

# Grassroots Reachout and Networking in Rajasthan through Consumer Action (GRANIRCA)



Report

## State Level Media Consultation

October 30, 2012, Jaipur



*Submitted by*



**Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS)**

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## **1. Background**

Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS International) is an Indian origin international NGO established in 1983, pursuing social justice and economic equity within and across borders. It is working through six resource centres in India and four overseas resource centres at Lusaka (Zambia), Nairobi (Kenya), Hanoi (Vietnam) and Geneva. CUTS also works with several national, regional and international organisations.

CUTS is one of the organisations responsible for the enactment and strengthening of the dynamic Consumer Protection Act (COPRA), 1986. In 1998, as part of advocacy for a National Consumer Policy, CUTS prepared a draft through a consultative process and submitted to the Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India.

On January 08, 2010 CUTS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) partnering with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs on a project entitled 'Grassroots Reachout and Networking in Rajasthan through Consumer Action' (GRANIRCA). The project is for three years starting from January 08, 2012 and will end on January 07, 2013. GRANIRCA is being implemented in Rajasthan by CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART) (<http://www.cutsinternational.org/CART/index.htm>) in partnership with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Government of India and in active collaboration with Department of Consumer Affairs, Food & Civil Supplies, Government of Rajasthan. The objective of the project is to strengthen the consumer movement at the grassroots in the 12 districts of Rajasthan. (*For more information, please visit: <http://www.cutsinternational.org/CART/GRANIRCA/index.htm>*)

## **2. Objectives**

Since media plays an important role in establishing link between the civil society organisations (CSOs) and related stakeholders, so to make it more focussed a state-level consultation was organised at Jaipur. The primary objective of the workshop was to sensitise the state and district level media representatives, both from print and electronic on consumer protection issues and discuss the possible intervention to strengthen and take the consumer movement effectively to the common masses.

The second objective of the consultation was to disseminate the findings that emerged out of the survey under the project in the third year, i.e. 2012 and to release the research book on 'The Plight of Electricity Consumers in Rajasthan'.

### 3. Participation

The workshop was attended by more than 68 representatives of print and electronic media from Jaipur as well as 12 project districts. Prominent personalities who were present were P N Bhandari, Ex. Chairman, Rajasthan State Electricity Board (RSEB); Gopal Sharma, Additional Director, Department of Information and Public Relations, Government of Rajasthan; Rajendra Prasad Bora, Senior Journalist; R C Sharma, Joint Secretary, Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission (RERC); Jai Singh Kothari, CEO, Nafa Nuksan; Vimal Jain from Rajasthan Patrika; Lokpal Sethi from The Pioneer; D R Mathur, Electricity Ombudsman, Rajasthan; Shyam Sunder Sharma, Rashtriya Sahara and R G Gupta, Ex- CMD, Discoms. District level project partners, representatives of NGOs, activists and the project team were also the part of this consultation. *(Please refer Annexure- A for list of participants)*

### 4. Proceedings

The workshop commenced with welcome remarks by Jai Shree Soni, Project Officer, CUTS CART. *(For agenda please refer Annexure-B)*

#### 4.1 Opening Remarks

George Cheriyan, Director, CUTS International, in his opening remarks welcomed all the dignitaries and briefed about the project and its objectives. He said that the project was launched in the year 2010. Several activities in 12 districts as a part of the project have been conducted so far. While explaining the importance of the project and the workshop, he said that it is the 14<sup>th</sup> such workshop during the three years, first was held in 2010 at the state level, in 2011 it was organised at the district level with the help of 12 district partners to sensitise local media. He said that there is need to build a strong consumer movement by making the people aware through proper advocacy and networking.



He also informed about the national level survey, which was conducted by CUTS and the report on 'State of the Indian Consumer 2012'. He said that in the national survey it was found that Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is the most common name recognised by 40 percent of the respondents followed by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) only 30 percent.

#### **4.2 Project Overview and Dissemination of Research Findings**

Deepak Saxena, Senior Programme Coordinator, CUTS provided a brief overview of the project, its objectives, activities, area, design, approach and governance etc. He also shared in brief about the findings of the research survey that was conducted in 2010 and 2011. Speaking about the survey conducted in 2012, he said that the topic of the current year was 'Plight of Electricity Consumers in Rajasthan'.



