

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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World Consumer Right Day 2022 Fair Digital Finance

The United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection (UNGCP) were adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1985. The guidelines were revised in 1999 and again in 2015 to ensure that they are up-to-date and address the real challenges people worldwide face. The revised guidelines included a new section on sustainable consumption and e-commerce, financial services, other issues and implementation.

"Consumers from everywhere will benefit from digital financial services. Hence, digital financial services must be accessible, secure, confidential, and sustainable," said Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS in his opening address.

CUTS International organised the Conference on World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD) with the theme: 'Fair Digital Finance'. Mehta suggested WCRD should be one of the UN Days and the Department of Consumer Affairs should be strengthened at the National, State, and District levels.

Deepak Saxena, CUTS, highlighted that each year, consumer organisations come together to raise awareness of an essential issue to consumers worldwide. He discussed six consumer rights that are part of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

Munish P Kothari, former Regional Director of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), agreed that consumers should be aware of their rights. Kothari mentioned that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a critical role in raising consumer awareness.

Furthermore, Abhishek Kumar, Indicc Associate, spoke about Fair Digital Finance from a gender perspective, focusing on self help groups. He stated that 60 percent of the population in India does not have access to the Internet and there is a need for more capacity building.

Manoj Meena, Assistant Professor, University of Rajasthan, spoke about fraudsters targeting developing countries. People attempt to purchase low-cost products with doubtful security, and device manufacturers also play a crucial role in developing low-cost, secure chips. Meena claims that a consumer rights chapter should be included in the college curriculum, and young people should be aware of their consumer rights.

Rakesh Krishna Sharma, RBI, Regional Office, Jaipur, spoke about activities that the RBI and several banks are involved in. He said India is the number one country globally regarding digital transactions. We must be aware of fraud and take steps to stop it.

Amol Kulkarni, Director, CUTS International, moderated the opening session and proposed a vote of thanks. The Conference was attended by more than 35 participants representing the RBI, industry, academics, and civil society organisations (CSOs).



Combating Child Labour in Rajasthan

CUTS, in partnership with World Vision India (WVI) and Vagdhara launched the project, entitled 'Strengthening Formal and Informal Systems and Structures as well as the Capacities of Vulnerable Children and Households to Reduce Child Labour in Banswara and Pratapgarh, Rajasthan' at Pratapgarh on March 22, 2022. The project's objective is to reduce the incidences of harmful child labour by 50 percent by 2025 in Suhagpura block of Pratapgarh district and Ghatol block of Banswara district of Rajasthan.

Sangeeta Beniwal, Chairperson of Rajasthan State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (RSCPCR), was the Chief Guest. She delivered the inaugural address and formally launched the project. Prakash Chandra Sharma, District Collector, was the Guest of Honour. Charanjit Lal Meena, Additional Superintendent of Police, Pratapgarh, was a special guest. Around 70 participants attended, including *Pradhans*, *Sarpanchs*, other elected representatives, officials from various government departments and representatives from NGOs and CBOs of Pratapgarh district.

George Cheriyan and Sharma from Jaipur; Gauhar Mehmood from Chittorgarh; Kamlesh Kumar Jangid and Mohan Meghwal from Pratapgarh attended the event. Cheriyan, Sharma and Mehmood met with Sangeeta Beniwal and updated her about the preparations. After the event, the team visited the WVI office in Pratapgarh and had a meeting with Sasmita, Associate Director, WVI and her team and discussed issues related to the project budget.



Efficient Water Management is the Need of the Hour

"There is a need for a regulatory framework and reforms for efficient water management in India," said Gopal Krishna Agrawal, Author of the Book *"Water an element of life price sensitivity and consumption by the marginalised"*. He spoke in the webinar organised by CUTS to observe World Water Day 2022. He opined that currently, there are several conflicts about water, which are very important for public debate.



Bipul Chatterjee, Executive Director, CUTS, highlighted the relevance of the webinar topic and the gravity of the groundwater situation in our country.

Mathew Cherian, Chair, CARE India, spoke about how essential traditional knowledge is to recharge water. He stated that there is significant pressure on groundwater across the country, and reports are saying that states like Rajasthan would face severe crunch in the coming years.

Shubha Ramachandran, Head, Water Team, Biome Environmental Trust, shared her experience from the perspective of an urban or urbanised context. She reminded us how people living in cities are unaware of where the water comes from and where the wastewater goes.

Joydeep Gupta, South Asia Director, The Third Pole, claimed that India is the largest user of groundwater in the world in irrigation, which is certainly not moving in a sustainable direction. During the discussions, the panelists also voiced the vital role of local governments in water management.

Mehta pointed out that CUTS has dealt with these issues for many years. He said a whole government approach is required as most issues cover various ministries other than just Water Resource Ministry. More than 50 participants attended the webinar.

Indo-Pacific and India's Economic Reforms

Patricia Lacina, Chargé D'Affaires, Embassy of the United States of America in India, visited CUTS on March 11, 2022, along with a delegation of five other officials from the US Embassy in India. She had discussions with Mehta and CUTS team on Indo-Pacific and India's economic reforms.



Women's Commission should Speedily Resolve all Complaints

“State Women's Commission should make efforts for the speedy resolution of all complaints and cases pending at the Commission in a time-bound manner,” CUTS International suggested to the Commission on International Women's Day.



On occasion, Cheriyan and Sharma submitted a charter of key issues to Rehana Rayaz Chisti, Chairperson Women Commission Government of Rajasthan, to work on women's safety and protection.

