

RTI Advisory & Facilitation Stall on ‘Citizen Awakening, Good Governance & Development Exhibition’ at Pushkar, Ajmer, Rajasthan held on 17th to 24th November 07

I. Preamble

Pushkar is a sacred town in Rajasthan, about 14 km from Ajmer. It is renowned worldwide for the annual fair that is popularly known as the ‘*Pushkar Mela*’. The fair is held every year in the month of October/November and is regarded as the world's biggest livestock fair. It is studded with vibrancy of the local Rajasthani traditions that includes music, dance, culture, varied skills competencies and also presents the “development perspective” for the masses. Pushkar is a hit destination with the tourists from both national and international fraternity.

II. RTI Advisory & Facilitation Stall

Considering the enormous opportunity in order to propagate the right to information (RTI) Act, and make the rural mass aware of its application as an effective tool in combating corruption and thus ensuring transparent and accountable governance, CUTS Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART) in active partnership with CUTS Centre for Human Development (CUTS CHD) and with the support from Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF), US decided for a meaningful participation in the fair by putting up ‘RTI Advisory & Facilitation Stall’

In addition, along with the staff of CART and CHD, the responsibility for CUTS’ participation was also entrusted with the members of Consortium of Groups Combating Corruption (CGCC) that have been formed in Ajmer and Jaipur administrative divisions. In the fair, through exhibition stall, the rural development schemes/policies of the government and other support agencies were promoted. The grassroots interventions being made by CUTS CART and CUTS CHD were also exhibited.

Naveen Mahajan, Ajmer District Collector, formally inaugurated the fair on November 18, 2007, which lasted till November 24, 2007. The joint participation of CUTS CART, CUTS CHD and PTF on the theme of ‘Citizen Awakening, Good Governance & Development’ was very much appreciated by the visitors. Among the visitors was Sarita Gena, Ajmer *Zila Pramukh* (Ajmer District Head) and many other members of the *Panchayati Raj Institutions* (PRIs), tourists from different regions of the country and foreign countries, officials from different departments of government and rural citizens.

The visitors arrived at the ‘RTI Advisory & Facilitation Stall’ were very keen to know about the RTI Act and how it can be applied for combating corruption. They also sought detail information about the PTF, CUTS CART and CUTS CHD and their respective performances in ensuring good governance.

III. Output

- A total of 139 RTI Act applications filing were facilitated on the spot and more than 300 application formats were distributed to the visitors who expressed their interest in filing applications. The filing facilitation covered different categories of information.
- The majority of applications filled were for submission at different offices under the Department of *Panchayati Raj* and Rural Development, Department of Land & Revenue, Department of Electricity, Department of Consumers Affairs, Food & Civil Supplies since with these departments the rural masses have their maximum dealings.

- Interestingly, a few of the retired government officials also filed the applications under the Act, since the departmental inquiries/probes against them are still pending in the Department of Personnel, Government of Rajasthan.
 - The huge rural crowd belonging to the different districts, not only falling under the Ajmer and Jaipur administrative divisions but also the other administrative divisions were made aware of the RTI Act and provided with adequate knowledge in order to procure information through appropriate process of filling application.
 - The media specially the electronic media expressed deep interest in CUTS CART, CUTS CHD and PTF work profile and assured its full support in propagating initiatives taken in curbing corruption.
 - The visitors from foreign countries, many of them from the developed countries, were explained the existing governance mechanism at grassroots in India and how the RTI Act is performing effectively in dealing with the corrupt practices. These visitors were also briefed about the catalyst role being played by the CUTS CART, CUTS CHD and PTF.
 - The staff members of CUTS CART and CUTS CHD, along with the CGCC members, earned wider exposure to a variety of problems of the rural citizens and how these have become complicated due to their unawareness and unauthentic information about the RTI Act.
 - The most important observations noticed during the exhibition was the raised level of confidence of the rural citizens for addressing corruption after visiting the 'RTI Advisory & Facilitation Stall' and consulting CUTS staff and CGCC members present over there.
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