

**Grassroots Reachout and Networking in Rajasthan through
Consumer Action
GRANIRCA**

Detailed Report on
District Level Training Workshop
Year 2011



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1 Background

Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) is pursuing social justice and economic equity within and across borders. CUTS serves on several policy-making bodies of the Government of India. CUTS was responsible for the enactment and strengthening of the dynamic *Consumer Protection Act (COPRA)*, 1986, the likes of which has not been seen anywhere in the world. It developed a draft *National Consumer Policy* at the request of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs (MoCA), Government of India (GoI).

Continuing with the interventions in the area of consumer education and protection, CUTS signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the MoCA, Food and Public Distribution, GoI, to implement a unique project, entitled GRANIRCA, on January 08, 2010, which will build a strong consumer movement at the grassroots by equipping consumer activists with skills and creating a networking of zealous grassroots activists through intensive training, capacity building and orientation programmes on relevant consumer protection issues. The project is being implemented in 12 districts of Rajasthan, representing all five zones.

The first phase of Public Interface Meetings (PIMs) was conducted in 12 districts of Rajasthan to propagate the rights and responsibilities of consumers at the grassroots and initiate a dialogue with the people, in between the people and redressal agencies and among buyers and sellers. These meetings generated curiosity and demand among the mass for exposure and acquaintance with the process and procedures for approaching the existing appropriate authority for redressal of grievances, which becomes the ground for *District Level Training Workshops (DLTWs)*.

Activities proposed in the project would be conducted in the next two years in the projected 12 districts, starting from the districts to the *Panchayats*.



2 Introduction

The COPRA, 1986, has come as a panacea for consumers all over the country and has become the most important legislation enacted in the country during the last few decades. It has become a vehicle for enabling people to secure speedy and inexpensive redressal of their grievances.

Despite various measures taken by the government and several consumer organisations working on the issue, a majority of Indian consumers are still not aware of the provisions of the COPRA, 1986, and its implementation mechanisms.

As per the survey report commissioned by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), a whopping 78 percent consumers feel the government is not making efforts for safeguarding consumer rights, leaving the consumers to grapple with "market forces" at a time when increase in prices of commodities, arbitrary profit margins and delays in redressing consumers' grievances have become the order of the day. Consumers spend as much as 82 percent on lawyers' fees in consumer courts, defeating the very purpose for which the COPRA was enacted.

Most of the consumers are not aware that they can represent themselves in consumer courts through a simple complaint. The recently conducted survey in 12 districts shows that very few (less than three percent) complaints are represented by consumers themselves, without engaging any advocate. Amendments in the Act are promoting engagement of advocates, making the process complicated.

Therefore, it necessary to build a strong consumer movement at the grassroots, by equipping the consumer activists with knowledge and skills through intensive training, capacity building and orientation programmes on consumer protection issues, to create an enabling environment at the grassroots.

2.1 Objectives

- Understanding the consumer protection issues and the status of redressal mechanisms and awareness generation among the common consumers, especially in rural areas;
- Building up of a large group of aware and literate grassroots activists, who, in turn, can mobilise and assist illiterate and helpless consumers to access consumer justice and uphold their rights;
- Creating a vibrant network of small consumer organisations, groups and interested individuals, extending down to the block level;
- Enhancing the capacity of identified CSOs to handle emerging and relevant consumer issues woven around the basic needs, ensuring improvement in service delivery and playing the "watchdog" role in their respective districts; and
- Building blocks for strengthening and sustaining consumer movement at the grassroots.

2.2 Clientele Group

- a. State Key Resource Persons;
- b. Retired and present officials from line department;
- c. Advocates;
- d. Present and past elected representatives belonging to *Panchayats, Nagar Parishad* and *Zila Parishad*;
- e. Activists working on consumer protection issues; and
- f. Common consumer/people.

2.3 Duration: Two days

2.4 No. of Participants: Average 35

2.5 Methodology

- a. Lecture-cum–discussions;
- b. Group exercises;
- c. Case studies;
- d. Panel discussions;
- e. Demonstration;
- f. Practice;
- g. Role plays;
- h. Mock exercises; and
- i. Brainstorming group exercises presentations.



