

CUTS CRC Activity Report

October-December 2010

ONGOING
PROJECTS

Grassroots Reachout & Networking in India on Trade & Economics (GRANITE), Phase II

CUTS Calcutta Resource Centre (CRC), in partnership with CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics & Environment (CITEE), and with the support of Royal Norwegian Embassy, New Delhi and Oxfam India has been implementing a project in West Bengal, entitled 'Grassroots Reachout & Networking in India on Trade & Economics' (GRANITE), since 2005. The project is presently in its second phase. The first phase of the project was aimed at capacity building of grassroot civil society organisations (CSOs) on trade and development issues.

In the second phase, the project focussed on understanding whether and how the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) of India has impacted or not impacted export of specific products. To this end, CUTS CRC conducted a case study on tea export from West Bengal.

Through the study, an attempt was made to understand: firstly, whether India's FTP was instrumental in increasing tea export from West Bengal and, secondly, if export of tea is increasing from the state then whether the benefits are trickling down to the grassroots and, lastly, if tea export is not increasing then identifying the major bottlenecks and advocate with the concerned agencies on how such problems can be dealt with.

Under the project, a research study was first conducted on the tea economy of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts of West Bengal. The research included interview and focussed group discussions with tea growers, exporters, packeteers and government officials.

<http://www.cuts-international.org/CRC/GRANITE-II/index.htm>

Grahoker Mukho-Mukhi

Consumer Camps are being organised by the Centre in partnership with local clubs and associations in and around Kolkata. The activity being undertaken with support from Calcutta Electric Supply Company (CESC) Ltd aims to raise awareness and assist consumers with basic queries about electricity supply and services, safety issues, energy conservation, etc.; provide consumers a platform to get their grievances redressed; and function as a two-way communication platform between the consumers and the utility. In total, 50 camps are planned under this initiative, out of which seven have already been organised.



25 years
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Consumer Assistance Cell at Grassroots (CONASC)

CUTS CRC, with the support of West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (WBSEDCL) is working on a pilot project entitled, 'Consumer Assistance Cell at Grassroots' (CONASC). Under the project, CUTS will open a number of assistance cells for electricity consumers in nine districts of West Bengal, viz., North Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Purulia, West Midnapore, Howrah, North 24 Parganas and Nadia. In each of the districts, five group electricity supply areas were selected where such assistance cells would be formed. The main objective of the project is to form CONASC at sub-divisions to improve and supplement the service delivery at the grassroots, with focus on improving the grievance redressal system of the utility service provider.

Specific objectives of the project are to:

- a) build consumer capacity on the rights and responsibilities of electricity consumers, as laid down by the Electricity Act 2003 and relevant regulations;
- b) educate them on the provisions laid down in regulations regarding new and temporary connection procedures, supply quality, consumer grievance redressal mechanism, etc.;
- c) assist consumers in:
 - o Basic queries about electricity supply,
 - o Filling up forms for new and temporary connections,
 - o Information on relevant offices and officials, certified electricians, wiring, safety issues, etc.,
 - o Understanding bills and different components and charges mentioned in it,
 - o Complaint registration and required follow-up, and
 - o Understanding the perils and disadvantages of power theft;
- d) organise interactive sessions involving consumers and utility officials to help in a smoother communication channel, better service delivery and hence higher consumer satisfaction; and
- e) build awareness and find solutions/mechanism to plug power theft by people's participation.

Domestic and agricultural consumers in the rural and sub-urban areas constitute the principal target group for the project. Under the project, nine CSOs in the nine districts had been selected. CRC, along with WBSEDCL, trained two representatives from each of the district partners who will be in charge of the CONASC cells in their respective districts. In the next step, these CSOs will organise a number of dissemination and capacity building workshops with electricity consumers. In addition, these CSO representatives will also sit in the cells at a particular time and day of the week to listen to consumer complaints and guide them on how to go about a particular problem.

<http://www.cuts-international.org/CRC/CONASC/index.htm>

REPRESENTATIONS



- Keya Ghosh and Arnab Ganguly attended an event, entitled, 'National Seminar on Rural Consumers in Globalising Market: Vulnerability & Choices', organised by the Department of Sociology, University of Kalyani, West Bengal, in association with the Centre for Consumer Studies and the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, during December 15-16, 2010. Keya made a presentation during the session entitled 'Working of Rural Consumer Organisations and Institutions' on December 16, 2010.
- Keya Ghosh attended an event, entitled, 'Low Carbon High Ambition', organised by the British Deputy High Commission, in Kolkata on November 20, 2010.