Explaining about the survey he said that total 2419 respondents from 12 districts were interviewed; out of which almost quarter of percentage were female participants. 96 percent of the respondents avail electricity connection. Almost 65 percent are still unaware of Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission (RERC) and its functions. This definitely indicates an improvement in the overall awareness on these reforms that started around 12 years back in the year 2000. Almost half of the respondents rated feeder renovation programme (FRP) as good project run by the government and found it useful and consumer friendly. On the other hand, 59 percent were not aware about the new Public Service Guarantee Act. 45 percent respondents found difficult to get the connection and it almost took more than 30 days to get it. In continuation, 53 percent were charged separately as additional amount while given connection.

79 percent respondents were not aware about Ombudsman and from the remaining 21 percent, who knows it, 83 percent never filed appeal of their complaints. 66 percent reported problems/loss caused due to supply of high voltage and 68 percent complained about fast running of their meters, which resulted into rapid change in reading. In an interesting question, respondents were asked as to whether the distribution companies pay to the consumers 5 percent of the cost as compensation for taking more than the prescribed time limit to get the meter replaced, a huge number of 80 percent said that they never received any such compensation.

He further elaborated the following recommendations emerged out of the study, which was summarised as:

- Need for a proactive and responsive grievance handling mechanism
- Need to create more awareness on the reform process, role of RERC and the available grievance redressal mechanism
- Need to promote more consumer participation, which is a concern even after 12 years of reforms
- Need to take intensified steps to stop power pilferage and improve quality of service, which would ultimately reduce consumer dissatisfaction
- The high tariffs and corruption among utility employees were observed as main reasons for power theft. Immediate and stern action is required to be taken on these issues
- Poor service delivery was accounted as the major reason for consumers not reaching to electricity services. To resolve this issue, consumer consultation process should be simplified and widely disseminated
- Many issues mentioned above require collective engagement as it helps in identifying and solving long term general problems
- More and more public hearing with wider announcements in the rural areas
- Much better role of NGOs for ensuring people's participation
- Need to promote alternate energy

### **4.3 Inaugural Speech**

In his inaugural speech, P N Bhandari, Ex. Chairman, Rajasthan State Electricity Board (RSEB) expressed his satisfaction by saying that media plays an important role in highlighting problems and it is good to see that the concerned media is present and trying to associate with the people's rights. He said that one should not be always negative in giving feedback as the board is working

for the people. Regarding subsidy in electricity tariff, he said that it should be given only to the needy people.



#### 4.4 Keynote Address

In his keynote address Gopal Sharma, Additional Director, Department of Information and Public Relations, Government of Rajasthan appreciated the work done by CUTS and emphasised on the need for active media to play a pivotal role in imparting social justice to masses.

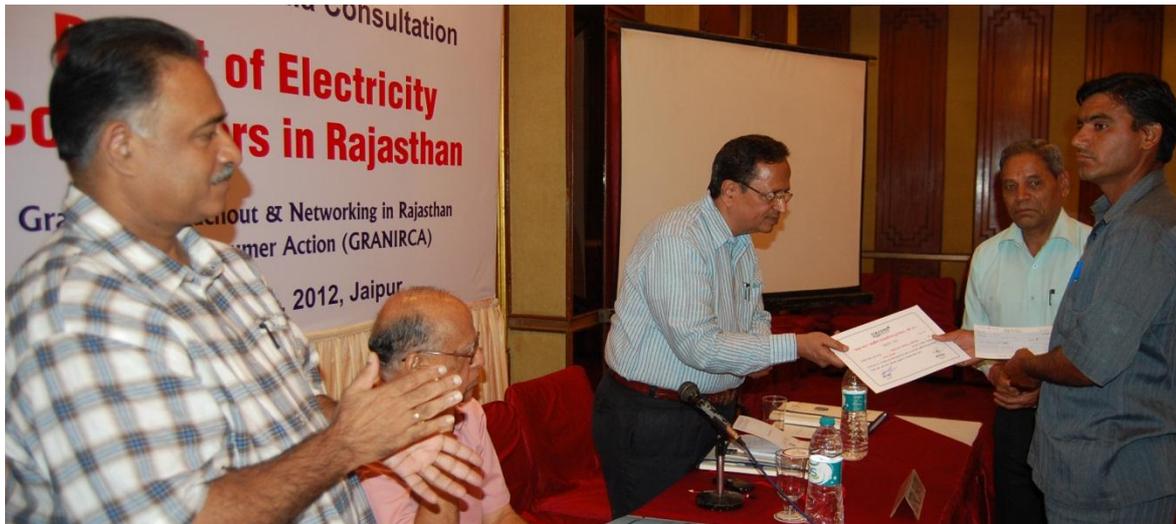


#### 4.5 Release of the research book and *Gram Gadar* Award

A book on 'Plight of Electricity Consumers in Rajasthan' which was the overview of the research findings that emerged out of the survey was also released by Gopal Sharma, Additional Director,

