizing the process of election also informing the citizen of the very process itself - most notably the act of voting. The Public Information Disclosure Act (number 14, 2008) was the overall frame work within which the KPU should inform to the public about the elections). The KPU had committed them selves to implement The Public Information Disclosure Act starting from the presidential elections in 2014. The Act was - and still is - seen as an instrument in order to conduct good governance. However, the implementation of the Act was met with opposition from the blind community because they were not correctly nor sufficiently informed about the process of voting as a blind citizen.

KPU (The General Elections Commission) is a public agency, who has the responsibility to hold general elections in Indonesia (<http://www.kpu.go.id/index.php>) , and has signed an agreement with The Indonesian Parliamentary Center (a non governmental organization who has the function to support the legislative department and also to control the governance performance). The agreement says that KPU will be committed to apply The Public Information Disclosure Act to their services, however, on the presidential election of 2014 in Bandung, six organizations for blind community - Ikatan Alumni Wyata Guna (IAWG), DPC Persatuan Tuna Netra Indonesia (Pertuni), DPD Pertuni, DPP Ikatan Tuna Netra Muslim Indonesia (ITMI), DPW ITMI, and PW Persatuan Olahraga Tuna Netra Indonesia (PORTI) - held a conference in Gedung Indonesia Menggugat to focus on the lack of clarity of information and socialization of the blind citizens in relation to the presidential election (*www.Sindonews.com* 2014). On the conference KPU was accused of discriminating the blind citizens, giving them incomplete or insufficient information, and thereby, violating their political rights. But the question is, of course, firstly, how did this happen and, secondly, why? Before we will take a look that, we will first, however, briefly mention our theoretical framework and method of analysis.

### **Theoretical framework and method of analysis**

Information is essential for each component of citizenship or we can say that through information, governance distributes power and rights to the citizens - within the civil, political, social and economic areas (cf. Breman 2007) - in order to conduct good governance. Governance concerns decision making and the implementation of these decisions in relation to the citizens. In order to analyze good governance we need to focus on the actors involved in the decision

making and the implementation of the decisions whereby we can relate these to the essential characteristics of good governance: Transparency, participation, equity and inclusiveness, as well as accountability (cf. Sheng 2008). Hence, within the framework of information as power and the concept of good governance we will try to make a critical literature analysis of The Public Information Disclosure Act itself and the implementation of the act done by the KPU. However, let us begin by taking a closer look at the context of the presidential election of 2014 concerning the communication or the information given to the blind community by KPU and the reaction of the blind community seen from their conference held in Gedung Menggugat Indonesia (Perdana, 2015)

### **The events before and during the presidential election of 2014**

Some months before the presidential election of 2014, KPU did publish some information on their website, saying that they will simulate the use of blind templates - so that blind citizens can become independent voters (KPU.go.id). With the blind templates blind citizens can “read” information about the presidential candidates (who is the president candidate number one and who is the president candidate number two etc.) as well as the procedure for the blind citizens when they are giving their vote. However, two weeks before the presidential election, blind citizens in some areas of Indonesia did not receive relevant or sufficient information about the election from KPU. KPU gave information about the election on a website (Muhyiddin, 2015), and the majority of the blind citizens in Indonesia do not have access to the internet<sup>2</sup>. Hence, no socialization did take place as was said or was promised on the KPU website before the presidential election. Because of this, one week before the election more than two million blind citizens assigned a petition saying that they do not want to use their vote on the presidential election. However, KPU did not give thorough attention to the petition and they did not formulate an official response (<http://pemilu.sindonews.com>).

During the presidential election, the blind citizens could not read the information on their voting letter concerning who is the

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<sup>2</sup> The main factor causing the information GAP between the blind citizen and the “normal citizen” is the ability to use IT, especially the internet. The majority of blind citizen in Indonesia are not familiar with IT because when they go to school, they will be taught braille, and not technology like screen readers, which can make them use a computer and have access on the internet ([www.mitranetra.or.id](http://www.mitranetra.or.id))

presidential candidate number 1 and who is the presidential candidate number 2, because the voting letter was not formulated in a braille template. However, some of the blind citizens still decided to give their vote, and thereby they had to ask someone to help them giving the vote on the voting letter. The problem was, of course, that the blind citizens could not be sure whether the person helping them was actually voting on the presidential candidate of their choice. Furthermore, some of the people helping the visually impaired with voting did not fill in the C3-form because the KPU did not present sufficient information about the form. C3 is a form that should be filled in by people helping the visually impaired concerning their personal information (like name, address, relation to the blind person etc.), and a statement that they will not misuse<sup>3</sup> the vote of the blind person (Muhyiddin, 2015).

