

About CART

Established in 1983 as a small voluntary group of concerned citizens, Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) expanded its activities and CUTS CART was set up in 1996 as a programme centre to pursue 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 a more responsible society and encouraging changes at the policy level by advocating with the government machinery and sensitising it to the issues of concern of the common man. The Centre has spearheaded several campaigns and pioneered consumer empowerment.

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Community of Practice on Social Accountability (CoPSA) Launched

CoPSA was formally launched in a two-day regional inception-cum design workshop in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on February 29-March 01, 2012, which was mainly attended by country anchors and core group members from each of the partnering countries, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka and some special invitees from Colombo.

CoPSA is an initiative in partnership with Affiliated Network of Social Accountability in South Asia Region (ANSA SAR) to exchange the knowledge and creation in the area of social accountability (SAc). Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) was entrusted with the responsibility as the regional anchor of CoPSA in the South Asia region. The inception



workshop also aimed to gather the views emerged out during various country consultations held in all five South Asian countries mentioned above so that a consensus can be arrived on the final design of the CoPSA.

The workshop began with opening remarks by George Cherian, Director, CUTS International. He said that Community of Practice (CoP) is 'a group of people who share a common concern or a passion on something they do and learn how to do it better based on regular interactions within the group'. He said that CoPSA aims to bring people together working on SAc in the South Asia region to exchange lessons and share experiences.

Naimur Rehman, Chief Operating Officer, ANSA-SAR said that ANSA has taken this initiative of CoPSA to consolidate SAc practices in the region. ANSA is trying to focus on deepening knowledge on SAc concepts and practices to push for research, case-works, and peer learning forums to enrich the body of SAc knowledge and making strategic investment on SAc innovations and promoting networking and capacity building among SAc practitioners in the South Asia region.

Wijaya Jayatilaka, Executive Director, Transparency International, Sri Lanka explained the meaning of governance and shed light on the overall situation of governance in Sri Lanka and its impact on the economy. He stated that state and society should bargain with each other well so that the opportunity of civic engagement can be enhanced by the government positively.

In technical sessions, representatives of five country anchors presented the findings of their country consultations held in New Delhi, Islamabad, Dhaka, Kathmandu and Colombo respectively and draft country action plan also was discussed. The workshop mainly discussed the design of CoPSA and the web portal and finalised the same with inputs from various country representatives.

Social Accountability an Effective Way to Bring Good Governance

“Using social accountability tools is the most effective and economical way to bring good governance, if results are produced”, said Roland Lomme, Governance Advisor, The World Bank. He was delivering the inaugural address in a national consultation organised by CUTS at New Delhi on the CoPSA.

Shomikho Raha, Governance Adviser, DFID India said that SAc is much more a demand side issue and this initiative of ‘CoP’ should aim at enhancing the credibility of demand side accountability programme with measureable and credible results.

George Cherian introduced the concept of the CoP. Naimur Rehman, Chief Operating Officer of ANSA-SAR said that investment in CoPSA is a strategy to create linkages between different actors, practitioners of SAc for knowledge exchange, mobilising innovation and new ideas and using the knowledge and innovations for advancing the practices and action on the ground.

Om Prakash Arya, Senior Project Coordinator, CUTS presented the outline and purpose of the CoP on SAc tools by mentioning about the context in which it can or cannot work.

Joy Elamon, Chief Executive Officer, Inter-Cooperation, New Delhi and Sarah Figge Husain, Training Specialist, UN Solution Exchange (Global Team) shared their valuable views related to sustaining web based communities, opportunities and challenges.



Urgent Corrective Measures to Save NREGS

The steep decline is noticed in the implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in Rajasthan. The state could utilise only 50 percent of the total labour budget demanded for the year 2010-11. This indicates that half of the money provided by the Central government remain unspent which could have been utilised for the welfare of the state.



The total expenditure in NREGS has drastically gone down from ₹6175.55 crores in 2008-09 to ₹3300.33 crores in 2010-11. The implementation is marred with a number of problems such as issue of dated receipt, delay in measurement and payment, lesser wages than notified, inadequate planning and approval of projects, indifference of *gram panchayats* etc.