Department of Information and Public Relations, Government of Rajasthan with Rajendra Bora former Bureau Chief, Press Trust of India (PTI), Jaipur and P N Bhandari, Ex. Chairman, RSEB.

*Gram Gadar* Award which is being given by CUTS every year in the field of journalism was also given to Chuna Ram, an active journalist from Barmer. A certificate of appreciation and the prize amount of Rs 10,000 was distributed to him.



#### 4.6 Special Addresses

Rajendra Bora former Bureau Chief, PTI, Jaipur emphasised on institutional reforms of the commission and also the unbundling of RSEB so that people can have choice of service providers. He also mentioned the concept of paid news, which could be a challenge to faithfulness of media. Bora urged media to play a pivotal role in sensitising consumers by way of sensible reporting and advertisement policies.



R G Gupta, Ex CMD, DISCOMS threw light on the pathetic conditions of the electricity. Contradictory to Bora, he was of the opinion of not unbundling RSEB. He mentioned that distance from the government is the key factor of unbundling. He mentioned that RERC is also not working independently as there is interference of state government. Speaking about the findings, he expressed his concern over the plight of consumers and the present system under the government.



R C Sharma, Joint Secretary, RERC said that issues related to electricity or petroleum should be solved by a proper body should be formed to address these burning issues. Talking about the pathetic conditions of electricity, he mentioned that there are many lacunas which need to be overcome to solve the conditions. He mentioned that somewhere people are themselves responsible for the pathetic conditions as there are protests against the hike in electricity tariff, which at times becomes necessary for the commission to function smoothly along with its board. Secondly, he said that no one complains about the electricity theft which ultimately harms the people themselves.



#### 4.7 Open Discussion

Vimal Jain, Senior Editor, *Rajasthan Patrika*, Jaipur said that despite all constraints media would continue to highlight the issues of common man, which are backed with proper evidence. He opined that both media and consumers have to be cautious in the present era of liberalisation because this is an age of multinational corporations and consumers often tends to get attracted by these. He said that the theft in electricity should be taken seriously by RSEB and RERC.



Lokpal Sethi, Special Correspondent, *The Pioneer* expressed his concern over the negative response from the government officials. He said that these government officials are not willing to take up the issues and complaints forward. He criticised the lethargic behaviour of the government officials. He urged that the officials should have the spirit to perform and solve the problems of consumers. He emphasised on the need to bring consumers and media on a common platform so that a stage could be set up to fight against evils and malpractices.



Jai Singh Kothari, CEO, *Nafa Nuksan* said that the financial section of Electricity Department is very messy, and at times, it becomes difficult for consumers to approach concerned officials regarding their excessive bill charged. He said that work should be done at the department level. Inefficiency of staff is also the reason for hike in electricity rate. He urged on the privatisation of electricity. He also requested media to join hands to raise awareness on these issues and build pressure on the government to take preventive steps.



Shyam Sunder of *Rashtriya Sabara* said that electricity being an integral part of today's life both RSEB and RERC should come forward to improve the supply of electricity and ensure that it reaches to the masses in the rural areas. He was also concern about the fast reading of electricity meter which is one of the areas where proper attention and action is required.

Every session was followed by a question answer session where participants raised several questions related to the plight of electricity which was well addressed by the concerned government officials.

## 5. Outcome

1. Media was sensitised about the plight of electricity consumers in Rajasthan. It will likely to result in more space to consumer issues in media and joint advocacy on issues.
2. CUTS was able to share the findings of the research on electricity done under the project before the media, so that media can highlight issues emerged out of the survey and build pressure for action on the same.

## 6. Recommendations

Some recommendations that emerged out of the consultations were as follows:

1. Organising such workshops at the district and block level with the support of RERC to make people aware at the micro level. RERC has asked to submit proposals for the same.
2. Electricity consumption should be fixed as per the consumption in watt.
3. Appointment of Ombudsman in other districts also so that grievances can be redressed easily and effectively.
4. RERC has asked for suggestions on consumer charter to improve the conditions of electricity, in response to which people asked to publish it in newspapers to reach wider level.

