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Transparency in delivery of entitlements through empowered Civil Society Organisations (CSOs): The Consortium of Groups for Combating Corruption (CGCC) model in Rajasthan, India

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Abstract. This paper presents an innovative model called “Consortium of Groups for Combating Corruption (CGCC) for the promotion of transparent and accountable government at the Gram Panchayat (GP) level in the Province of Rajasthan in India. Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), a Rajasthan based international organisation, has attempted to improve the functioning of government at the Gram Panchayat by means of this model. This model proved to be very successful in curbing corruption and creating transparency. The process of seeking information using the provisions of the Right to Information Act (hereafter termed RTI) not only brought several cases of corruption to light, but also increased citizens’ engagement. This further inhibited GP officials and other service providers from engaging in corrupt practices. In turn, this has mitigated instances of corruption. The intervention was implemented in a phased approach. Learning from each phase as it was implemented provided the groundwork for the intervention of the next phase. The CGCC was instrumental in all phases of intervention and worked as a sustainable model as people continue to approach it to seek its assistance.

Keywords. RTI, Transparency, Accountability, Governance, Corruption, MGNREGS, CGCC, India, Rajasthan

1. Background

Corruption lies at the core of poor governance. It is the most significant obstacle to efforts to overcome poverty in developing countries. Anecdotal and survey evidence suggest that corruption is rampant in the developing world and more prevalent in developing countries than in rich ones. Yet, there are remarkably few reliable estimates of the actual magnitude of corruption. Those that do exist reveal a high level of heterogeneity (for a summary of the survey evidence, see Olken & Pandey, 2012).

During a period of three consecutive financial years,¹ the Indian government has allocated more than USD 15 billion for the delivery of entitlements, like employment, education, health, food etc., through its flagship programmes. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is one such schemes. Niehaus and Sukhtankar (2010) has estimated corruption to represent as much as 79% of the labour expenditures.

TII-CMS India Corruption Report 2007, which

was released on June 28, 2008 by the Vice President of India, has estimated that one third of people who live below the poverty line in India paid bribes up in 2007 of up to USD 18.5 million to obtain their fundamental entitlements and basic services. These services included access to healthcare, education, water and even acquiring a ration card for PDS or being registered under the MGNREGS. In another global survey, Transparency International (TI) found that 54% Indians paid one or more bribes in 2009.

Corruption can have negative consequences on efficiency by its impact on government’s provision of goods and services. There is a loss in efficiency because projects that would be cost-effective at the true costs are no longer cost-effective after the costs of corruption have been included. Second, corruption can create additional inefficiencies, and thus costs, by distortions. Corrupt officials usually cannot steal cash directly, as that would be easily detected; instead, they need to go through a variety of more convoluted procedures to extract their loots. These convoluted procedures may induce inefficiencies that can be greater than the direct cost of corruption itself (Olken & Pandey, 2012).

¹ 2010-11, 2011-12 & 2012-13

Information is power. Thus, public officials who seek personal gains using their position often attempts to withhold information in order to increase the opportunity for corruption. In fact, this was usually legitimised by a colonial law, the Official Secrets Act (1923), under which the disclosure of official information by public servants is an offence. But the enactment of the RTI Act in India on October 12, 2005 transferred the power of information into the hands of ordinary people. It provided the power to access information about anything where public money is involved, except for a few items that are related to the nation's security. The provision of proactive disclosure of all relevant information to the public was a very effective measure against corruption.

The enactment of RTI was possible after several long and deep-rooted grassroots struggles by civil society organisations (CSO) which began during the beginning of the 1990s. CSOs in Rajasthan² have been in the forefront of these grassroots struggles and *Mazdoor Kisaan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS) led this movement. The movement for the right to information received a fresh impetus from a courageous and powerful grassroots struggle of the rural poor for the right to access information and to combat the rampant corruption in famine relief.

The reverberations during this struggle led to a nationwide demand for a law to guarantee the right to access information to every citizen. It received widespread support from social activists, professionals, lawyers, and persons within the bureaucracy, politics and the media, who are committed to transparent and accountable governance and to empowerment of the people. RTI caused a revolution in providing citizens with the right to demand information from government agencies and to see the official documents. As a result of this 15 year long struggle, different state governments passed a law to guarantee the people's right to access information and the state of Rajasthan was one of them. Later, in 2005, the same was enacted by the central government.