Local-level Advocacy Workshops

The Centre organised two local level workshops under the GRANITE Project in Jalpaiguri and Siliguri district of West Bengal on August 19 & 21, 2010 respectively. The main objective of the workshops was to present the research findings and identify major advocacy points to be taken up at the state-level advocacy workshop based on feedback from the various category stakeholders.

Deba Prasad Roy, Member of Legislative Assembly, Jalpaiguri, and Member, Tea Board of India, attended the workshop in Jalpaiguri and delivered the inaugural address. In Siliguri, Amal Roy Choudhury, Deputy Director Tea Development, Tea Board of India, Siliguri, was the chief guest for the workshop.



Representatives from various business associations, trade unions and small tea growers association attended both the workshops and provided their valuable feedback on the subject. Many participants in Siliguri, for the first time, came to know that Organic Ekta, a small tea growers association in Darjeeling, exists and that they are producing good quality organic tea. Members of Organic Ekta thanked CUTS for inviting them to the workshop, from which they came to know about various schemes available from the Tea Board of India, targeted for development of the Small Tea Growers.

State-level Advocacy Workshop

A State-level advocacy workshop under the GRANITE project was held in Kolkata on September 23, 2010. The main objective of the workshop was to present major findings of the case study and put forward appropriate recommendations, as gathered from the local-level advocacy workshops.

Agneshwar Sen, Director General, Foreign Trade, West Bengal, was the chief guest for the event. Gaganesh Sharma, Deputy Director, Tea Board of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industries, Government of India, was the panellist and shared his views on various recommendations put forth by CUTS. Other distinguished guests included Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty, Acting Chairman, United Forum for Small Tea Growers Association; Jalpaiguri, D Sengupta, Indian Chambers of Commerce, Kolkata.





Training of Trainers Workshop

CR, in association with WBSEDCL under the CONASC project, organised a Training of Trainers workshop in Kolkata on October 08-09, 2010. Two representatives from each of the district partners attended the workshop. Training was imparted to the participants on issues like:

- How to get new and temporary connection?
- How to calculate the electricity bill?
- What is security deposit and how it is calculated?
- What is the grievance redressal mechanism laid down in the regulations?
- Simulation exercises.



P K Chakraborty, Ombudsman, West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission, and officials from WBSEDCL were part of the resource team who explained and demystified the regulations, processes and handled queries from the participants.



Awareness Generation Workshops

A series of Awareness Generation Workshops were organised under the CONASC project in five CCCO areas under each district during October-December 2010. 37 such meetings were organised, reaching out to around 1600 consumers in eight districts.

Capacity Building Workshop

A capacity building workshop with 50 electricity consumers was organised by the Chanchal Jana Kalyan Samity (district partner in Malda) in the Chanchal sub-division of Malda district in West Bengal, on November 27, 2010.



Labourers Are Living in Distress

Anandabazar Patrika, August 20, 2010

Though many of the tea estates in Dooars had reopened, yet the labourers in those estates still live in distress, said Deba Prasad Roy, Member, Tea Board of India, and Member of the Legislative Assembly, Jalpaiguri Sadar, at a workshop organised by an international non-governmental organisation. He also said that once a private company acquires a closed tea estate, the State Government withdraws many of the benefits, as a result of which, many of the aged workers are not getting employment.

<http://www.anandabazar.com/archive/1100820/20sil7.htm>

An In-depth Discussion on Export of Tea

Uttar Banga Sambad, August 22, 2010

Consumer Unity & Trust Society organised a workshop entitled *India's National Foreign Trade Policy, 2009-14 and the Tea sector in West Bengal: Opportunities and Challenges* in Siliguri. Experts who were present at the workshop discussed issues on how the Indian Tea is competing in the international markets. An informative discussion on the problems facing the tea sector and what could be the future road map for addressing those problems took place at the workshop.

http://www.uttarbangasambad.com/Admin/uploadedfiles/2010-08-22_page9.pdf