



CUTS Centre for
Consumer Action,
Research & Training

25 years
1883 2008
CUTS
International

Catalyst

Quarterly e-Newsletter

Volume 4, No.1

January-March, 2008

About CART

Established in 1996, CUTS CART is pursuing the cause of common consumers, initially being undertaken by CUTS as the mandate. The programmes of the Centre are primarily aimed at generating awareness, creating more responsible society and encouraging changes at the policy level by advocating with the government machinery and sensitising it to its issues of concern to the common man. The Centre has spearheaded several campaigns and pioneered consumer empowerment.

Enhancing Awareness on RTI at the Grassroots

In rural Rajasthan, only 15 percent of people are having some sort of understanding about various clauses under the Right to Information (RTI) Act and capable of filing a RTI application without any external assistance. These findings came out of a survey conducted by CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART) under the project entitled 'Combating Corruption in Rajasthan State, India, by Applying RTI Act as a Tool' implemented with the support of Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF), US in two administrative districts of Rajasthan, viz Tonk and Jaipur respectively.

The final dissemination meeting of the one-year project was held in Jaipur, on February 15, 2008. A total of 737 applications were filed mainly focusing on schemes and programmes meant for the poor in the rural areas. As a result of the one year of interventions, two watchdog groups on RTI are formed and 42 small NGOs are empowered towards applying RTI as a tool to ensure accountability.

While delivering the inaugural address, State Information Commissioner MD Kaurani underlined the need for the Government and NGOs working together on RTI, especially for delivering training on RTI, and suggested the Government to provide sufficient resources for the same.



A K Pandey, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Rajasthan, while acknowledging the power of information in empowering the people, said that the Government mechanism needs to be strengthened in this regard.

Sohini Paul from Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), New Delhi said that there is need for rigorous follow up to maintain the momentum generated through this project.

George Cheriyan of CUTS CART said that the key findings of the project shows that the use of the Act had resulted in enhancing the transparency and accountability in the governance process in the State and is contributing towards addressing the corruption.

Traffic Calming Strategies to Improve Pedestrian Safety in India

CUTS with the support of the Lund University, Sweden and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) organised the launch meeting of the project, entitled 'Traffic Calming Strategies to Improve Pedestrian Safety in India' in Jaipur, on March 03, 2008.

Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS, briefing about CUTS involvement in road safety, opened the meeting with welcome and introductory remarks. Jagdish Chandra, Transport Commissioner of Rajasthan, delivered the inaugural address. Kumar Indu Bhushan, Deputy I G Police, Traffic, delivered the keynote address. Prof Christer Hydén, Lund University, Sweden, Prof Dinesh Mohan and Prof Geetam Tiwari, Transportation Research and Injury Prevention Programme, IIT Delhi facilitated the need of the project. About 45 participants attended the launch meeting. Media had given wider coverage for the launch meeting.



As part of the project, a two-day

training programme was conducted for the Indian team on selection of sites at CUTS conference hall, on March 03-04, 2008. The objective of this training was to guide the Indian team on site selection criteria. Four officials from Traffic Police and two Professors from MNIT participated in the training. Prof Hydén, Dinesh Mohan and Geetam Tiwari facilitated the training. As a result of the training, a concrete action plan emerged out for the implementation of various activities under the project.

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New Technique used to Assess NREGS in Rajasthan

People of Rajasthan are familiar with the usage of the tools such as Social Audit and RTI for ensuring social accountability. But first time in the history of the State the Community Score Card (CSC), a high breed technique among the available social accountability tools, was used to assess the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) by CUTS CART in Sirohi district of Rajasthan.

The CSC process is a community based monitoring tool that is a hybrid of the techniques of social audit and citizen report cards. CSC process is an instrument to extract social and public accountability and responsiveness from service providers. The CSC process uses the 'community' as its unit of analysis, and is focused on monitoring at the local/grassroots levels. It facilitates community monitoring and performance evaluation of services, projects and even government administrative units. Since it is a grassroots process, it is also more in use in rural areas.



Being part of the of the South Asia Social Accountability Network (SASANet) and a member of the international resource team on social accountability of the World Bank Institute on Sustainable Development (WBISD), based in Washington DC, CUTS CART team has earlier used the tool in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to assess various projects.

Under the CUTS CART social accountability project to assess the NREGS in Sirohi district, a four-day orientation-cum field exercise was organised in Rohida Gram Panchayat of Pindwara block during March 12-15, 2008. The participants used the

tool to assess the quality of specific works under taken under NREGS. A set of key findings and recommendations emerged out of the exercise and an action plan was prepared based on the consensus among the service providers and the beneficiaries. The findings and recommendations will

be submitted to the district administration and the concerned Ministry/Department before the scheme is scaled up to the entire country from April 01, 2008.