All these findings were disseminated at the state level dissemination cum advocacy meeting organised by CUTS under a project ‘Developing a culture of good governance and accountability in the state of Rajasthan, India through involving CSOs and building their capacity with a focus on improving the public expenditure outcomes’ at Jaipur on March 14, 2012. Several prominent speakers and the grassroots community-based organisations from all 33 districts participated in the meeting.

Global Integrity Report 2012

Global Integrity is an international non-profit organisation that tracks governance and accountability trends globally and publish Global Integrity Report every year. 2012 report was formally released on March 30, 2012. This year, CUTS has been included as the peer reviewer of the India country report and Om Prakash Arya reviewed the report.

Campaign on Real Choice in Financial Services (WCRD 2012)

CUTS initiated a campaign on Real Choice in Financial Services to commemorate World Consumer Rights Day 2012 in Jaipur on central theme “Our money, our rights: campaigning for a ‘real choice’ in financial services”. George Cherian stated allowing account portability in India is an effective way to induce competition among various service providers and improve quality of services.

Amarjeet Singh, Project Coordinator, CUTS in his presentation stated that there is need for effective regulation of complex policies of banks in fast moving markets under financial consumer services for better regulation and strengthening of financial consumer protection.

K. Sundari, Deputy General Manager, Reserve Bank of India and Secretary, Office of Banking Ombudsman, Jaipur presented an overview of functions of Banking Ombudsman and mechanism for seeking redressal through it.

Sanjay Jhala, Enforcement Officer, Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of Rajasthan emphasised on behavioural aspect of consumer and service provider relationships and constraints due to ignorance.



Consumer Protection in India: The Way Forward

George Cherian and Vijay Singh attended a national Seminar on 'Consumer Protection in India: The Way Forward' jointly organised by the Department of Consumer Affairs and Indian Institute of Public Administration marking the 25 years of Consumer Protection Act (COPRA).

A book entitled 'Consumer Protection in India': Issues and Concerns' was released on the occasion. An article entitled 'Rural Consumers and Role of Local Bodies in Consumer Protection' written by George is included in the book.

During the session on 'Consumer Rights and Services: Meeting the Expectations', chaired by Prof Suresh Misra,



George made a presentation on the topic, detailing what each of the consumer rights mean to the common consumers, what is the ground realities with regard to realising those rights, progressive laws enacted and the difficulties faced by the consumers in availing public services.

Meeting of Central Consumer Protection Council

George Cherian attended the 26th meeting of the Central Consumer Protection Council at New Delhi on January 31,



2012. The meeting discussed the ways and means to tackle the menace of misleading advertisements, wastage of food and reviewed the progress made in 25 years of the COPRA.

Telecom Consumer Awareness

CUTS with the support of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) organised a District Level Telecom Consumer Education Workshop at Churu, Rajasthan, on January 31, 2012.

Second workshop was organised in Dholpur, Rajasthan, on February 18, 2012; and third at Dausa, Rajasthan, on March 01, 2012 respectively. Representatives of various service providers attended and interacted with telecom consumers in all the three workshops.



Knowledge Enhancement

An inception cum partners' meet was organised under ConsumersUp project at CUTS CART office on January 12, 2012 to have a better understanding of project activities and financial dispersion for successful implementation. The meeting was attended by all four state partners and the formal memorandum of agreement was signed with them. Bipul Chatterjee, George Cherian and Uday S Mehta and the project team attended the meeting.

The first knowledge enhancement workshop under the project was organised by Consumer Rights Education and Awareness Trust at Bangalore on February 28-29, 2012; second by Janaki Foundation at Jamshedpur on March 20-21, 2012; and the third by Consumers' Protection Association at Agartala on March 23-24, 2012 respectively.

Consumers in the Digital Age

George Cherian and Pham Thi Que Anh Director, CUTS Hanoi Resource Centre participated in the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East Regional Members



Meeting of Consumers International in Kuala Lumpur on March 05-07, 2012 and the meeting entitled 'Consumers in the Digital Age' in Kuala Lumpur on March 08-09, 2012 respectively. George made a presentation on 'Consumer Participation in Energy Policies'.

The special event on 'Consumers in the Digital Age: Access, Fairness and Representation' was attended by more than 60 participants from Asia, Africa and Latin America. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss opportunities and challenges that consumers face in today's online digital environment, which raises a range of new issues for the global consumer movement.