Although the movement to enact the RTI took root and grew in Rajasthan, the citizens' low awareness of it led to underutilisation of the Act. The National Convention on One Year of RTI that was held in New Delhi from 13-15 October 2006 concluded with the warning that citizen awareness of RTI was very low, especially in rural areas. Civil society organisations knew that generating awareness of RTI provisions was one of the primary requirements for effective implementation of the RTI Act. It was a well-known fact that RTI would remain toothless, unless people learned of its power and potential.

In order to overcome this challenge, CUTS, together with the Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF), devised an intervention with the goal of combating corruption by means of the RTI Act. The plan was to create a cadre of people who were effective in using RTI at the grassroots level. The intention was to create a cadre of persons who were capable of performing three tasks: 1) generating awareness of the provisions of RTI among ordinary people, 2) providing support to ordinary citizens in using RTI, and 3) improving delivery of entitlements

and services by reducing corruption in flagship schemes.³

2. The Intervention

The intervention that was piloted by CUTS and outlined in this article was a six-year endeavour that proved to be successful in promoting a 'citizens against corruption' movement. It was implemented in three phases, each of which was built upon what had been learned in previous phases. The first phase of the initiative included generating awareness of the provisions of the RTI Act. This helped ordinary people to realise what powers had been transferred to them as a result of the enactment of RTI and how to utilise them for their benefit. This phase was executed during 2007-08 in nine administrative districts belonging to two divisions⁴ of Rajasthan, namely Jaipur and Ajmer. The second phase focused on applying the awareness and knowledge acquired through capacity building activities in the first phase. The CGCC members engaged in the processes of GP to improve the delivery of entitlements under three government programmes. These were the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)⁵, *Swarn Jayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojna* (SGSY)⁶ and *Indira Awaas Yojna* (IAY),⁷ which were managed by rural development departments in two districts of Rajasthan. The CGCC members also assisted two village councils to develop as a model *Gram panchayat*⁸ with complete transparency and freedom from corruption.

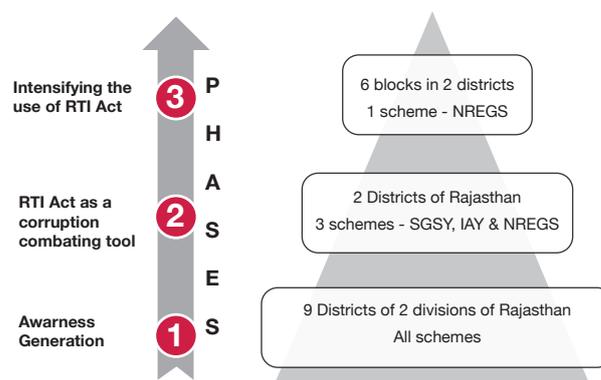


Figure 1. The three phases of the RTI Act

² Rajasthan is, geographically, the largest province in India. It divided into seven regions, each of which is further divided into four to six districts. The province contains a total of 33 districts, the most of any Indian province.

³ Schemes and programmes can be used interchangeably.

⁴ Rajasthan is divided into 7 regions (Ajmer, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bharatpur, Bikaner, Udaipur and Kota) and 33 Districts.

⁵ NREGA is a programme in which the adult members of any rural household, irrespective of caste, economic status, etc. who are willing to do unskilled manual work, are eligible for work for up to 100 days a year.

⁶ SGSY is a self-employment programme that provides assistance to the rural poor who live below the poverty line (BPL) to establish micro-enterprises through bank credit and government subsidy to create an income-generating asset.

⁷ *Indira Awaas Yojana* is a Government of India social welfare programme to provide housing for the rural poor in India.

⁸ Gram Panchayat is a constitutional body formed by elective procedure. They are important institutions that implement all kind of development and welfare activities at the level of village or cluster of villages. The size of Gram Panchayat communities can vary, but generally the community's population is between 2000 and 3000.