The other violation of KPU concerns that it did not give all their officers information about the right procedure when helping blind citizens in voting in the presidential election. In some TPUs (tempat pemungutan suara) blind citizens were treated unprofessionally by the officials (<http://indonesia-baru.liputan6.com/>, 2015). This caused numerous of the blind citizens not to give their vote – approximately more than 2.000.000 people. Hence, they choose not to participate in the presidential election because they felt that they have been treated as second ranked citizens.

Because KPU did not live up to the Public Information Disclosure Act concerning their services and lacked responding to the petition of the blind citizens, it means that KPU did not meet the rights of the blind citizens to receive information concerning the elections, also bringing the political rights of the blind citizens in real danger.

### **Why did this problem occur?**

The problem occurred because of two main reasons: the weakness of The Public Information Disclosure Act it self and the inconsistency and lack of good implementation of The Public Disclosure Act by The KPU.

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<sup>3</sup> This violates the three principles from Luber Jurdil (KPU.go.id); or the General Indonesian election principles; langsung, rahasia, and adil. It violates the Langsung principle because the blind citizen cannot give their vote independently. It violates the Rahasia principle because the helper knows which president candidate the blind citizen will vote for. And, finally, it violates the Adil principle because the blind citizens were treated unfairly by KPU; the blind citizen's right to information was not met. ([www.sindonews.com](http://www.sindonews.com)).

□ The weakness of The Public Information Disclosure Act it self  
The Public Information Disclosure Act was indorsed in 2008 by Mahakamah Agung, but The Public Agency did not apply the act before the year 2010. Some weaknesses, however, can be found in the act and reading article 6 3(e) it says, that The Public Agency can refuse an information request by citizens, if the request concerns information that is not within their own resort and authority or that request concerns information that was not documented yet, even if we can also read in article 13 that every public agency has an obligation to appoint an information management and public documentation officer, which should function to document the activities of The Public Agency and publish information to the public. However, there is no article which exactly states when the public agency must have an information management and public documentation officer. Furthermore, there is no article regulating when The Public Agency should full fill the information request (on article 10 (7); the Public Agency has a maximum of 10 days to inform, whether they will accept/ refuse the request; not stating exactly when they should full fill the request). Furthermore, there is no “serious sanction” for The Public Agency if it does not provide the requested public information – the article 52 states that The Public Agency has to pay five millions Rupiahs for not full filling the request of the information).

When the blind community accused KPU with discrimination - e.g. KPU did not give the blind citizens access to relevant and timely information - at first the KPU answered the critique with saying that the blind citizens must await further information because KPU themselves did not yet have any clear information about how to conduct the presidential election for the blind citizens (KPU (article 6, 3 (e). However, some months later KPU announced that it was not within their budget to inform the blind citizens and that they could not provide them with a special template for voting (<http://indonesia-baru.liputan6.com>).

The above mentioned weaknesses of the Public Information Disclosure Act make room for The Public Agency to work unprofessionally when trying to implement and apply the act, and can even be seen as “a way of protecting” The Public Agency themselves when they are working with the Act. In short: the weaknesses seem to be based on a bias from the side of public system giving The Public Agency more power, and not enough power to the blind citizen.

Looking at the articles 6 3(e) and 9 (3) we can see why these articles seem to inhibit a professional implementation of the act. Based on article 6 3(e), KPU did not do anything wrong because they did not

have the information that was asked for by the blind citizen. And, furthermore, based on article 9 (3) “the obligation to provide and to submit public information is conducted at least every 6 months”, we can see that even two weeks before the presidential election and when, in fact, the presidential election did take place, and blind citizen still had not received the information that they needed from KPU, this was not, however, a violation according to article. But, still, we can say that even though KPU did not violate those articles, they did, in fact, violate the essence of the act itself concerning the guarantee of The Public Agency to provide information to the blind citizen.

