

Catalyst



Quarterly E-Newsletter

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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.

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Further Amendment to the RTI Act is a Potential Danger



“Further amendment to the Right to Information (RTI) Act is one of the major possible dangers to the Act”, said Shailesh Gandhi, Information Commissioner, Central Information Commission, New Delhi. He claimed RTI as the first act during 60 years of Independence, which can bring self rule and make the citizen a king. He called upon the common mass to join hands and fight against these possible challenges.

Gandhi was delivering the inaugural address at the Launch cum Orientation Workshop under the second phase of RTI project ‘Reforming the processes in the Rural Development Department through policy and civic engagement, based on RTI Act 2005’ (RePoRDD) being implemented by CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART) in partnership with Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF) in Jaipur, on June 13-14, 2009.

George Cherian, Director, CUTS, in his introductory remarks emphasised on the potential of RTI for bringing transparency and accountability. While briefing about the project, he said that setting up of a watchdog group, Consortium of Groups for Combating Corruption (CGCC), generating awareness among rural areas about RTI and its filing process, is one of the highlights of the project.

Harinash Pandya of JANPAT, a network of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Gujarat, said that filing RTI applications in high numbers is the only way to bring accountability and transparency. He said that the act has not only benefited the common man but also people in administration as it has reduced the undue interference from the power holders.

Later the gathering of RTI activists and CSOs from the state unanimously raised the collective concern to the Government of India over the announced ‘suitable amendments’ to the RTI act, and also to the state government of Rajasthan to take appropriate steps for the effective implementation of the act in the state.

The second, two-day Orientation Workshop was held in Tonk on June 18-19, 2009. Zila Pramukh of Tonk Ram Vilas Chaudhari was the chief guest of the event. Dr. Rakesh Ranjan from Commonwealth Human Rights Initiatives (CHRI), Madhya Pradesh was the external resource person.



Quick Response Survey on Pictorial Warning

A quick response survey was conducted on June 01, 2009 to check the implementation of pictorial health warnings, which came into effect from May 31, 2009. Survey findings, which show zero compliance to the Supreme Court order, were shared with the media, which had given wide coverage. Findings and media reports were shared with Advocacy Forum for Tobacco Control (AFTC) members and the Ministry of Health, which triggered a debate at the national level on effective implementation of the law.

85% Youth Does not Care for Environment!

About 85 percent of our urban educated youth shrugs away their shoulders from holding any responsibility to save our environment. However, 90 percent of the same exclaimed that small efforts at individual level could contribute largely in protecting our planet.

This stark reality was exposed in a survey conducted in the city of Jaipur on the eve of World Environment Day

(WED) by CUTS CART. WED is globally celebrated every year on June 05 and this year's theme is: "Your Planet Needs You: Unite to Combat Climate Change". This survey was conducted among the girls and boys of age group 18-25 with 44:56 ratios. The aim of the survey was to assess the awareness level and contribution of the youth towards environmental protection.

The survey findings have smeared a big question mark on the numerous efforts done to protect the environment. As 90



percent youth asserted that among all human activities, excessive use of motor vehicles is primarily destroying environment. Utilisation of public transportation can be an effective measure to preserve the fast depleting non-renewable resources but 69 percent youth merely avoids using public transportation due to its poor standard and 31 percent evades due to improper connectivity within the city.

Time and again several organisations have conducted various awareness activities to discourage reckless usage of plastic bags and 97 percent youth also believe usage of plastic bags should be completely prohibited by the government. However, looking at the level of awareness it is a hard-hitting reality that 52 percent youth accepted feeling awkward and 41 percent never thought of carrying their own bags while going to market.

Life Skill Education – Need of the Hour

"Imparting life skill education to children is a dire need in the present social context", said Dr Sunil Thomas Jacob, State Representative of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) while delivering special address in the 'Teachers Training' workshop organised by CUTS CART in collaboration with Health Related Information Dissemination Amongst Youth (HRIDAY), New Delhi under the project entitled, 'Get Active' in Jaipur, on April 16, 2009. Further, he explained that life skill and value education was used to be a part of joint family structure, which is becoming extinct fast. Henceforth, the responsibility is on the shoulder of schools.



In his introductory remarks, George Cherian, Director, CUTS emphasised on the role of schools and parents for inculcating healthy eating habits in the children. Around 60 teachers from 30 schools participated in the workshop. Surabhi Bhalla and Tina Rawal from HRIDAY facilitated the technical session on 'Food Pyramid'. Chief Dietician of Fortis Hospital, Dr Namita Bhagat, as resource person spoke on the importance of diet and nutrition. Khushbu Parnami of CUTS CART provided a brief overview of the various activities undertaken and to be implemented in the upcoming modules under the programme.

World No Tobacco Day

World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) was observed in Jaipur by CUTS CART. A press conference under the banner of Rajasthan Coalition for Tobacco Control (RCTC) was organised on the effective implementation of pictorial health warnings on tobacco products, at Press Club in Jaipur, on May 28, 2009. A signature campaign and *Nukkad Natak* (street play) based on the ill effects of tobacco were organised at Gaurav Tower, Malviya Nagar, Jaipur on May 30, 2009. Both the activities laid stress on the strict implementation of pictorial health warnings on tobacco products, to be in effect from May 31, 09 as per the central government notification. Many people pledged their support to the campaign by signing on the banner.

Grassroots Interface Meetings

CUTS with the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) is undertaking an initiative over two years (2008-2010) in Nepal, Bangladesh, and two states of India (West Bengal and Rajasthan) to build capacity of consumer groups/CSOs to enable them to deal with the issues involved, take-up action research, share experiences, and carryout advocacy with policymakers and regulatory agencies to effect pro-consumer changes in the electricity regulatory/policy processes. The project is being implemented in association with local partner organisations across project territories.