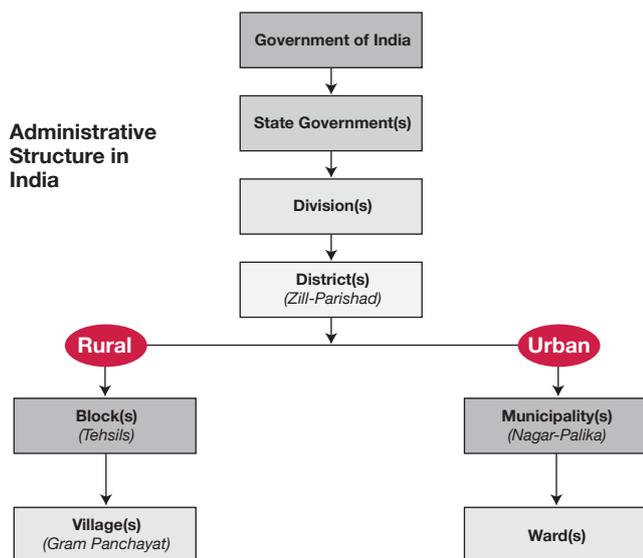


Figure 2. India's Administrative Structure

In the third and concluding phase of intervention, the members of the CGCC in six selected blocks⁹ concentrated their efforts on increasing the use of RTI in only one programme (the MGNREGS one) with the goal of reducing corruption and also gaps in service delivery. CGCC remained pivotal in all three phases of intervention and was central in generating awareness, filing RTI applications and creating a model of a transparent and accountable *Gram Panchayat*.

CGCC engagement proved to be instrumental in curbing corruption and improving governance. It prepared the ground for community monitoring of services, lobbying of service providers and bringing cases of corruption to light. As a result of increased citizens' awareness and engagement, the model deterred service providers from engaging in corrupt practices, which mitigated the instances of corruption.

3. Phase 1: Creating an environment to begin the battle against corruption

Initially, two CGCCs involving 42 CSOs were combined to run a mass campaign in all nine districts of two administrative divisions - Jaipur and Ajmer – that were selected under the intervention. The process started with an evaluation of the organisations present in the target area of the intervention. All organisations in the area were invited to a meeting to discuss the purpose of the intervention and to determine their interest in associating with the intervention. The 42 organisations were selected to serve as CGCC members. They were selected on the basis of three criteria – their capacity to educate and mobilise people, their capacity to reach out to people in rural areas and their interest in creating an enabling environment to begin the battle against corruption.

Two consortiums, each having 20 to 25 members, accepted responsibility for running a campaign in separate divisions. The members were unevenly distributed among the districts

⁹ Districts are further divided in to blocks which are intermediary administrative units between district and *Gram panchayat*.

of these two divisions. To serve vigilantly and proactively in their respective divisions, the CGCCs constructed their knowledge base by holding a series of workshops and training sessions. The members were educated on provisions of RTI, the application process, various rural development departments and information available from them. The workshops were intended mainly to develop skill in formulating questions to use in RTI applications in order to get useful information. The members were also given an opportunity to meet and interact with government officials and elected representatives to help in building their confidence. The project management team continues to hold the hands of its members, if and when this is necessary.

In addition, a comprehensive questionnaire was developed for a field survey that was undertaken to obtain the perception of corruption and knowledge of the RTI Act of average citizens, CSOs, CBOs and others. The questionnaire contained a separate set of questions that were intended to gather perceptions of government authorities that were involved in curbing corruption, such as the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), Vigilance Commission etc. The information provided by the survey was used to establish an effective means to generate awareness. The data gathered also served to provide a baseline of awareness data and was used later for evaluation purposes. The members of the CGCCs were involved in data collection to acquaint them with the instances and types of corruption that were prevalent in the system. For the CGCC members who administered the questionnaires and provided hand-holding support to community members encountering instances of corruption, this process was also the opportunity to build their capacity related to corruption research and data collection and analysis.

In order to develop among a larger group of citizens an identification with the intervention, a series of Block Level Consultations (BLCs) were conducted in 17 blocks of two selected districts. The BLCs provided an opportunity for close interaction with rural citizens and to receive suggestions from them on matters of importance at a grass-roots level. The inputs from these BLCs added significantly to the survey's findings.

