

Strengthening Consumer Voices

The Way Forward in Rajasthan

Grassroots Reachout & Networking in
Rajasthan through Consumer Action (GRANIRCA)



25 years
1983 2008
CUTS International



Ministry of Consumer Affairs,
Food & Public Distribution
Government of India

#1116

About CUTS International

Established in 1983-84 as a rural development communications initiative, Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) is now at the cutting edge of the consumer movement in India, as well as across the globe, and has expanded into trade and development, competition, investment and economic regulation and human development. Today, CUTS International, with a staff of over 100, operates out of:

- Three programme centres in Jaipur (CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics & Environment, CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training and CUTS Centre for Competition, Investment & Economic Regulation) and one in Chittorgarh (CUTS Centre for Human Development);
- An advocacy centre in New Delhi and a Centre in Calcutta (focusing on Consumer Safety and Grassroots Economic Development), India; and
- Four resource centres in Lusaka, Zambia; Nairobi, Kenya; Hanoi, Vietnam; and Geneva, Switzerland.

The organisation elects its Board/Executive Committee every fourth year, while the Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General. Over 1200 individuals and 300 organisations are its members. The organisation is accredited to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Commissions for Sustainable Development (UNCSD).

CUTS works with several other regional, national and international organisations such as Consumer International (CI); International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD); South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE); World Trade Organisation (WTO); the World Bank; International Finance Corporation (IFC); Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); the Commonwealth Secretariat, East Africa Community Secretariat; various development cooperation and trade ministries all over the world; and, in India, various federal and state ministries and departments, National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD), the Consumer Coordination Council of India, etc. It also serves on several policy-making bodies of the Government of India.

CUTS International's vision is "consumer sovereignty" and mission is "consumer sovereignty in the framework of social justice and equality, within and across borders". In all its work, it follows the method of research-based advocacy and connects the grassroots with the international policy-making processes.

For more details about CUTS, please visit: www.cuts-international.org

CUTS CART

Established in 1996, CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART) is a Programme Centre of CUTS. This programme centre was created as a result of the diversification of CUTS in order to move ahead with its inherited agenda consumer protection and education and to create a more responsible society. Continuous pioneering work in the area of consumer protection found CART at the forefront of the consumer movement in India and beyond.

For more information please visit: www.cuts-international.org/CART/index.htm

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Rajasthan through Consumer Action (GRANIRCA)**



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Published by



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Implementing Organisation
CUTS International

With the support from:



Consumer Welfare Fund (CWF)
Department of Consumer Affairs
Ministry of Consumer Affairs,
Food & Public Distribution
Government of India

Sanction No. : O-11011/23/2007-CWF dated: 06/01/2010

Project Period: January 2010-December 2012

Reporting Period: January 2010-December 2011

Project Area: 12 Districts of Rajasthan: Alwar, Banswara, Bundi, Chittorgarh,
Churu, Dausa, Dholpur, Jalore, Jodhpur, Kota, Tonk and Sikar

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ISBN 978-81-8257-159-4

Printed by: M.S. Printer, Jaipur

#1116

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Background

Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) has been instrumental in bringing various changes at the policy level as well as in redressal mechanism for protection of consumer's interests. CUTS was also behind the enactment and strengthening of the Consumer Protection Act 1986. To know more about CUTS, *please visit <http://www.cuts-international.org>*.

However, even after about 25 years of enactment of such a dynamic and unique Act, the situation of consumers is still not good in India. The changed scenario of globalisation, technological advancement and emergence of various new sectors has further posed many new challenges before consumers today. Therefore, to address such issues, CUTS has initiated a project entitled, Grassroots Reachout & Networking in Rajasthan through Consumer Action (GRANIRCA) with the support of the Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Government of India under the Consumer Welfare Fund (CWF).

The objective of the project is to generate more capable consumers by way of equipping them with knowledge & skills and build up zealous grassroots activists through intensive training, capacity building and orientation programmes on consumer protection issues to create an enabling environment at the grassroots. The duration of the project is of three years, i.e. January 2010-December 2012. It would cover all seven divisions and would be implemented in 12 districts, i.e. Tonk, Chittorgarh, Kota, Bundi, Alwar, Banswara, Jodhpur, Jalore, Churu, Sikar, Dholpur and Dausa. *Please visit: www.cuts-international.org/cart/GRANIRCA*

The findings and recommendation mentioned in the advocacy documents emerged out of the field research studies as well as interactions/discussion with various stakeholders during project activities. This are result of joint efforts of GRANIRCA project team (Deepak Saxena, Amarjeet Singh, Arjun Kant Jha and Dharmendra Chaturvedi of CUTS CART) and district partners of the project (list is at the end of the report) under the overall guidance of George Cheriyan, Director, CUTS International & Head, CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART).