Among the key issues on women's safety and protection that the organisation submitted include:

- establishing a scientific investigation cell at the Women Commission level to investigate and control crime against women by effectively coordinating with police etc.,
- creating women's advice and security centres in all the districts of the State and ensuring the participation of women members in these centres on behalf of voluntary organisations.

Vigilant committees involving local self-government bodies/CSO at the micro-level should make effective interventions when a crime against women is reported. It also suggests effective measures to deal with cases of domestic violence and women trafficking and other illegal activities and develop a mechanism for effective implementation of the Domestic Violence Act in the State.

Also, an appeal was made to the state government and urban local bodies to allocate specific budgets for constructing convenient and clean women's toilets in the Rajasthan cities. The Charter also suggests checking gender budgeting and effective implementation of Nirbhaya and women empowerment schemes in Rajasthan.

The chairperson promised to take immediate steps to implement the issues mentioned in the Charter. She also appreciated CUTS' work at the grassroots for the protection and safety of women and thanked for submitting a charter of key issues to the Commission.

Generating Demand for Effective Implementation of MVA Act 2019

In partnership with Public Affairs Foundation, CUTS organised two road safety events in Karnataka in March 2022. Singh attended and participated in the “Divisional Level Consultation on Generating Demand for Effective Implementation of MVA Act 2019” at Kalaburagi, Karnataka on March 10, 2022.

Yeshwanth V Gururkar, District Collector was the chief guest and NV Prasad, Regional Commissioner, Kalaburagi and C Mallikarjuna, Joint Commissioner, Transport, were special guests. Officials such as medical, transport and law students etc. attended the meeting. The event



also got good coverage in the print media as well.

Madhu Sudan Sharma participated in the District level Consultation with Enforcement officials of Road Safety in Belagavi, Karnataka, organised on March 25, 2022.

Divisional Commissioner, Police Commissioner of Belagavi, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Traffic, Regional Transport Offices (RTOs), District Transport Offices (DTOs), Transport Inspectors, District Trauma Care in charge of Belagavi district hospital, officials from the Public Works Department (PWD), Karnataka Roadways, Practicing lawyers on Motor Vehicle Act, 2019 and related issues and around 40 other officials and representatives participated in the consultation.



Cheriyan, Simi TB and Satyapal Singh participated in the Global Health Advocacy of India (GHAH) partners meeting on Front-of-package labeling in New Delhi on February 24 & 25, 2022. During the meeting, Cheriyan made a brief presentation on 'Industry Mapping Report' on February 24, 2022. He was also part of the panel discussion about the strategies to counter industry opposition, which Vandana Shah facilitated.

Simi TB made a presentation on 'SWOT analysis on advocacy for strong FoPL' on February 25, 2022. More than 20 participants from various organisations participated in the meeting and developed a plan of action to support the strong FoPL in India.

WEBINARS

- Amar Deep Singh, Amit Babu and Simi TB attended an online stakeholder consultation workshop organised by UN Environment Programme (UNEP) & World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) on January 25, 2022. The objective was to discuss research findings on communicating food sustainability to consumers.
- Simi TB attended a UN System Response to Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution webinar organised in partnership with the United Nations Environment Management Group (UN-EMG) and GRID-Arendal on January 13, 2022.
- Amit Babu attended the Hallmarking of Gold Jewellery webinar organised by the Bureau of Indian Standards, at New Delhi, on January 28, 2022.
- Pratibha Jain attended a webinar on 'India's target of eradicating TB by 2025 by Testing and Treating the Missing Millions with Tuberculosis' on January 11, 2022.
- Simi TB attended the Economist Impact 7th Annual Sustainability Week hosted by Economist Impact, virtual and physical, in London from March 21-24, 2022.
- Cheriyan was one of the panellists and Simi TB, Amit Babu and Pratibha Jain attended 'Warning Labels or Health Star Rating (HSR) on Unhealthy Food Products: What Should India Choose?' organised by Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) on March 09, 2022.
- Madhu Sudan Sharma participated in the webinar organised by Accountability Initiative on 'Making Governance in India simpler to understand' on March 15, 2022.
- Pratibha Jain attended a public dialogue on 'Our role in preventing child sexual abuse and trafficking' organised by Kailash Satyarthi Children Foundation (KSCF) and Bhaichara Foundation on March 31, 2022.

MEETINGS/DISCUSSIONS

- Cheriyan and Singh visited the Department of Consumer Affairs and met Rohit Singh, Secretary of Consumer Affairs, in New Delhi on February 25, 2022, wherein Cheriyan briefly discussed key consumer issues.
- Cheriyan attended a National level Colloquium on State Action Plans on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in India 2022, organised by WHO (India), ReAct (Asia Pacific) and World Animal Protection (India), in Delhi on March 14, 2022. He was one of the panelists in a session on 'Behavioural change and local action plans on AMR'.

ARTICLE

Why must Food Industries promote healthy and sustainable diets?

Nuffoods Spectrum, February 07, 2022

By George Cheriyan and Simi TB

Even well before the pandemic, food systems within a vast developing country like India faced enormous challenges in achieving equitable access to healthy, nutritious, sustainable and balanced diets. Now, COVID-19 has further pushed the country behind in reaching the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has caused widespread loss of livelihoods and incomes, threatening the food security, health, and nutrition of poor and marginalised people. This can be corroborated by the latest Global Hunger Index Report, where India has slipped to the 101st position of 116 countries from its 94th position in 2020. Let's examine where the food industry stands concerning churning out healthy and sustainable options for the post-pandemic, demanding consumer.

Catalyst ♦ 5