2.6 Reading Material

Programme Guidelines, Training Manual in Hindi, hands on experience and practice sessions.

2.7 Resource Persons: Apart from GRANIRCA team members (Deepak Saxena, Amarjeet Singh, Arjun Kant Jha and Dharmendra Chaturvedi), CUTS also availed the services of locally available subject experts, along with the District Partner.

2.8 Workshop Schedule & Participants: Apart from participants, people from the media, the judiciary, the administration and service providers participated in the programme as resource persons. A wide coverage was given by the print as well as electronic media. News clipping of the programme is annexed as annexure A.

S. No.	Date	District	Participation
1.	August 29-30, 2011	Tonk	50
2.	September 05-06, 2011	Dholpur	50
3.	September 05-06, 2011	Kota	62
4.	September 08-09, 2011	Dausa	67
5.	September 08-09, 2011	Alwar	36
6.	September 12-13, 2011	Churu	36
7.	September 12-13, 2011	Chittorgarh	36
8.	September 20-21, 2011	Jodhpur	47
9.	September 22-23, 2011	Jalore	77
10.	September 26-27, 2011	Bundi	48
11.	September 29-30, 2011	Sikar	51
12.	November 02-03, 2011	Banswara	50

3. Proceedings

3.1 Overview of the Project and Objective of Training Workshop: The local district partners began the workshop by welcoming the participants by introducing the project objectives and objective of the training programme. In their inaugural speeches, they said that the workshops were to create an enabling and comfortable atmosphere for the participants to interact without any hesitation and make them aware of the existing consumer redressal mechanism. The district partners also talked about last year's project intervention in the districts.



3.2 Brief History of Consumer Movement: The project team traced the Brief History of Consumer Movement in the workshop, which incorporates Consumer Protection in Ancient India, consumer co-operatives, birth of consumer organisations, the emergence of consumer movement and the historical speech delivered by John F Kennedy in 1962 to US Congress in which he extolled four basic consumer rights, later called 'The Consumer Bill of Rights' and United Nations guidelines adopted in 1985 and revised in 1999.

Adding to the brief history of the consumer movement, the project team highlighted CUTS' intervention in and contribution to the field of consumer movement and its outreach and outcome. The participants were informed that CUTS' mandate is to equip the consumers with knowledge and skills to build a strong consumer movement at the grassroots, through intensive training, capacity building and orientation programmes on consumer protection issues, to create an enabling environment at the grassroots.

3.3. Introduction of Consumer Protection Act, 1986: The participants were told about the important features of the Consumer Protection Act (COPRA) such as simple procedure; no need of advocate; inexpensive to complainant; time-bound proceeding; quasi-judicial; prevention of misuse; and consumer protection and welfare provisions. The CPA, which applies to all goods and services, unless specifically exempted by the Central Government, covers all sectors – private, public and co-operative. The provisions of the Act are compensatory in nature. It provides adjudication authorities, which are simple,

speedy and less expensive. It also provides for consumer protection councils at the national, state and district levels. The provisions of this Act are in addition to, and not in derogation of, the provisions of any other law for the time being in force.

3.4. Definition of Key Phrases: Information was provided on key phrases, such as consumer, deficiency in services, restrictive and unfair trade practices.

3.5. Grievance Redressal Mechanism under COPRA: The main purpose of this session was to develop a cadre of activist networks and partnerships that can further carry forward the lessons learned and also strengthen consumer's rights; make the participants



acquainted of the procedures and process of nearest redressal forum and assist the adoption and implementation of an integrated approach to social policy, programmes and services. The participants were provided the conceptual and theoretical base for micro-level planning for putting forward the grievances and agony in a legalised method.

It was ensured that participants

should be backed by proper information, guidance and skills in adopting and applying grievance redressal mechanism at the micro-level.

