

Consumer Dialogue

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E-newsletter

Safer and More Sustainable Food for All

CUTS with the support of Consumer Coordination Council under the project entitled, 'Green Action Fund' organised a campaign on the theme '**Safer and More Sustainable Food for All**' to make consumers becoming pro-organic. The Green Action Fund is made available through the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) and aims to promote sustainable development and reduce poverty by promoting worldwide awareness and advocacy activities which encourage sustainable patterns of consumption.

The project was implemented in 10 *gram panchayats* of Sambhar block of Jaipur district of Rajasthan in August, September & October 2013. Prior to commencement of activities, a scoping visit was made to the targeted Department of Agriculture, Block Office, SKN Agriculture University and selected *gram panchayats* to explore the area of conducting awareness programmes and provide a platform for liaising with key stakeholders in August 2013.



Sensitisation meetings were conducted in 10 *gram panchayats* of Sambhar block of Jaipur district of Rajasthan with the help of *Atma Sansthan*, local partner in Sambhar block in September 2013. In these, farmers were identified and selected to make them aware and sensitise about progressive advantage of organic farming and harmful effects of presently used insecticides and pesticides.

In the outreach under the campaign, 2,000 coloured handouts in simple and local languages were printed and 1,000 illustrative posters were developed for distribution during activities for awareness generation.

This campaign-based project provided a platform to generate awareness among consumers about organic products (benefits, availability etc.) and furthered in educating cultivators to use organic fertilisers to grow foods and not to resort to adulteration, so that the people of the country would get good and pure food and live a healthy life.

Consumer-Friendly Real Estate Bill on the Anvil

The government is coming with a buyer-friendly real estate legislation which aims to protect consumers and bring transparency.

The new bill to be named as the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Bill, 2013 will be very relevant to the real sector.

Describing the bill as a pioneering legislation which will install standardisation and professionalism in the sector, Girija Vyas, MP and Minister, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation said, "It will ensure consumer protection and promotion of the real estate sector through effective regulation and introduction of speedy mechanism for adjudication of disputes."

The real estate sector is one of the largest business and employment generators in the Indian economy. Despite its mammoth size, the sector does not have a regulator, who can balance the interests of various stakeholders involved though there are a number of legislations at various levels that affect the sector directly or indirectly.

According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation data, the housing shortage in India is to be around 18.78 million out of which 56 percent is in the economically weaker category and 39 percent is in the lower income group category.



Real Estate Regulatory Bill

30 CUTS International
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(Press Trust of India, 17.07.13)

ACTIVITIES



National Environment Awareness Campaign (NEAC) 2013-14

This year, the process of NEAC was initiated in July 2013 on the theme 'Biodiversity Conservation'. A total of five divisional levels pre-proposal workshops were organised during July 31-August 05, 2013, covering all 33 districts of Rajasthan. CUTS, received a total number of 353 proposals for NEAC in 2013. The pre proposal workshops were held at Chittorgarh for Udaipur division on July 31, 2013; at Kota for Kota division on August 01, 2013; at Bikaner for Bikaner division on August 02, 2013.

The scrutiny of the proposal by Centre of Excellence appointed by the Ministry of Environment & Forests took place on September 12-13, 2013. Rashmi Gangwar from Centre for Environment Education, Uttarakhand visited CUTS CART and did the scrutiny. The Regional Committee Meeting was held at New Delhi during August 23-27, 2013.

REPRESENTATION



- Abhimanyu Singh & Jai Shree Soni participated in a training programme on 'Consumer Complaint Redressal and Mediation' organised by Centre for Consumer Studies, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi and sponsored by the Consumer Coordination Council (CCC) of India at New Delhi during July 15-19, 2013.
- Arjun Kant Jha attended a training on 'Basic Life Saving Skills' conducted by Transport Department, Government of Rajasthan, on July 24, 2013 which was demonstrated by Maya Tandon, CEO of M N Tandon Charitable Trust, Jaipur.
- Deepak Saxena and Arjun Kant participated in a workshop on e-mediation and role of mediation centres organised by CCC, New Delhi on September 13, 2013.
- Deepak Saxena attended the 21st Annual General Body Meeting of CCC at New Delhi on September 14, 2013.
- Deepak Saxena & Arjun Kant Jha attended 'Consumer Outreach Programme' organised by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) at *Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj Sansthan* on September 19, 2013.

CUTS Opens Third Centre in Africa

"We welcome the opening of the CUTS Centre in Accra and look forward to its active participation in providing research support to Ghana and the West African region on critical economic policy issues", said Hanna Tetteh, Ghana's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, while inaugurating the third CUTS Africa Resource Centre in Accra (Ghana).

The first African Centre of CUTS was opened in Lusaka, Zambia in 2001 and a second one in Nairobi, Kenya in 2002. CUTS is perhaps one of the few 'southern' organisations to have a 'voice' office as well in Geneva, where it has been running successfully since 2008. It also has an office in Hanoi, Vietnam that became operational in 2005, which covers the South East Asian region.

Like the other two African Centres, CUTS Accra would be a locally registered Ghanaian not-for-profit outfit doing research, public outreach and engaging in capacity building activities.

The need for this Centre had been felt by CUTS for the last three-four years now, as many of CUTS friends in the country and indeed the region (West Africa) encouraged CUTS to explore this possibility, since it has been engaged in few research and advocacy projects in the region.

By establishing its third Centre in Accra (Ghana), CUTS will further strengthen its approach of promoting South-South cooperation on trade and development, and strengthen long-term capacity of both non-state and state actors in the region to address socio-economic and developmental challenges in the region.



