

Citizens Against Corruption (CAC) Programme South Asia
CUTS Project
Independent Project Completion Assessment
Prepared by Stephanie de Chasse, PTF Volunteer Adviser
February 2011

Key Project Data

<i>Title of Project</i>	“Reforming the Processes in the Rural Development Department through Policy Dialogue and Civic Engagement, based on RTI Act (2005) in Rajasthan, India”	
<i>Project Location</i>	Tonk and Jaipur districts, Rajasthan	
<i>Corruption Problem being addressed:</i> (as described in the project proposal).	Contribute towards reduced corruption in processes of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), <i>Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana</i> (SGSY) and <i>Indira Awas Yojana</i> (IAY) implemented by the <i>Panchayati Raj</i> and Rural Development (PR & RD) Department in Rajasthan, India.	
	<i>Planned</i>	<i>Actual</i>
<i>Implementation period</i>	May 01, 2009-April 30, 2010	September 2010 (extension)
<i>Total Budget</i>	US\$26,000	US\$30,000
<i>PTF Contribution</i>		
<u>Project Objectives</u>		
<i>As described at Project Approval</i>	<i>Status of Achievement at Completion¹</i> (in view of the Evaluator)	
Reduced incidence of bribery/corruption experience by the project area citizens for service delivery under the targeted schemes of the <i>Panchayati Raj</i> Institutions (PRIs) and Rural Development Department	2	
Transparency and accountability in the target schemes increased through increased through RTI Act	2	
Citizens in the project area are able to obtain corruption-free services through empowered network of Consortium of Groups for Combating Corruption (CGCCs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) & other interested citizens that conduct advocacy at multiple levels and play the role of ‘watchdog’	2	
<i>Top Three Results (actual). In view of the Evaluator</i>	1. Increase awareness about systemic issues and successful setting of model <i>Panchayat</i> and documented toolkit 2. Engagement with government through consultation meetings and follow-	

¹ Please use the following ratings scale and provide brief narrative. 1 = fully achieved, very few or no shortcomings; 2 = largely achieved, despite a few short-coming; 3 = only partially achieved, benefits and shortcomings finely balanced; 4 = very limited achievement, extensive shortcomings; 5 = not achieved.

	up, using media and advocacy campaigns 3. Formation of a cadre of volunteers with hands on relations with communities
Overall Achievement Rating² in Evaluators view. Use numeric rating as well as narrative. See footnote 2.	2

Executive Summary of Implementation (Copied From the Completion Report prepared by the Grant Recipient)

CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART), one of the programme centres of Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), in partnership with the Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF), Washington DC, implemented a project, entitled ‘Reforming the Processes in the Rural Development Department through Policy and Civic Engagement, Based on RTI Act (2005) in Rajasthan, India’, from May 2009-September 2010. The activities under the project had been confined to two districts of Rajasthan, Jaipur and Tonk, and had been conceived to make the attempts more rigorous and deeper in defeating corruption.

It was done through diagnosing systemic causes of various facets of corruption and adopting measures to address them through simplifying the service delivery process, re-institutionalising agency processes and enhancing transparency and people’s participation. These efforts ultimately contributed to improving RTI response capacity of service providers by using RTI Act as a tool in the NREGS, SGSY and IAY implemented by the *Panchayati Raj* and Rural Development Department, Rajasthan government.

A network of trained & resourceful CGCCs, CSOs and other interested individuals working together for transparency and accountability in all 17 blocks of Jaipur and Tonk districts was formed and started to work in a focused manner, which resulted in the emergence of trained critical mass within the community, increased use of RTI for targeting corruption issues and denial of benefits meant for common man in case of not paying bribe in turn.

An RTI Advisory and Information Cell was started to advice and educate the masses, proactive citizenries and victims of corruption about the RTI Act and its usages in government departments and targeting the areas of corruption to get corruption-free service delivery meant for them. An orientation of the concerned staff was conducted for handling it effectively. A total 210 phone calls were received and most of the callers were facing a situation in which service providers were demanding bribes in lieu of rendering the entitled services. More than 43 callers/visitors filed RTI applications in various departments (26 of them received demanded information) and used it as a tool which helped these 41 people to avail those services without paying any bribe, denied earlier.

² The degree to which the project achieved, or seems likely to achieve, all or most of its objectives and produced the outcomes projected in the logframe attached to the Project Proposal. The rating be based on, and consistent with, the detailed ratings in the Completion Assessment section.

The 'RTI Ground Realities and Corruption Vulnerability Survey' was conducted with 600 scheme beneficiaries, engaging the consortium of CGCCs. This survey revealed that every beneficiary of NREGS (average ₹303), IAY (₹1268) and SGSY (₹660) were paying bribes to avail the benefits. In Jaipur and Tonk districts, total bribes paid were: in NREGS (₹14.9 crores), IAY (₹48 lakh) and SGSY (₹37 lakh). These findings formed the basis for evidence-based advocacy and constructive and continued dialogue with high officials of the concerned Rural Development Department.