Concerning article 3 the purpose of this article is to make good governance possible including participation, transparency, and accountability. In fact, this is the essence of The Information Public Disclosure Act. However, and unfortunately, some articles within this act do not support the purpose, because they stand on the side of the public agency<sup>4</sup>, allowing unprofessional work. Those articles make the act powerless, not endowing The Public Agency with force. Surely, a Public Information Disclosure Act should have its articles very well balanced between the interests of The Public Agency (the governmental side) and the interests of the citizens; e.g. it is important that – seen from the side of The Public Agency – the sole interests of the citizen will not take over; however, balance is here the keyword, so that the main purpose of the act will not lose its essence.

- The inconsistent implementation of The Public Information Disclosure Act by KPU

Before the presidential election in 2014, KPU had declared to commit themselves to implementing The Public Information Disclosure Act. Hence, KPU signed an agreement with The Indonesian Parliamentary Center thereby marking a new awareness of increasing the quality of public access to their services also guaranteeing the information rights of the citizen. However, KPU did not live up to this commitment as described in the problem focus above. There lies a complex cause behind this problem.

The idea of committing KPU to The Public Information Disclosure Act just took place on the managerial level. Hence, the act was never

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<sup>4</sup> . If we analyze article 11 concerning the scope of the public information that must be published to the citizen, the scope is rather limited (it is not really transparent); the scope just concerns publishing administrative and operational information – hence, it is very questionable how this kind of information can empower citizens, and be a part of good governance.

fully anchored on the staff level (Anwar, 2015) on the staff level the idea was not clearly understood and, therefore, the implementation of the act could not go well.

Before the time of the presidential election in 2014 KPU did give information to the blind citizen when they published information on their website about launching a blind template, also emphasizing simulation, and the socialization of the blind citizen. However, at the time of the presidential election this did not take place (<http://pemilu.sindonews.com>).

This shows, among other things, that the commitment to implement The Public Information disclosure Act on the staff level was limited to publishing information about certain activities on a website; there was no simulation, nor socialization, due to, it was said, a limited budget, not allowing to give information to the blind citizen.

The way that KPU has implemented The Public Information Disclosure Act lacks the characteristics of equality, accessibility, accuracy, and giving responds - characteristics that are themselves, in fact, written in the act itself as guiding principles exercising the very same.

**Concerning equality** The blind citizens, being a small part of the population, do not have a powerful position within the society; however, they are citizens, and they must have the same rights as every other citizen ([www.pertuni.org](http://www.pertuni.org)).

Hence, KPU should acknowledge the demand of the blind citizens providing them with braille voting templates (which are, of course, more expensive than a normal voting letter). It is not because the blind citizens want KPU to treat them special. It is because the blind citizens ask for their rights - to become informed about the presidential election and hence being able to take part of the election as every other citizen.

It is setting the wrong perspective when KPU is arguing for that they do not have a budget to provide the expensive blind templates. As citizens the blind community needs to state their ideas, aspirations, let their voices be heard about economic, social, political, and cultural aspects, but how can they do that without equal access to information? The way that KPU argue - solely from an economic standpoint - shows their lack of understanding about the importance of information. The real problem, indeed, concerns information, and compared with this, the budget problem is, rather, a small problem. In the era of information, where information is identified as a power (Braman, 2007), discrimination concerning the access to information is a complex problem because it not only touches upon political rights, but



furthermore, the discrimination affects the economic, social, and cultural aspects of the blind citizen life. In short: it will decrease the quality of life as a citizen.

**Concerning accessibility** KPU has a wrong perception concerning accessibility; KPU did publish information about the presidential election for the blind citizens on their website, thinking that the internet is the most accessible medium or tool. Hence, the rationale was the following: if KPU is publishing the information on the internet all citizen can access the information; and if, there should be a small part of the citizens who cannot access the information it will be people who do not care about the information anyway.

This perception should change; it is not enough just to publish information on the internet, but one should also make sure that the information can be accessed easily too, not just by a vast majority of citizen, but (ideally) by all citizens. KPU should take into consideration that the majority of blind citizen in Indonesia have a weak or vulnerable position within the society<sup>5</sup>; mostly they will have a low income, and information technology like the internet will be luxurious for them; and because of their blind disability, of course their access to information becomes limited (<http://pertuni.idp-europe.org/>).