Hanna S Tetteh, Ghanaian Minister unveiling the plaque of CUTS Accra on August 20, 2013



Separating Consumer Affairs from Food Department

The Rajasthan government has finally decided to separate Consumer Affairs Department from the existing Food and Public Distribution so that it can focus on consumer welfare and protection better. The decision took place during the Cabinet meeting on September 07, 2013, which marks the victory of all consumer organisations and activists, who were involved in this advocacy to pursue the state government.



CUTS, a leading consumer organisation in the state, was continuously raising this issue before the Central as well as the state government.

The same issue was raised in front of the Chief Minister of Rajasthan during the pre-budget meet by citing the example of Jammu & Kashmir and Kerala, where the Consumer Department is headed separately by the Minister in these states.

The decision is yet to be taken by the Central government on the issue but the decision of the Rajasthan government to make it a separate department detaching it from the existing Food and Public Distribution will definitely boost the consumer movement in the state and ultimately enhance consumer protection in a much focused manner.

After the segregation, link departments, such as Legal Metrology (which is at present under the Department of Industry) and Food & Drugs Inspection (which is under Medical & Health Department) is expected to fall in the vicinity of new Department of Consumer Affairs, which will result in better coordination and easily accessible to consumers.

Each Pesky Call to Cost Telecom Cos. ₹5,000

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) is also tasked to check menace of pesky callers who have been spamming consumers with unwanted calls and SMS.

With no palpable abatement in pesky calls and SMSs despite several attempts to control the menace, TRAI mandated financial penalties on telecom service providers whose networks are used for the unwanted communication by marketing companies. The TRAI also warned that phone connections of banks, insurance firms and builders will be blacklisted if the mandated rules on unsolicited calls are violated by them or their representatives.

The TRAI, in November 2012, eased the process of lodging complaints against unwanted calls and messages and has decided to fix ₹5,000 as penalty for every complaint received on the matter.

“If on verification of a complaint, it is found that the Unsolicited Commercial Communications (UCC) has been sent by a subscriber, who is not registered as a telemarketer, the service provider shall be liable to pay financial disincentives of ₹5000 on each complaint”.

TRAI was particularly critical of the cheap SMS packs marketed by service providers. “The Authority has observed that such telemarketing activities are encouraged by service providers by providing attractive SMS packages and by allowing bulk/multiple connections without following the Customer Acquisition Form (CAF) directives issued by the Department of Telecommunication though they are fully aware that these could be used for telemarketing activities. It is the duty and responsibility of the service provider to ensure that such misuse does not happen in their network.”

(Times of India, 23.08.13)





Road Accidents a National Emergency

The Supreme Court sought the response of various Union Ministries and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority for a direction to take coordinated efforts to prevent road accidents.

A Bench of Chief Justice P Sathasivam and Justices Ranjana Desai and Ranjan Gogoi asked them to file their response in four weeks on a public interest litigation petition by Coimbatore orthopaedic surgeon S. Rajasekaran.

The petitioner said: "There is no national problem that required more attention than the one which results in a death every four minutes, disabling four citizens every minute, a loss of 3 percent GDP every year, a loss of Rs. 7 lakh crore in primary treatment and an unspecified amount lost in physical disability."

The Hon'ble Court further embarked that 'The lack of public education and the appalling condition of infrastructure resulted in citizens being deprived of their lives, a condition manifestly violative of Article 21 (Right to life and personal liberty). The total failure and inaction on the part of the various ministries to commit themselves to ending road accidents, in addition to depriving citizens of the right to lives, "is responsible for pulling down the country's status in the growing economies."

Dr. Rajasekaran wanted the authorities to take practical measures expeditiously to give effect to the numerous legislation, reports and recommendations for ensuring that the loss of lives in accidents was minimised.

(Indo-Asian News Service, 08.08.13)



Plan Scheme for Creation of Consumer Awareness

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the proposal of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs to continue the Plan Scheme for creation of consumer awareness with a total outlay of Rs.409.29 crore. This fund will be utilised during the 12th Five Year Plan for strengthening the consumer movement by spreading consumer literacy through a sustained campaign about consumers' rights and responsibilities.

The approved scheme envisages extensive use of newspapers, radio, television and other mediums for spreading consumer awareness. The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 has guaranteed several rights to Indian consumers regarding quality, quantity, purity of goods etc. The consumers have a right to approach various consumer fora for redressal of their grievances.

It is felt necessary that the Indian consumers, particularly in rural areas, should be made aware about their legal rights and also the procedure for filing complaints. The existing grievance redressal mechanism needs to be popularised.

(www.newsmind.in, 08.08.13)



Upcoming Projects

Pro Organic

To promote organic consumption in the state of Rajasthan (India) covering six major agriculture potential districts through awareness generation, sensitisation, capacity building and advocacy activities, CUTS CART is implementing a two year project entitled, 'Pro Organic' from November, 2013 with the support of Swedish Society for Nature Conservation. The project will cover a total of 135 *gram panchayats* with three selected *gram panchayats* each in 45 blocks of six districts. Increased awareness is expected to result in increased consumer demand which will further push demand for availability and affordability of organic products.

Research Study on Misleading Advertisement

CUTS CART is undertaking a two-month study to analyse and document the knowledge gaps for issues/challenges arising from unfair and misleading advertising in India with the support of GIZ, India in October & November 2013. The objective of this study is to investigate the current context and undertake a situation analysis and document the knowledge gaps of the issues resulting from unfair and misleading advertising in India and recommend a clear way forward on how to address the issue within the framework of Indian law.