## 7. Vote of Thanks

Vote of thanks was given by Dharmendra Chaturvedi, Project Officer, CUTS. He thanked all the dignitaries, officials from RERC, media representatives and all the participants for their active participation, their valuable inputs/suggestions and overall contribution for making the consultation successful.



## Annexure A

### List of Participants

S. No.	Name	Name & Address of the Organisation	Mob./Ph.	Email
1.	Gangadhar Solanki	Distt. President, Akhil Rajasthan Upbhokta Sangthan Mahasangh, Chittorgarh	9352909781	-
2.	Tejveer	NIDAN Sanstha, 9B/2, Ratnada, Jodhpur	9413249745	-
3.	Shivendra	Samajik Viaks Sansthan, Dholpur	9928661939	-
4.	Ashvin Malot	Vagad Vikas Sansthan, 3/108, Rati Talai, Banswara	9784419987	-
5.	Kamlesh Bohra	KV Social Welfare Society, Dausa	9414271208	-
6.	Mahesh Balaheri	Journalist, Dausa	9462610401	-
7.	R.C. Sharma	RERC, Jaipur	9784217127	<a href="mailto:rccsharma@gmail.com">rccsharma@gmail.com</a>
8.	Mohan Dhayal	Churu	9983034491	-
9.	George Cheriyan	CUTS, Jaipur	9829285930	<a href="mailto:gc@cuts.org">gc@cuts.org</a>
10.	Raghuveer Singh	Rajasthan Patrika	9929309561	-
11.	Kamlesh Meena	Councillor, BJMC, MJMC, Jaipur	9828335910	<a href="mailto:kamlesh_mjmc2004@yahoo.com">kamlesh_mjmc2004@yahoo.com</a>
12.	D.R. Mathur	Electricity Ombudsman, Sahkar Marg, Jaipur, Rajasthan	9829192925	-
13.	Shanti Devi Nama	Duni, Tonk	9166055358	-
14.	Yashwant Agarwal	Freelance Journalist	9829058811	<a href="mailto:ayshawant@gmail.com">ayshawant@gmail.com</a>
15.	Rajendra Bora	Freelance Journalist		-
16.	R.G. Gupta	RVVS, Jaipur	9414051015	
17.	R. Jalani	RVVS, Jaipur	9828151748	-
18.	Vinod Singh	Daily News	9829266044	-
19.	Govind Singh	Dainik Naya India	9929191308	-
20.	Surendra Singh	Hindusthan Samachar	9828875155	<a href="mailto:ssnathawath@gmail.com">ssnathawath@gmail.com</a>
21.	Babu Lal	DD News	9828456723	-
22.	S.K. Sankya	SE (TCC), JVVNL	9413390061	-
23.	Vimal Jain	Rajasthan Patrika	9829062789	-

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26.	A.K. Thalia	CUTS CART, Jaipur	5133259	-
27.	Abhimanyu Singh	CUTS CART, Jaipur	8107794315	<a href="mailto:abs@cuts.org">abs@cuts.org</a>
28.	Asif Khan	Daily Mahka Rajasthan	9636685202	<a href="mailto:mahkarajasthan@gmail.com">mahkarajasthan@gmail.com</a>
29.	Diwakar Sharma	1762, Telepara, Choura Rasta, Jaipur	9414771364	-
30.	Kalyan Singh Kothari	2/633, Jawahar Nagar, Jaipur	9414147744	<a href="mailto:kalyan.hansak@gmail.com">kalyan.hansak@gmail.com</a>
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32.	B.M. Sanadhya	54/144, Mansarovar, Jaipur	9928322885	-
33.	D.P. Chiraniya	2/668, Jawahar Nagar, Jaipur	9414068535	-
34.	Sushila Devi	Shubham Mahila Prashikshan Sansthan, Alwar	8890991173	-
35.	Kishan Snehi	Journalist, Kedalganj, Alwar	9928459181	-
36.	Rakesh Kumar Parmar	Samajik Viaks Samiti, Dholpur	9460646339	-
37.	Chuna Ram Godara	Journalist, VP-Panavara, Via- Baitoo, Distt.- Barmer	9828496634	-
38.	Kailash Puri Goswami	Journalist, Rajasthan Patrika, Bhaisarodgarh, Chittorgarh	9413010370	-
39.	Mukesh Sikhawal	Jila Upbhokta Jagaran Samiti, Sikar	9928106349	-
40.	Arjun Kant Jha	CUTS CART, Jaipur		-
41.	Amarjeet Singh	CUTS CART, Jaipur		-
42.	Badri Narain Sharma	CUTS CART, Jaipur		-
43.	Mahendra Kumar Ojha	SANKALP Sanstha, Ahore, Jalore	9414534193	
44.	K.R. Boss	Journalist, Bhartiya Grmain Patrakar Manch	9828290688	-
45.	Heena Kausar	Dainik Kota Bureau, Maqbara Bazar, Kota	9928988965	-