So information should be disseminated in different ways, blind citizen cannot access information through normal texts (not braille), and they cannot - in most cases - access something expensive/modern like the internet; hence, dissemination of information that is accessible to the blind citizen is verbal communication, through mass media like TV or radio, or if the blind citizen need information about technical instructions like how to vote using a voting letter, they need socialization/simulation too; e.g. officials from the KPU should offer training to the blind citizen (in groups) in the case where the technical instructions coming from TV or radio are not sufficient.

**Concerning accuracy** As mentioned in the above before the election KPU announced on their website that they would provide the blind citizen with a voting template, make simulations possible, and

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<sup>5</sup> This statement was written on the Pertuni web page by Aria Indrawati, an officer and volunteer in several blind organizations. Pertuni is an organization under the social department, the other organization for blind citizen is Mitra Netra. (Indrawati, Aria). The government and society did not treat blind citizen fairly; e.g. it is difficult for them to get the same access to education, work, and thereby obtain good positions in society.

thereby work for the socialization of the blind citizen. However, at the time of the election KPU did not do that; and the days just prior to the election there were no announcements clarifying why this was the case. When a “Blind Organization” addressed this issue and tried to get clear information about the election, they were not given the information by KPU. This shows how the information of KPU lacked accuracy, and was not suited to meet the demands and needs of the “Blind Organization”.

KPU should understand that information without accuracy simply and solely will lose most of its value. The Public Information Disclosure Act is, of course, not just about publishing random information on a website; however, KPU seemed to have forgotten that they should provide information to their users the blind citizen; hence, the information should be real information suitable for the real needs of the blind citizen, and not just information that the KPU thought that the citizen should need. The result was that the blind citizen did not receive accurate information and therefore had trouble understanding the real conditions concerning the presidential election; and with affinity to this the blind citizen lacked anticipation in the election. Furthermore: the low quality of information, the lack of accuracy, also affected a low precision of decision to solve the problem by KPU.

**Concerning the lack of response** In relation to the implementation of The Public Information Disclosure Act by the KPU, KPU did not of respond to the critique from the blind citizens in the time before and under the presidential election. Hence, after that The KPU had published a somewhat, we could say, random kind of information on their website about the election they seemed to assume that their responsibilities were now over. However, The Public Information Disclosure Act is a “tool” to make communication better between governance and citizen. The central idea is that information provided by The Public Agency will make the citizen know more about the governance, but, at the same time, it will also let the governance know more about the needs of the citizen, and thereby they will be able to adjust their information services to the information needs of the citizen. Hence, this will pave the way for a mutual understanding and making good governance possible. However, when the KPU chose not to respond to the critique of the blind organizations it was a case of one-way communication and there was no feedback possible, and the act did loose its essence. Speaking of good governance also brings us to saying that when the KPU did try to implement the Public Information Disclosure Act in relation to the presidential election they did also break the principles of good governance. This can be seen

within the framework of the concepts of transparency, participation, equity and inclusiveness, as well as accountability.

### **Transparency**

Transparency means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by governance and its decisions and the enforcement (O'reilly, Emily.200). With a view to ensuring maximum disclosure of information regarding government rules, regulations and reports including decision making processes in government services, ideally, every public agency is required to manage information that they have to facilitate the right to information under the Act. The public agencies are expected to make pro-active disclosures through publication of relevant information to the citizen.

The KPU did not give the blind citizen enough information concerning the act of voting at the presidential election, and when the KPU decided to cancel on giving special templates to the blind citizens, they did not inform the community before hand making the blind citizen insecure of what should happen on the election day. The blind citizen could not exercise their right to receive information from the KPU, and this shows the lack of transparency. Furthermore, it is also a sign pointing towards that the KPU still has a clear control over the blind citizen which is in deep contrast with good governance.

### **Participation**

Participation of all citizens is part of the foundation of good governance, and the principle of participation is derived from the fact that citizens are not only the ultimate beneficiaries of development, but also the agents of change. Information will empower citizens to make proper choices for participation in the process of development. Because the blind citizen could not exercise their right to receive information from the KPU, they could not make proper choices on how they should participate in the presidential election; some of the blind citizen did loose the possibility to participate in the political activity, and thereby the could not exercise their political right; they could not, on their own, give their vote to the presidential candidate of their liking, also, maybe, causing that the “right” presidential candidate was not elected.

