

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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Delivering Democracy Retrospect and Prospect

Democratic decentralisation is the power, responsibility, and authority of decision-making in different layers of government, which are Central, State and Local Self Governments. More powerful decentralisation is when more and more citizenries participate and contribute to the governance system, especially the local governance system. It is a fact that several issues can be efficiently solved at the local level only through empowered, innovative, resourceful, transparent, and accountable local governments.

Under C20, the working group on 'Delivering Democracy: Retrospect and Prospect' is one such group, which is organising multiple in-person knowledge assimilation events and roundtables, incorporating its various sub-themes at the national and regional levels. One of the regional roundtables for the north region was organised by CUTS International in Jaipur on June 07, 2023.



The roundtable featured a diverse group of participants from various sectors and states. The Chief Guest was Member of Parliament Ram Charan Bohra, and the keynote speaker was Kamal Chandra Yogi, a Professor from Central Sanskrit University. Rajib Dasgupta, Head of Research at Grassroots Research and Advocacy Movement also attended the roundtable.

The event saw the presence of PRI members, including *Pradhans* (*Panchayat Sarpanch* or *Zila Parishad* members) who were honoured by the Prime Minister of India for their innovative development initiatives aimed at promoting people's participation in a transparent and accountable manner. These PRI members hailed from Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

In addition to them, Mayors, Deputy Mayors (both current and former), representatives from urban local bodies (ULBs), civil society organisations (CSOs), and media representatives actively participated in the discussions.

The roundtable also had the presence of retired bureaucrats, development researchers, social activists on women, gender, Dalit rights and youth empowerment, Domain experts of Indian heritage, philosophy and culture, and youth and tribal movement activists. CUTS team members facilitated the roundtable and actively participated in the discussions. Hence, a total of 50 participants participated.

Enhancing City Governance

Capacity Building for Municipal Officials

To enhance the knowledge of municipal officials on urban issues, CUTS organised a Capacity Building Workshop at Jaipur, Rajasthan for ULB officials on May 25, 2023, under the project 'Improving City Governance' supported by the Australian High Commission.



effectively implement government schemes.

Amar Deep Singh, CUTS made a presentation on CUTS urban interventions and the need for capacity building of ULB officials. More than 30 participants, including officials from Jaipur Municipal Corporation Heritage and Greater along with CSOs working on urban governance participated. Participants appreciated the training workshop emphasising its value in enhancing service delivery by city governments.

D Sudhakar, Expert in Solid Waste Management delivered sessions on solid waste management, sustainable transportation and community participation. Kamaldeep Sharma, State Nodal Person, 15th Finance Commission spoke about the financial status of Rajasthan-based ULBs and presented ways to improve resources.

Himani Tiwari, State Nodal Person for Capacity Building at the Department of Local Self Governance, Government of Rajasthan, emphasised the importance of empowering city managers through capacity building to

Electricity Consumers in Rajasthan Bear Burden of Weak Distribution Company Finances

Electricity consumers in Rajasthan are paying irrational charges that unnecessarily burden their pockets. In the case of industry, it reduces their ability to produce efficiently and create wealth and jobs.

CUTS said that the whole economics of both homesteads and industry are unfairly burdened by the very high electricity bills. For example, fuel surcharges to the tune of ₹0.50 per unit over and above a high rate are being levied. The worst hit is the electricity-intensive industries some of which pay fuel surcharges as high as ₹50 lakhs per month, thus making them uncompetitive and regressive.

These surcharges are calculated on a quarterly basis and levied upon consumers when there is a cost escalation in the landed cost of fuel (generally coal) owing to increased market prices, transportation costs etc. But more often than not, these hefty charges are an indicator of operational inefficiencies of power distribution companies (discoms).

For instance, a special fuel surcharge of ₹0.07 per unit is currently added to the electricity bills to recover the financial liability suffered by the discoms following payment of ₹7,000 crore to Adani Rajasthan Power Limited on account of the discoms' failure in honouring the contractual liability that arose due to the import of coal on higher prices. This was done without any public consultations. The Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission has been challenged in the Rajasthan High Court for this move.

The transparency of the mechanism through which fuel surcharges are calculated is also in question as it generally is taken up by a third party to ensure credibility. However, it was not done in this case. On the flip side, Rajasthan is a leading producer of low-cost renewable energy. The installed solar energy in Rajasthan stands at 17 GW but not even one-third of this (5 GW) is purchased by discoms. The fact that power produced and consumed within the state can significantly reduce the costs associated with transmission and distribution losses, transmission infrastructure, grid augmentation etc. is continuously overlooked by RERC and the Energy Department.

If unchecked, the state, on the one hand, will likely end up being an exporter of low-cost renewable energy, while on the other, consumers will be forced to pay an exorbitant amount of money for electricity.



Regional Partner's Meeting on Global Road Safety

Madhu Sudan Sharma, Senior Programme Officer, CUTS participated in the Global Road Safety regional meeting on April 04, 2023. Global Road Safety Programme (GRSP) is working in various Asian countries and having its road safety partners in India, Vietnam, China, Malaysia, Philippines, and Bangladesh.