CUTS CART is the project partner for implementing various activities in Rajasthan under the project. As a part of this project, Grassroots Interface Meetings (GIMs) were held in Jhunjhunu on June 11, 2009; in Churu, on June 12, 2009; in Bikaner on June 17, 2009; and in Dholpur on June 26, 2009 respectively.

The meetings started with the local partners making welcome remarks highlighting the objective of the meeting, project activities conducted in the district and their experiences, followed by the RESA documentary show. The next session was a brief introduction of the project, objective and agenda of the meeting, and CUTS interventions in the power sector etc. by CUTS' representatives. Public representatives shared the problems faced by the electricity consumers not only in dealing with utilities but also with Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission (RERC). They appreciated CUTS for providing such type of communication channel and making consumers aware not only of their rights but also of their duties.



Representatives from CUTS made a presentation on the systemic problems and their solutions in the presence of public and utility representatives, who then answered the queries raised by the participants. This presentation was followed by another brief presentation on Grievance Redressal Mechanism. In the end, consumer perception survey was conducted. All the participants were provided with survey questionnaires along with the handouts. It was duly explained to them and filled up forms were collected.

On the basis of the feedback received from consumers, it has been revealed that these GIMs have proved very useful in understanding the complaint redressal mechanism. The experience of these GIMs and note of systemic problems faced by consumers would also be shared during the National Advocacy Seminar, to be conducted after these meetings in the project territories.

Securities and Market Awareness Campaign

CUTS CART, with the support of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), under the Securities and Market Awareness Campaign (SMAC) organised six workshops during April-June 2009.



S. No	Date	Place	In association with
1	April 29	Sri Ganganagar	SEBI
2	April 30	Hanumangarh	BSE
3	May 28	Khanpur (Jhalawar)	SEBI
4	May 29	Jhalawar	BSE
5	June 29	Sultapur	SEBI
6	June 30	Kota	BSE

REPRESENTATIONS

Good Governance in India

Om Prakash Arya attended a consultation workshop on 'Citizen Engagement in Promoting Good Governance in India' organised by the Public Affairs Centre, Bangalore, on behalf of Partnership for Transparency Fund and the World Bank, in New Delhi, on April 02-03, 2009.

Gender Budgeting

Khushbu Parnami and Om Prakash Arya participated in a training course on 'Gender Budgeting' organised by the Women and Child Resource Centre, HCM Rajasthan State Institute of Public Administration, in Jaipur, during May 20-22, 2009.

Social Accountability

Om Prakash Arya participated in the consultation workshop on developing a framework for incorporating 'Social Accountability Mechanism for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and National Rural Health Mission' organised by the National Institute of Administrative Research (NAIR), Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie in New Delhi, on May 25, 2009.

HR Management

Amar Deep Singh attended a five-day 'Human Resource Management Course' organised by the Union Southeast Asia Centre in Bangalore, during June 15-19, 2009.

REPRESENTATIONS

Improving Business Environment

Amarjeet Singh participated in a consultation with the private sector on 'Prioritising the Key Issues to Improve Business Environment in Rajasthan' organised by CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics & Environment (CUTS CITEE) & International Finance Corporation (IFC), World Bank, in Jaipur on June 02, 2009.

Enhancing Development Effectiveness

Om Prakash Arya and Madhu Sudan Sharma participated in a session at a workshop on 'Enhancing Development Effectiveness' in Jaipur, on June 02, 2009 organised by the World Bank. Om made a presentation on 'Governance Issues – An Outside Perspective'.

Customer Relations Council

Amarjeet Singh participated in a Meeting of Customer Relations Council (CRC) organised by Tata Tele Services, in New Delhi, on June 05, 2009.

Poison on Platter

Om Prakash Arya represented CUTS in a campaign against genetically modified (GM) food by attending the screening of the film 'Poison on Platter' and participating in the subsequent multi-stakeholder consultation on GM foods on June 06, 2009.

Assessing Communication Skills

George Cherian attended the South Asia Workshop on 'Strategic Communications: Role and Impact in Effective Development' organised by the Water & Sanitation Programme-South Asia (WSP-SA) of the World Bank in New Delhi, on June 12, 2009. He was part of the working group on 'Effective Monitoring and Assessment of the Impact of Communication' and shared thoughts on the topic.

Visits

Mary Coyle, Director, Coady International Institute

Mary Coyle, Director and Susan Mackay, Events & Public Education Coordinator from the Coady International Institute (CII), St. Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia, Canada visited Jaipur on April 20, 2009. George Cherian had a dinner meeting with them.

Bangladeshi Delegation

A five-member delegation from Bangladesh working on 'Access to Information' facilitated by Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) visited CUTS on June 05, 2009. The group also visited one of the model *Gram Panchayat Harsuliya* under *Phagi Panchayat Samiti*. Madhu Sudan and Om Prakash Arya met with the group and facilitated the visit.

Future Activities

Project on 'Ensuring Service Delivery through Community Monitoring in 30 Health Centers in Tonk district of Rajasthan, India' in partnership with Results for Development (R4D), Washington DC under the Transparency & Accountability Programme (TAP).



CART IN MEDIA

world no tobacco day

Need to keep eye watch on cigarette warning'

Respondent

IS a need to raise col-
laboration by civil soci-
ety

CART) in the city.
A consensus emerged
among the various
organisations.

कूप के साथ केन्सर फ्री

एक दिवस की पूर्व संध्या पर हुए विभिन्न आयोजन

**Missing, pictures on
tobacco product packs**

A visit to a number
of tobacco companies
in the city revealed
that they had not
displayed the pictorial
warning on their
packs.

Photo: Kartik

Youngsters in the city
are not aware of the
warning on cigarette
packs.