### **Equity and inclusiveness**

Good governance depends on ensuring that all citizens get equal rights and responsibilities, that they are being treated fairly by the government and society, and thereby feeling as an important part of a whole. By not informing the blind citizen sufficiently before and

during the presidential elections KPU caused blind citizens to become excluded from governmental services and political participation; hence, the blind citizen were not treated with equity. Good governance will, ideally, bring goodness in the governmental services - e.g. concerning the political, economic, and social aspects of life to benefit of all citizens; however, if the goodness just concerns one group of citizens, and a other group - such as the blind citizens - is being excluded this is a case of bad governance.

### **Accountability**

Every Public Agency, have the duty to openly give responsibilities to the citizen that will be affected by their services/policies. With the idea of openness in information, citizens will know how the public agency works, and it will increase their critical ability. Citizens will give feed back to the Public Agency to correct or adjust their services. The feed back from citizens can become an instance of control to make the Public Agency work better or more in correspondence with the needs and the demands of citizen; and thereby the work of The Public Agency will become more accountable.

KPU did not give the blind citizen sufficient information about their services, and, therefore, the blind citizen did not know how the KPU was working in relation to the presidential election. Concerning their right to participate in the election the blind citizen did not realize that they could not exercise the same right because they did not know that the KPU would act unprofessionally. Without sufficient information the blind citizen could not influence let alone control the way that KPU worked, and there was room for KPU to act irresponsibly.

Disclosure of information and knowledge resources are critical for the empowerment of citizen to realize their entitlements as well as to augment opportunities for enhancing the options for improving quality of life. The strengthening of information is therefore *sine quo non* for promoting good governance. With a view to reaping the benefits of The Public Information Disclosure Act to reach good governance, the government should develop the capacities for transparency, accuracy and access to information. The capacities of both the agency and the citizens may have to be enhanced.

Citizens who have access to information and who understand how to make use of acquired information can actively participate in the processes of exercising their political, economic, social, cultural, and

legal rights. It will enable them to build their strengths and assets to improve their quality of life as individuals and as citizen. The blind citizen are, of course, are no exception to this rule.

### **Concluding remarks**

Before, the paradigm concerning public information in Indonesia<sup>6</sup> was that almost all information produced and stored by the public agencies was kept secret.<sup>7</sup> However, now a new paradigm has begun to surface and changes have been made so that all public information is open to access, except the exemption (maximum access limited exemption). As a consequence this means greater probity in the functioning of the government departments as to promote transparency, active participation and accountability which are some critical factors for ensuring good governance. Or we can say that there is movement from a bureaucratic welfare state - where the government is deliberately, explicitly, and consistently controlling information from creating, processing, and communicating information, to exercise their power - towards an informational state where the government is more transparent and accessible also sharing relevant information to the citizen and thereby sharing their power (cf. Leonard 2003). When the General Elections Commission signed an agreement with The Indonesian Parliamentary Center concerning the application of The Public Information Disclosure Act to their function and services this is exactly a sign of this movement. However, concerning the Indonesian presidential elections in 2014 the General Elections Commission failed to implement The Public Information Disclosure Act successfully concerning the blind community. Hence, in the path of the implementation followed lack of equality, accessibility, transparency,

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<sup>6</sup> Public Information is every kind of information which is produced and stored by public agencies related with the organization of the state and the public interests (Public Information Disclosure Act article 1 (2))

<sup>7</sup> The old paradigm can be seen clearly within the “orde baru era” when people who voted for the formation of democratically elected governments and contributed to the huge costs of financing public activities, had no legal rights to know as to: what process has been followed in designing the policies affecting them, how the programmes has been implemented, who are the concerned officials associated with the decision making processes and the execution of the schemes and why the promises made for delivery of essential services to the poor have not been fulfilled (Farhan, 2012)

as well as accuracy. The General Elections Commission seemed not to realize that providing a low quality of information also meant a violation of the Public Information Disclosure Act which caused a series of serious problems for the blind community. Hence, blind citizen were hindered in participating fully in the elections whereby they could not exercise their political rights.

The loss of equal access to information meant that the blind citizen lost the equality to participate in the elections. And in the information era information has an important role regulating the relation between government and citizens; information is a means to reach good governance.

Blind citizen could not exercise their political rights, they got excluded from the (most important) political event, their voices, aspirations, participation, were being ignored, and the result was that they felt powerless. Hence, the governmental services could not cover and protect the blind citizen fairly; which is a sign of bad governance.

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