About the Project

Lack of consumers' access to adequate information, improper understanding about the redressal mechanism/procedure as well as other socio-economic vulnerabilities of individuals and households are the reasons of the under-privileged classes not getting justice.

To address the problem, CUTS is partnering with the Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Government of India, under the Consumer Welfare Fund (CWF), to implement the project entitled 'Grassroots Reachout & Networking in Rajasthan through Consumer Action' (GRANIRCA) in 12 districts of Rajasthan. The purpose of this project is to enhance strong consumer movement at the grassroots in seven divisions of the State by ensuring an enabling environment for protecting consumer's interests, which will, in turn, contribute to national interest.

Specific Objectives

The objective of the project is to build a strong consumer movement at the grassroots equipping consumer activists with skills and creating network of zealous grassroots' activists through intensive training, capacity building and orientation programmes on consumer protection issues.

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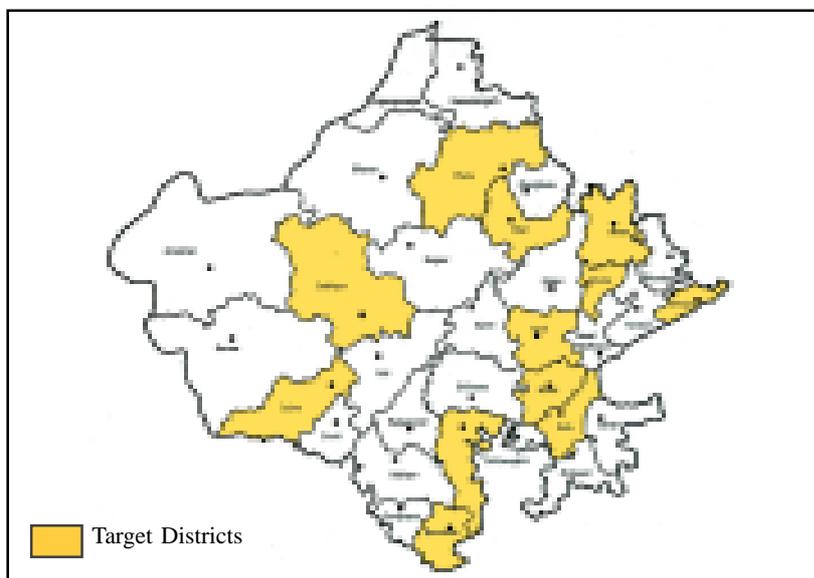
The project is being implemented by CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART) with financial assistance under the CWF by the Ministry of Food and Consumer Affairs, Government of India.

Expected Outcomes

- *Empowerment*: People will be assertive consumers to uphold their rights and fight for justice;
- *Questioning Society*: Civil society organisations (CSOs) will act as “watchdogs”;
- *Enforcement*: Better service delivery areas and efficient redressal mechanism;
- *Enabling Environment*: Protecting consumer’s interests, which will ultimately create an enabling environment for protecting the state interest;
- *Good Governance*: Contribute towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); and
- *Replicable Model*: The programme will result in a model of empowering consumers through networking and thus offer a model for further expansion in the identified district and elsewhere.

Duration and Coverage

The project is for a period of three years, i.e., January 2010 to December 2012, covering all seven divisions of Rajasthan, comprising 12 districts, namely, Tonk, Chittorgarh, Kota, Bundi,



Alwar, Banswara, Jodhpur, Jalore, Churu, Sikar, Dholpur and Dausa. The project map is given above:

*For more information please visit:
www.cuts-international.org/cart/GRANIRCA/index.htm*

Project Activities

- State launch-cum-orientation of district partnering organisations at Jaipur;
- Research activities include identification of NGOs, diagnostic survey of the consumer protection, needs assessment, field study, data collection, compilation and analysis of relevant consumer issues;
- Public interfaces/hearings and outreach meetings on consumer issues;
- District-level training workshops in each of the 12 district headquarters;
- State feedback roundtables to share and consolidate the learning's from various districts and build and strengthen the network;
- Media sensitisation workshops in each of the 12 districts and at the state level;
- Advocacy with the government agencies in identified divisions, Central and state government;
- Complaints Handling, Information and Advisory Services (CHIAS) through a dedicated cell at the district headquarters; and
- Publication of reports, briefing papers and newsletters and creation of a programme website and a collective communication device for wider outreach.

Purpose

The word advocacy is a combination of **Ad + Voca**. 'Ad' (means 'in favour of') and 'Voca' is to speak.... hence the literary meaning of the word 'advocacy' is to speak in favour of someone. In reference to social work, advocacy is to bring social issues of marginalised, disadvantaged or unorganised sections of society to the person in authority to address there..