In addition to the *Sarpanchs*, Deputy *Sarpanch* and various members of *Gram Panchayat*, *Zilla Parishad* and identified beneficiaries from both the *Gram Panchayat* of Rohida and Watera attended the workshop. Prof Dr Santosh Kumar from Mahatma Gandhi Labour Institute, Ahmedabad along with CUTS CART team facilitated the four-day workshop and the field exercise.

Kids Prefer Junk Food in Lunch Box

Among the children of Jaipur city, 65 percent children like junk/fast food as their preferred item in the lunch box and 43 percent of children prefer aerated and canned drinks.

These findings emerged out of a survey entitled 'Lunch Box Challenge', conducted by CUTS CART among the school children in Jaipur city, on the eve of the World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD). The sample survey was conducted among the students of class four to nine in the age group 9-14. 269 students from 8 schools in Jaipur city participated in the sample survey.

Every year, the WCRD is observed on March 15, and this year the theme is 'Junk Food Generation', to call the attention of the international community to the campaign against the marketing of unhealthy food to children.

Though the main reasons for the liking, as mentioned by children, were taste and look, the third reason was the TV advertisements, which played a major role for this preference.

Unhealthy diets are a major cause for several diseases. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified being overweight as a global problem, pointing out that more than 300 million people are obese. About 22 million children around the world under the age of five are already overweight or obese and there is a need to act to prevent the spread of the childhood obesity epidemic.

The survey finding clearly shows the need for the advocacy and campaign for an international code on the marketing of junk food to kids.

This news item can be accessed at: www.cuts-international.org/cutsinmediaMar08.htm#mar2

Making the Consumers Aware

CUTS CART organised four events in Rani (Pali); Jalore; Ahore (Jalore); and Nagaur respectively under the Consumer Awareness Programme (CAP) with the support of Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Government of Rajasthan during Januray, February and March 2008.

In the Pali meeting, District Education Officer, Naringram Meghwal was the chief guest. In the Jalore event, DSO, B R Didel was the chief guest, while Murarilal Sharma and Usha Parihar, nodal person of consumer clubs were the other speakers. In the event held in Nagaur, Dallaram Choudhary, Social Activist and Kailash Chandra Sharma, Principal of Senior Secondary Boys School, Nagaur were the guest speakers. In all these awareness meetings, local citizens, networkers, members of voluntary organisations and experts took part.

World Bank: NGO Consultation

The World Bank jointly with CUTS CART organised a consultation of NGOs in Rajasthan working in the health sector, primarily on centrally sponsored programmes such as RCH, TB, HIV/AIDS etc., in Jaipur, on February 04, 2008. The following were the focus of the discussions.

1. Extent to which CSO advocacy has led to improved accountability in general, and in health (or other) service delivery in particular.
2. How can one make health managers (and elected officials) pay close attention to the tracking (methods adopted by the government or by the project itself) of the performance of a particular programme/project, what roles are played by the community and the local NGOs for its effectiveness and what measures are taken to address the finding.

A total of 20 participants from 17 prominent organisations participated and shared their views and experiences. Tekabe Belay, Senior Economist, The World Bank, Washington DC and Kumar Amrendra Singh, Social Development Specialist, World Bank, New Delhi facilitated the discussions along with CUTS CART team.

Securities and Market Awareness Campaign

The Seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth workshops under the fifth round of Securities and Market Awareness Campaign (SMAC) supported by Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) were organised at Rajsamand, Dungapur, Keshavraipatan (Bundi) and Malpura (Tonk) on January 24, 2008; and March 07, 10 & 29, 2008 respectively with the assistance of local networkers.

State Level Workshop under NEAC

A State Level Workshop under the National Environment Awareness Campaign (NEAC) was organised by CUTS CART, in Jaipur, on January 21, 2008.

Satish Kumar Jain, Forest Officer and Sohan Lal Saini, Forest Guard, Department of Forest, Government of Rajasthan were the resource persons. More than 250 representatives of several NGOs from all over Rajasthan participated in the workshop. A total of 91 NGOs were directly monitored.

Investor Education Programme

CUTS CART with the support of Investor Education and Protection Fund, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India organised nine workshops-cum-open house discussion under Investor Education Programme in Jodhpur

on January 21-22; Jalore on January 26-27; Sawai Madhopur on February 08-09; Churu on February 22-23; Jhunjhunu, on February 28-29; Bikaner on March 20-21; Kota on March 24-25; Alwar on March 26-27; and in Bharatpur on March 28-29, 2008 respectively.



REPRESENTATIONS

Workshop on RBHs

OP Arya participated in the brainstorming session during the inception meeting on Rural Business Hubs (RBHs) organised by ACCESS Development Services in Jaipur, on January 24, 2008. The objective of the workshop was to get insights from different agencies that are closely associated with farming community.

Regional Consultation on Child Abuse

Sabita Tripathi participated in a two-day 'Consultation for State Action Plans to Counter Child Abuse' organised by National Centre for Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) and Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) Lucknow, on February 12-13, 2008. The purpose of the consultation was to formulate the National Plan to counter Child Abuse as a follow up of the Child Abuse study conducted in 2007.