This constructive dialogue with the government resulted in passing office orders related to transparency and accountability. This data of RTI Ground Realities and Corruption Vulnerability Analysis (RGR & CVA) survey was disseminated widely to the common masses and service providers by organising 'RTI Block Level RTI *Chaupals*' (BLRCs) in all the 17 blocks of both the districts and their views and suggestions were invited. '*Chaupal*' means a meeting place of local villagers to discuss day-to-day issues with each other. In these BLRCs, strategies were also discussed to make the service delivery system free from corruption by using RTI as a tool.

A 10-member delegation visited Kozhikode and Wynadu districts of Kerala during November 13-18, 2009. The delegates included *Sarpanch* and *Gram Sachiv*, Mundia and Harsulia *Gram Panchayats* and Sub-divisional Officer, Niwai, Tonk. Two NGO partners from SAJAG and NEH Sansthan and three staff members from CUTS were part of the delegation. The visit was very educative, eye opener and full of learning for all the visitors which helped them in understanding the best practices related to people's planning process at ward and *Gram Panchayat* level out there and imbibing these to implement in their working areas in selected districts. It is significant to mention that, in India, it is the state of Kerala where 40 percent of the total plan outlay of the Rural Development and *Panchayati Raj* Department goes directly to the *Gram Panchayats*.

As an outcome, one visiting official passed an order down the line in all *Gram Panchayats* and Block Development Offices to have a complaint-cum-suggestion box, fixed at some prominent place of their office so that common citizens could drop their complaints and later actions can be taken by concerned officials. The order was followed in some of the *Gram Panchayats* and the visiting official also placed a complaint-cum-suggestion box in his office just after returning from this visit. This exposure visit was extremely helpful in ensuring the participation of these key stakeholders throughout the project period.

Efforts were made to develop a Model RTI *Gram Panchayat* (MRGP) in each district to ensure transparency, accountability and corruption-free service delivery system in selected schemes. In these MRGPs, community mobilisation programmes were organised in villages regarding RTI awareness, filing process, identified areas of corruption and using RTI as a tool so that they all avail services without paying bribes.

As a result of these mass mobilisation efforts, slogan writings and frequent visits, more than 90 people came forward to file RTI applications on corruption issues prevalent in the three selected schemes. In both the districts, 450 RTI applications were filed. These applications were based on issues of corruption that cropped up during the RGR and CVA survey: The information demanded

in most of the RTI applications was related to acts of corruption. These RTI applications were need-based, represented burning issues among beneficiaries and were filed individually, but supported collectively. These also contributed to simplifying the processes, use of RTI by common people, satisfactory resolution of problems, enhancing responsiveness of services providers and reducing corruption experienced by common people.

Two advocacy meetings were organised at the state level and participation of policy makers and media was ensured. These meetings were extremely useful and fruitful in terms of putting the ground realities and corruption vulnerability survey findings before the policy makers. As an outcome of these meetings, official orders were given to ensure transparency and accountability measures in governmental schemes.

A set of recommendations for simplified and transparent service delivery processes of the selected schemes was submitted to the government and policy makers to take appropriate actions.

Finally, a model framework for replication or RTI Toolkit has been developed in which entire project-related experiences, tools, methodology, community participation model, success stories and best practices have been incorporated so that similar intervention can be replicated elsewhere as well. To develop the model framework for replication, a concept note was prepared and shared with key stakeholders mentioning the target audience, objectives/purpose, content/structure/usage/dissemination/replication.

Completion Assessment³

1. Quality of the Project Design

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| a. Elaboration of the corruption problems to be addressed. | <u>1</u> |
| b. Clarity and relevance of the objectives to the corruption problem being addressed | <u>1</u> |
| c. Proposed Community empowerment activities | |
| d. Coherence of Results Framework (Logframe) | <u>2</u> |
| e. Constructive engagement plan | <u>2</u> |

Comments: (to support/explain rating and overall assessment)

The project has been well thought out, pulling on extensive experience of CUTS in the area, their understanding of governance deficiencies and their local networks of community-based organisations (CBOs) and local cadres. CUTS has also a good relation with the government and has engaged at all levels – leveraging the media in an effective way. The M&E design could have been better integrated from the beginning as there was initially no plan for an end survey to

³ Ratings Scale: 1 = **Highly Satisfactory or Likely**; 2 = **Satisfactory/Likely** ; 3 = **Moderately Satisfactory/Likely**; 4 = **Moderately unsatisfactory/Unlikely**; 5 = **Unsatisfactory/Unlikely**; 6 = **Highly Unsatisfactory/Unlikely**; NA = **Not Applicable**

measure results against baseline, the questionnaire of the baseline had some weaknesses and a lot of the data collected has not been systematically analysed on-going.