There are various advocacy tools to choose from as per the requirement of the implementing organisation. Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) has a rich history of successful advocacy interventions on consumer issues.

This advocacy document present evidences of ground realities and suggest the corrective measures, so that concerned authorities can make informed decisions to address those issues.

The main objective of the advocacy document is to come out with key advocacy messages to be disseminated to policymakers. Key findings concluded from various project activities such as baseline consumer survey, public interface meetings, etc., are incorporated in the advocacy document.

The GRANIRCA project was formally launched in March 2009 and now it is about to complete two years. During the period, many project activities were conducted and during the implementation, project team got inputs/suggestions from wide range of stakeholders.

So, all those suggestions about the consumer issues and the findings of the annual field study activity are collated to present before the authorities responsible for consumer protection in the state and national level for their consideration and action in form of this advocacy document.

The advocacy points raised here will be addressed for the protection of consumer interests and the larger social benefit in the state of Rajasthan. These issues can also trigger actions in other states and at the national level, as scenario in other states is not much different.

Findings from Field Research of 1st Year (2010)

The primary objective of the research was to find out the status and performance of the key authorities/institutions (listed below) responsible for strengthening consumer protection at the district level in all the 12 project districts:

- District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forum
- District Collector
- District Supply Officer
- Drug Control Officer/Inspector
- Chief Medical and Health Officer
- District Weights and Measures Inspector

The secondary objective was to build the capacity of district partners about the functions and schemes etc. of these departments as well as to initiate communication between them and the partners.

Key Findings

- Out of 12, only seven district forums were having required three members, four were working with two members and District Forum at Sikar is defunct, having no member. Many members were not playing active role as envisaged under the Act.
- Very low percentage (only 26 percent) of cases is disposed within the prescribed period of 90 or 150 days under the Consumer Protection Act (COPRA).
- Very few (less than three percent) complaints were represented by consumers themselves without engaging any advocate.

- Appointment of drug inspectors at the District level was not satisfactory. They were given charge of two or three districts, which was hampering their work efficiency.
- Labs for testing of drugs/medicines in most of the districts was not established by the government and also they were not upgraded from time to time.

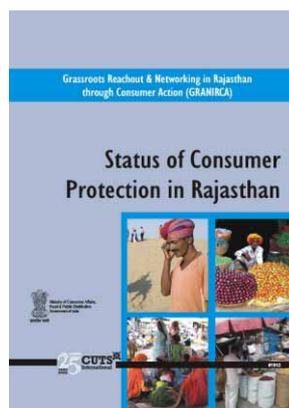
Advocacy Issues and Recommendations

- Consumer protection councils both at the State and District level should be made effective with immediate effect.
- The vacant positions at the district consumer forums should be filled for speedy redressal and resolution of consumer problems.
- There is need to enhance the resources and provide better infrastructure for active working of the district consumer forums.
- A separate Consumer Directorate should be set up in the state. Various consumer-related divisions should be brought under one common umbrella within the banner of Consumer Directorate, e.g., Weights and Measures, which is presently with Industries Department and similarly Food and Drug Inspector, who comes within the purview of the Medical and Health Department of the State government.
- Well-equipped product testing laboratories should be set up to keep a check on adulterated products in the market, preferably at the state and district levels.
- Advocates should be discouraged from entering the consumer forums, except in special circumstances.
- Information available at the district consumer protection councils, when made functional, should be published on the website.
- Price Control Commission should be set up at the State level in order to check and monitor inflation.
- State Consumer Welfare Fund should be made functional and the guidelines should be made public, in order to support small consumer organisations which have been in the field for years and are contributing to spreading consumer awareness at a greater magnitude.

- The vacancies in districts should be filled immediately and the recruitment process should start well in advance.
- Various departments should work in a proactive manner to protect the interest of consumers, not merely fulfil minimum targets.
- There should be separate department for legal metrology.
- Big districts should have more than one permanent District Forum.
- There should be proper follow up and monitoring of cases registered to ensure that the culprits are punished as soon as possible.
- The schemes of consumer clubs, financial assistance to consumers filing complaints, financial assistance to consumer organisations and reward to consumer activists should be provided adequate financial resources as well as proper implementation. These are crucial for ensuring consumer protection in the state.
- For better transparency and accountability, these departments should make proactive disclosure of their functions, schemes and action taken by them. Till date, the Consumer Fora do not have their websites even at the state level.

More details are available in the research document, which can be accessed form the project webpage.

www.cuts-international.org/CART/GRANIRCA/Research_Reports.htm



Findings from Field Research of 2nd Year (2011)

The objective of this research under the second year of the project was to gauge the consumer awareness level on consumer issues at the grassroots level. For this, 2349 consumers were targeted in 12 project districts of Rajasthan.