Development Initiatives Led by Older People

R K Sharma attended a workshop on 'Development Initiatives led by Older People and the Way Forward' organised by *Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti* (GRAVIS) and Help Age International (HAI) Jaipur, on February 19, 2008 to share about the actions taken for older people under the project entitled 'Assimilated Development for Older People in the Thar Desert'.

ADB's Accountability Mechanism

George Cheriyan attended an 'Orientation on the Asian Development Bank's Accountability Mechanism: Consultation Phase and Compliance Review Phase' in Jaipur on February 22, 2008. Robert C May, Special Project Facilitator, ADB, Manila and Suresh Nanwani, Associate Secretary, Compliance Review Panel, ADB, Manila facilitated the orientation.

Symposium on 'RTI: Action Now'

George Cheriyan, Ajnish Biswas and A B Paul attended a symposium entitled 'Right to Information: Action Now' organised by the Public Relations Society of India along with Pink city Press Club, Jaipur. Wajahat Habibullah, Chief Information Commissioner of India delivered the keynote address.

Colloquium on RTI

George Cheriyan attended and made a presentation in the national Colloquium on 'The Right to Information Act: Impact on Governance and Service Delivery' organised by Centre for Good Governance (CGG), Hyderabad and Yashwant Rao Chavan Academy of Development Administration (YASHADA), Pune at CGG under the Government of India initiated project entitled 'Capacity Building for Access to Information' funded by the UNDP/GoI.

MEETINGS WITH GOVERNMENT / DONOR AGENCIES

Meeting with SIC M D Kaurani

George Cheriyan and R K Sharma visited the office of State Information Commission and met with SIC, M D Kaurani on January 16, 2008 to discuss RTI related matters.

Meeting with Additional Chief Secretary

George Cheriyan and Ajnish Biswas visited the Government Secretariat and met with A K Pandey, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Rajasthan on February 02, 2008.

Meeting of PIC, GTZ-DoCA Project

George & R K Sharma visited Delhi to present an action plan on the Terms of References (ToRs) of the consultancy work, which was referred to CART, in the Project Implementation Committee Meeting of the Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)-Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA) project on "Strengthening Consumer Protection in India" on February 11, 2008.

Meeting with G N Sreekumaran

George Cheriyan & R K Sharma met with G N Sreekumaran, Director (CWF) in New Delhi on February 11, 2008 and discussed various pending issues.

ARTICLE

An article written by George Cheriyan titled 'Changing face of governance' was published in the Deccan Herald (Bangalore) in the editorial page on February 28, 2008. The same can be viewed at:

<http://www.cuts-international.org/articlesFeb2008.htm#feb03>

VISITS

Visit of Dr Savita & Hieke Hummelmeier

Dr Savita Hanspal, Senior Consultant, GTZ-DoCA project on 'Strengthening Consumer Protection in India' and Hieke Hummelmeier, an international expert from Germany visited CUTS CART on January 09, 2008 to discuss the possible collaboration with CUTS in the project.

Visit of Sayantani Raychaudhari

Syantani Raychaudhari from I-land informatics, Calcutta visited CART office on January 10, 2008 and discussed various possibilities of collaboration with George.

Visit of Amarendra Narayan Singh

Kumar Amarendra Narayan Singh, Social Development Specialist of the World Bank, New Delhi visited CART office on January 28, 2008 and met with George Cheriyan, R K Sharma and Om Prakash.

Visit of Vinay Bhargava

Vinay Bhargava, recently retired as Director, External Relations, World Bank, Washington DC and since then volunteering for PTF, Washington DC, visited CART office as part of the assessment of the PTF supported project's outcome and impact, and to discuss future project ideas.

Visit of Young Entrepreneurs

A team, consisting of 33 young entrepreneurs from France, visited CUTS on March 17, 2008. Along with Pradeep S Mehta and Arun Talwar of CUTS, George also met with the group and shared CUTS' successful interventions in various areas.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

'Tobacco Control Initiatives through Citizens Mobilisation in Rajasthan' in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India and World Health Organisation (WHO-India) and in active collaboration with Department of Health, Government of Rajasthan.

CART IN MEDIA

The collage features several newspaper articles. Key headlines include:

- A generation living on junk food is here**: Discusses the rise of fast food and its health implications.
- Kids prefer junk food in lunch box**: Reports on children's preference for junk food over nutritious school lunches.
- Changing face of governance**: An article by George Cheriyan discussing the evolution of governance in India.
- New technique used to assess NREGS**: Details a new method for evaluating the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.
- पर्यावरण जागरूकता के लिए कार्यशाला**: A report on an environmental awareness workshop.
- Rajasthan may create separate budget for road safety measures**: News about the state government's plan to fund road safety initiatives.
- कार्यशाला का आयोजन**: A notice regarding the organization of a workshop.