There was a country presentation on behalf of all the partners. India presentation was given by Save Life Foundation in which all the key activities of the Road Safety India network were included. Several CUTS activities were showcased in the presentation especially engaging with district road safety committee, Chief Secretary's Traffic Management Committee, Members of Parliament and others.

Sharma joined the two-wheeler group and shared his experiences and strategies formation for effective two-wheeler management in consultation with other country delegates. The meeting was full of interactions, experience sharing & cross learning.

7th UN Global Road Safety Week

CUTS actively participated in the 7th UN Global Road Safety Week from May 15-21, 2023. They organised various online and social media activities and joined events by GRSP partners in India and international organisations like Global Alliance of NGOs on Road Safety.

A webinar titled 'Rethinking Speeding and Helmet Issues in India: Challenges and Solutions' was organised on May 19, 2023, with prominent speakers, including officials from MORTH, AIIMS, and experts from different states. The webinar had a total of 11 speakers and over 60 participants.



GHAI Reviews FoPL Updates

GHAI organised a Partner's Meeting in New Delhi on June 22, 2023, to review the progress of the Front of Package Labelling (FoPL) Campaign. The meeting aimed to discuss project updates from partners for the current quarter and strategise on advocacy and communication plans. CUTS and other partners presented their activities from the previous quarter and shared upcoming plans for the next three months.

During the meeting, Ranjit Singh from GHAI provided insights into engaging with the Consumer Protection Authority through the Grievances Against Misleading Advertisements (GAMA) portal, specifically addressing misleading advertisements related to packaged food products.

Lopa Ghosh, GHAI's India Country Coordinator for the Cardiovascular Health Programme, discussed using media effectively to raise awareness about warning labels for foods high in fat, sugar, and salt.

Anup Kumar, Senior National Policy Consultant for Political and Policy Advocacy at GHAI, joined via Zoom to emphasise the importance of engaging with political leadership and continuous follow-up with policymakers for a meaningful impact.



ASCI Academy Launch

Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) and CUTS team had a Zoom meeting dated June 05, 2023, for future collaboration and the ASCI academy launch programme. ASCI and CUTS signed an MoU dated June 09, 2023, for future collaboration on misleading advertisements in India.



Internship in CART

While the internship of Tashreen Khan and Krishna Sharma from Vivekananda Global University joined CUTS CART for three months is going on, Kashika Gupta of Symbiosis School of Liberal Arts, Pune has joined CUTS CART as a volunteer on June 14, 2023.

ProScope Activities in Full Swing

During the extended phase of April-September 2023, the activities started from April 2023 onwards. During April-June 2023, activities under the ProOrganic section of the project, such as village-level awareness campaigns, inception meetings for school clubs and kitchen gardens and knowledge-sharing meetings for seed cell systems, were held in 12 districts.

Under the Sustainable Consumption Practices part of the project, a planning meeting with partners was held, under which new strategies were discussed.



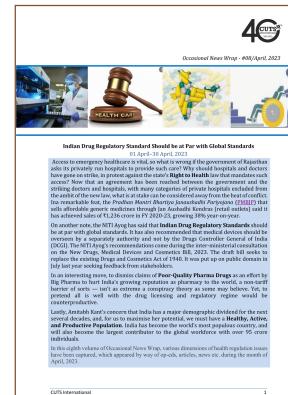
WEBINARS/MEETINGS/VISITS

- Amrat Singh participated in the 'National Conference on Inclusive Rural Growth and Development' organised by Confederation of Indian Industry in New Delhi on April 06, 2023. He also participated in the International Conference on 'Delivering Democracy: Prospects and Retrospect' organised by GRAM in Bengaluru on April 12-13, 2023.
- Simi TB attended C20 Policy Roundtable entitled 'Addressing Climate and Biodiversity with Local Stakeholders: Strategies, Challenges & Solutions' on April 17, 2023. She also attended an event 'Introducing EnfTech: A Technological Approach to Consumer Law Enforcement' organised by University of Reading in collaboration with United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on April 20, 2023.
- Madhu Sudan Sharma participated in the Child Road Safety Workshop at Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi organised by Global Road Safety Partnership and Centre for Environment Education, Pune on May 29-30, 2023.
- Singh with Nilanjana Sharma participated in a UN Global Compact Network India Multi-Stakeholders Workshop on Collective Action: Uniting Together—Addressing Healthcare Challenges through Ethical Business Practices and Collective Action at State Institute of Health & Family Welfare, Jaipur on May 30, 2023.
- Singh along with Yatika Agrawal participated in the HCL Grants Symposium organised by HCL Tech in association with the Indian Institute of Health Management Research University on June 15, 2023.
- Simi TB attended a webinar on Fostering Educational Processes and Community Engagement: Dialogues for a Sustainable World, organised by C20 India 2023 Working Group on Sustainable and Resilient Communities in collaboration with UNESCO Chair on Experiential Learning for Sustainable Innovation & Development on June 28 2023.

PUBLICATIONS

Three issues of ONW of April, May and June, 2023

<https://cuts-cart.org/occasional-news-wraps/>



Dossier

CUTS on Road Safety in India

<https://cuts-cart.org/pdf/dossier-cuts-on-road-safety-in-india.pdf>