Part A of the perception survey was to know their level of awareness and perception about consumer rights and issues. Part B was to know consumer perception about issues related to edible items, especially *Atta* and Ghee.

- 35 percent respondents were unaware of their rights as a consumer and 26 percent knew these partially.
- A sorry figure of almost 42 percent expressed their ignorance about their responsibilities as a consumer and only 21 percent said that they know these partially.
- 85 percent of the total respondents expressed their awareness of the general definition of consumer, 37 percent had heard about the Act and the rest either did not know about it or had very little knowledge.
- Only 10 percent of respondents went to consumer fora for seeking redressal.
- 53 percent respondents showed their awareness of demanding bills and 55 percent said that they knew about MRP and its importance.
- 77 percent see the manufacturing and expiry dates before purchasing goods and 85 percent out of this 77 simply avoid buying these.

- As many as 69 percent check packed items, their expiry and manufacturing dates, etc., and normally hesitate in purchasing such items.
- With regard to food and drug inspectors also, respondents had heard and knew about them, but were not aware as to under which department they fall.
- Only 36 percent respondents were satisfied with government efforts and the rest felt that government's efforts are not reaching down the line.
- The awareness of the available present law on food security is meagre. 67 percent of respondents were unaware about the availability of law as such.
- Respondents often hesitated in taking action against adulterators simply because they did not know as to where they should approach.
- *Shudh ke liye yudh* was known to 51 percent, but 50 percent of the respondents have termed it as only partially successful government-run campaign.
- Respondents were not satisfied with the role of the government in curbing adulteration, despite its recent initiatives such as mobile labs and *shudh ke liye yudh abhiyan* and often sudden raids on adulterators.
- 70 percent of the respondents reported that, after “Ghee”, Edible Oil and Spices, basic commodities like *Aata* (Wheat flour), Milk, Pulses and Petroleum products are the most adulterated.

Recommendations

- The law should be implemented religiously within the objectives with which it was enacted, i.e. speed, just and economic redressal to consumers.
- Members should be appointed without political influences and connections.
- Retired judges or the judges on the verge of retirement should not be appointed as presidents of the District Forum, State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission and National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission.

- Members should have some sort of legal background so that they could actively take part in the forum's proceedings.
- Lawyers' presence should be restricted, though some respondents said that their presence should be made mandatory.
- The issue pertaining to consumers buying goods for the commercial purpose should be resolved, as it is creating confusion not only in consumers of all categories but also in legal fraternity.
- There should be some flexibility with regard to compulsion of producing bills and a system should be set in case consumer is not in a position to produce bills or other supporting documents.
- Time limit for giving redressal should be maintained.
- Vacancies of both members and presidents should be filled up prior to retiring of the incumbents.
- Active participation by media in all the workshops and getting acclimatised with the issues pertaining to consumer protection ultimately motivated them to work jointly on all such issues.

More details are available in the research document uploaded at the project webpage.

Advocacy Interventions

1. Including media and other stakeholders in the project advisory and resource group.
2. Involving media, policymakers and the implementing authorities in all project activities.



State Level Media Consultation Meeting, October 25, 2010, Jaipur

3. Submission of project activity and research reports to the Central and state governments.
4. Submission of memorandum to the Central and state governments on identified consumer issues.



Public Interface Meeting, June 23, 2010, Jodhpur

5. Organising state level feedback roundtable meetings involving consumers, media, policymakers and the implementing authorities.
6. Organised media workshops at district and state levels.
7. Circulating project findings and news on consumer issues to wider level through printed newsletters, e-newsletters and a dedicated project webpage.
8. Raising consumer issues with policymakers in other formal/informal meetings.

Some Success Stories

1. The District Consumer Protection Councils (DCPCs) were constituted in all the 33 districts of Rajasthan in year 2010 by the State Government.
2. Most of the vacancies in District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forum (District Forum) were filled up by the State government.
3. The State government for the first time appointed persons qualified to be a District Judge, as President District Forum in some districts, instead of the practice of appointing only retired district judges.



State Level Feedback Roundtable Meeting, December 15, 2010, Jaipur

4. The State government announced the establishment of two more district foras in both Jaipur and Jodhpur districts.



State Level Feedback Roundtable Meeting, November 29, 2011, Jaipur

5. Both print and electronic media provided more space to consumer issues.
6. State Department of Food, Civil Supply and Consumer Affairs started monthly interaction meeting with Voluntary Consumer Organisations, as suggested by project team during a meeting with the Principal Secretary of the Department.
7. The State government further intensified the action against food adulteration, adulteration at patrol pumps, etc.

Glimpses of Media Coverage





ISBN 978-81-8257-159-4



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