2. **The Implementation Performance**

- a. Extent to which the planned project activities completed. 2
- b. Extent to which the planned outputs completed 3
- c. Community empowerment initiatives implemented 2
- d. Constructive engagement during implementation 2
- e. Focus on sustainability 2

Comments

The overall performance is satisfactory in terms of depth and quality of engagement with community and government, especially given the complexity and sensitivity of the issues tackled (corruption is taking place at all levels of government and it is difficult to 'retain' champions; many bureaucrats have short tenure and *panchayat* representatives are not always the strongest allies). Most of the activities have been completed but the timeline has been a challenged and delays occurred. It is feared that some momentum has been lost between May 2010 and February 2011, especially in relation to following up on commitment of officials during consultation meetings and also on RTI applications. The tool kit has yet to become available. Sustainability plans are not very convincing as it was mentioned earlier that the CSOs/CBOs have little funding and heavily depend on government grants. Members of CGCCs typically have several responsibilities, have to travel far and were paid by the task. Without financial incentive, it is not clear how sustainable their motivation will be.

3. **The Results:**

- a. Accomplishments of the results specified in the logframe 2
- b. Responsiveness of authorities to constructive engagement 2
- c. Effectiveness of community empowerment initiatives 2
- d. Value added of peer learning activities and events 2

- e. Project contribution to CSO partner capacity to carry out anti-corruption work 3
- f. Prospects for sustainability of project activities 3

Comments: *(Please briefly explain the ratings and any noteworthy aspects)*

- Corruption and bribes levels have been measured, which gave strong evidence to high level officials, and lead to a number of office orders
- The survey process helped raise awareness about the importance of local governance institutions and people's participation. It also built the capacity of the CGCC members, who administered the questionnaires and provided hand-holding support to community members facing corruption issues. The survey brought up some interesting issues such as the level of corruption of NGOs involved in the SGSY scheme, and the difficulty for the banks to prioritise servicing the 'small' non-profitable customers.
- RTI popularisation and use has increased and people in the operational areas are realising how they can leverage this law to make the government more accountable for basic entitlements delivery and access to corruption-free services. However, the awareness level remains low in rural areas
- The exposure visit in Kerala inspired participants who attempted to adapt some of the good practices in their own context, and CUTS made good use of Peer learning visits and workshops
- Government officials also gained awareness about the Act throughout the project life and their responses in the post survey also shows a change in attitude towards the role of transparency in service delivery and the potential of RTI. However, they are still not very familiar with the procedures and their own responsibility, which makes the success of the RTI Act implementation still questionable.
- The quantitative results (number of calls to the RAIC, number of applications that yielded positive results) are reasonable and were categorised by issue but it is not very clear how they have been followed up and used for advocacy.
- While the post-surveys shows some improvements in the corruption level, mostly due to awareness raising, some trends are still negative and it is obvious that the scale of the problem, and the opportunities for new forms of corruption as the schemes are becoming more known and demand for benefits increase (hence more 'competition') makes preventive actions very difficult as they need to be constantly adapted. In addition, it will take more than a year to break some of the deeply ingrained practices as they are now considered by both beneficiaries and service providers as part of the normal process.
- Documentation was overall good and steady with some case studies illustrating some success stories. They should be used for the website with minor editing and pictures.
- Sustainability and follow-up beyond the life of the grant may still be a question that is not very clearly addressed in the report.

4. **PAC-PTF Advice** (Please consult CSO Partner)

a. Value added of PTF technical advice

Several advisors have been involved with CUTS over the last three years and it seems that the technical advice has been valued during the project concept development and during the evaluation phase.

b. Value added of PAC technical advice

Based on earlier conversations in May 2010, it appears that PAC has not been very actively involved with CUTS for this project as PTF had developed relationships with CUTS before the establishment of the agreement with PAC

Comments: (In your comments please include strong and weakest points of PTF-PAC interventions and suggestions for improvement)

5. Summary of Assessment:

a. **Overall Achievement Rating**

2

Guidance. The degree to which the project achieved, or seems likely to achieve, all or most of its objectives and results.

b. **Commentary to support Overall Assessment.**

Guidance. Please provide a narrative to accompany your overall achievement rating taking into account your overall assessment (in a maximum of 20 lines) of taking into account quality or project design, implementation performance and results achieved. Reasons for rating of 4 or more may please be explained here. It is suggested that this be written last after the detailed assessment (Section 2 below) has been done and Overall Achievement Rating determined.

Given the difficulty of the task and the context, it can be concluded that CUTS has been able to complete almost all activities planned in a satisfactory way. They also brought some innovations in the process and a very comprehensive set of complementary activities.

CUTS has been balancing engagement with government officials with engagement with communities and has motivated and trained a broad variety of volunteers, cadres and group members. They have been open to peer learning and exchanges.

The main challenge has been to ensure all commitments taken by officials present at the sharing meetings are true to their word and that impact of various orders or decisions can be measured.

Ensuring that somehow RTI is mainstreamed in other projects would be really important. In addition, CUTS should continue to extract lessons learnt and knowledge from this project and more widely disseminate them (by making available the tool kit but also by refining case studies, possibly writing a last newsletter with final lessons learnt from the overall project).