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52.	A.K. Godika	Rajasthan Chamber of Commerce & Industry	9314531381	<a href="mailto:arungodika@india.com">arungodika@india.com</a>
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56.	Suresh Bishnoi	DD News	9461433433	-
57.	R.C. Goel	News A to Z	9649488251	<a href="mailto:crimereporterjaipur@gmail.com">crimereporterjaipur@gmail.com</a>
58.	Lokpal Sethi	The Pioneer, 44/45, Sri Rampura Colony, Civil Lines, Jaipur	9314883616	
59.	Rajiv Saxena	PTI Reporter, Bundi	9461332814	<a href="mailto:rajivshawai@yahoo.co.in">rajivshawai@yahoo.co.in</a>
60.	Suman Sharma	Richmonds Society, Bundi	9887210251	<a href="mailto:smnrjiv32@ymail.com">smnrjiv32@ymail.com</a>
61.	Taheel	DIGI News	9784318607	-
62.	Amit Pareek	DIGI News	9929598923	-
63.	Dinesh Sharma	R.C. Media	9782650100	-
64.	Dalen	Dainik Hukamnama	9829176010	-
65.	Dharmendra Chaturvedi	CUTS CART, Jaipur	9414202868	-
66.	Mahendra Singh	A- 35, Jawahar Nagar	8891430644	-
67.	Aishwarya Pradhan	HBC News	9414310899	<a href="mailto:aishpradhan55@gmail.com">aishpradhan55@gmail.com</a>
68.	Mahesh Dadhich	B TV News	9828535828	<a href="mailto:btvmahesh@gmail.com">btvmahesh@gmail.com</a>

## Annexure B

### Agenda

9.30-11.00	Registration & Tea	
11.00-11.05	Welcome	Ms Jai Shree Soni, CUTS CART
11.05 –11.15	Opening Remarks	Mr. George Cheriyan , Director, CUTS & Head CUTS CART
11.15- 11.35	Project Overview, Progress so far & Presentation of the Research Findings.	Mr. Deepak Saxena, Sr. Programme Coordinator, CUTS CART
11.35-11.50	Documentary to Showcase CUTS Intervention in Electricity Sector.	Powered To Grow-A Documentary
11.50-12.30	Keynote Address	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr P N Bhandari, Ex. Chairman, Rajasthan State Electricity Board</li> <li>• Mr Gopal Sharma, Assistance Director, of Department of Information and Public Relations, Govt of Rajasthan.</li> </ul>
<b>12.30-12.40</b>	<b>Research Report Release and Distribution of GRAM GADAR Award</b>	
12.40-13.15	<b>Session I-</b> Role of Media in highlighting problems and protecting rights of electricity consumers.	<b>Panelist: Mr Rajendra Prasad Bora, Senior Journalist as Chair</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr S K Sonkhia, Suptd. Engineer, Jaipur Discom.</li> <li>• Mr R C Sharma, Joint Secretary, Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission.</li> <li>• Mr R G Gupta, Ex-CMD, Discoms</li> </ul>
13.15-13.40	<b>Session II-</b> Role of Media in highlighting problems and protecting rights of general consumers.	<b>Panelist: Mr Jai Singh Kothari, CEO, Nafa Nuksan as Chair</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr Vimal Jain, Rajasthan Patrika</li> <li>• Mr Lokpal Sethi, The Pioneer</li> </ul>
13.40- 13.45	Vote of Thanks	Mr. Dharmendra Chaturvedi, CUTS CART
13.45 onwards	<b>Lunch</b>	