Further, the project team detailed the steps to be taken to approach the consumer forum for filing complaint, which includes topics “who can file the complaint in consumer forum”, “where to approach”, “time limit for filing of complaints and circumstances”, “time limit for appeal”, “relief available to consumers in present scenario”, “precautions to be taken by consumers” (before, during and after purchase), “procedure for writing a complaint for submitting at district consumer forum”, “fee levied for filing a complaint” and “evidences/documents to be annexed with complaints”. Consequently, a simulation exercise session was also conducted in groups, which built the confidence level of participants.

3.6 Other Consumer Issues: Print as well as electronic media's advertisements are basically meant to promote a product or a service, one does see some exaggeration in the way they extol the virtues of the product. But, when it goes beyond that and deliberately utters a falsehood or tries to misrepresent facts, thereby misleading the consumer, then it becomes objectionable and, to counter such advertisements, protest/complaint should be filed at Advertising Standards Council of India.

On the issue of “Standards”, the project team briefed the participants about the



existing standards. The participants were informed that expiry date, production date, ingredients, MRP, weights/measures and terms and conditions are part of standardisation and compulsory for packed products.

Insurance, banking, telecom and allied services are also accountable to consumer. Regulatory bodies such as the Banking Ombudsmen, the Insurance Regulatory Development Authority (IRDA), etc., have been constituted to safeguard the interest of consumers.

3.7 Describing the tools to be used for effective action by government authorities, the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005 mandates timely response to citizen requests for government information. The initiative provides quick information to the citizens on the details of first Appellate Authorities, Public Information Officers, etc., amongst others, besides access to RTI related information/disclosures published on the web by various Public Authorities under the Government of India as well as the state governments.

4. Open Discussion: In the two-day training programme, during open discussions, people

expressed dissatisfaction with service providers, especially the Electricity Department, Telecom and Insurance agencies. These agencies do not respond to consumers in a positive way. Participants’ complaints related to PDS, LPG and water supply etc. were suitably responded by the department’s representatives and/or by the project team.



5. Highlights

- Various government department authorities attended meetings and gave valuable information to participants.
- District consumer forums and weights and measures departments' showcased their day to day activities.
- Wide representation from each block at respective districts including women and youths.
- Participants expressed their desire to extend the learning of the workshop.

6. Feedback

- Similar specific-issue based programmes with short duration should be conducted.
- Expansion of consumer forums at the sub-district level so that overburdened district consumer forum may work smoothly.
- Local governance must be incorporated in the movement.



7. Outcome

- There was an increase in the number of people having the capacity, skill and knowledge to support consumer rights in the project districts.
- Build a network of motivated people belonging to different aspect, which will further be supporting the consumer movement.



Programme Agenda

DAY ONE		
15 Minutes	Registration and Welcome	District Partner
15 Minutes	Overview of the Project and Objective of Training Workshop	District Partner
45 Minutes	Brief History of Consumer Movement	GRANIRCA Team
45 Minutes	Introduction to Consumer Protection Act, 1986	GRANIRCA Team and/or Resource Person/Guest Speaker
30 Minutes	Definition of Key Phrases	
01 Hour 15 Minutes	Grievance Redressal Mechanism under Consumer Protection Act	
<i>Lunch Break</i>		
45 Minutes	Procedures for Filing Complaint, Fee and Complaint drafting	GRANIRCA Team
01 Hours	Tea and Simulation Exercise	GRANIRCA Team
DAY TWO		
09:30 AM – 10:00 AM	RECAP SESSION	Participants
10:00 AM – 11:30 AM	Some Consumer Issues: Misleading Advertisements, Standards of Goods and Services Second Generation Consumer Issues: Telecom Services, Electricity Services, Banking/Financial Services, Insurance Sector and Medical Profession	GRANIRCA Team
<i>Open Session and Tea Break</i>		
12:00 PM – 02:30PM	Open Discussion, Some Burning Consumer Issues, Feedback, Questions & Queries and Suggestions	GRANIRCA Team, District Partners and Participants
<i>Lunch</i>		
03:00PM – 04:00 PM	Use of RTI as Grievance Redressal Tool	GRANIRCA Team