In addition to the survey and other consultations, several activities were undertaken. These included holding meetings at various levels, conducting dialogues among various stakeholders, analysing prevailing legal accountability measures, disseminating the research findings, organising workshops and seminars, organising an RTI fair, and producing multi-lingual publications generate awareness and encourage common citizens to file RTI applications. Overall, an environment was created in which the battle against corruption could start.

While running awareness campaigns, CGCC members also began to file RTI applications and provide support to citizens as and when required. The level of awareness of RTI among citizens increased from 40 percent to 85 percent under the intervention as revealed by the baseline and an end line survey. The evaluation report that was prepared by 'Partnership for Transparency Fund (ptf),' the granting organisation, stated that the CGCC members succeeded in helping 779 citizens to file RTI applications. The applications mainly sought

information related to various social security services in case where entitlements had not reached the intended beneficiaries. The RTI application became a tool for obtaining fair services without the payment of bribes. The evaluation report stated that the request was satisfactorily resolved in 100% of the cases without payment of a bribe.

During this first phase of intervention, there were several signs that progress was being made. The popularisation and use of RTI increased and people began to realise how they can leverage this law to make the government become more accountable for the delivery of basic entitlements and access to corruption-free services. The CGCC members also acquired knowledge and experience. Finally, there was an enabling environment for the intervention with a clear agenda of fighting corruption by effective/maximum application of the RTI Act.

4. Phase 2: Applying RTI as a tool for combating corruption

The activities undertaken in the first phase of the initiative produced an outcome of enhanced awareness among people. Now became an appropriate time to sow the seeds in the soil that had been prepared. The target was to achieve the larger goal of utilizing RTI rigorously to curb corruption. It was decided that the area for intervention would be restricted to two selected districts¹⁰ and three selected schemes.¹¹ The decision was part of a planned strategy to make the attempts to defeat corrupt practices more rigorous, comprehensive and penetrative. During the first phase, although the awareness level could be increased among citizens, the RTI applications filed through CGCCs were related to various issues and, hence, distributed to various departments at the level of *Gram Panchayat*, Blocks and districts. The area of intervention was also too great to intensify the intervention as the budget was limited. The idea was to confine the next phase of intervention to two districts within the same geographical area.

The activities were designed to put emphasis on identifying vulnerable points and increasing the number RTI applications filed. CGCC members were assigned the task of providing adequate support to victims of corruption. It was also decided to identify and support two *Gram panchayat*¹² from two districts under phase II. Some additional activities for community mobilisation were planned for both citizens and public officials for advancement of transparent practices in the functioning of *Gram Panchayat*, so that they could be developed as models.

Initially, a *Corruption Vulnerability Survey* of beneficiaries of the targeted schemes was conducted to assess their vulnerability to corruption. The survey findings¹³ made it possible to identify key points of high vulnerability and

helped to determine the means with which to move forward. The survey findings also provided the foundation for constructive and continued dialogue with high level officials of the concerned Rural Development Department in advocacy meetings.

Two advocacy meetings were organised at the state level in which policy makers and the media participated. These meetings were extremely useful in placing the grass-roots' realities and corruption vulnerability survey findings before the policy makers. As a result of these meetings, official orders were given the opportunity of visiting the *Gram Panchayat* and also made familiar with ways in which to implement development programmes with transparency and to provide information as required. A set of recommendations for simplified and transparent service delivery for selected schemes was submitted to the government and policy makers for appropriate actions. The findings were also disseminated among villagers and front line service providers by RTI *Chaupal*¹⁴ so that people could understand the extent of their vulnerability to corruption in the delivery of various entitlements.

When members of CGCCs and citizens began to use RTI precisely and rigorously, various problems became evident. These included the citizens' low understanding of the procedures of specific schemes and citizens not prepared to file applications due to a fear of retribution. To counter those challenges, more workshops were organised in the second phase. They concerned the practical aspects of filing RTI application and how to handle cases of corruption. Networking among members of CGCCs was also initiated. This resulted in the development of a network of a trained critical mass of persons within the community who had experienced the process of filing RTI applications. This network assisted in engaging more citizens and service providers for improved delivery of entitlements and service.

CUTS also established a cell for rendering *RTI Advisory and Information Services (RTI AIS)* within its premises to efficiently deal with the emerging need to educate and guide persons in the RTI application process and dealing with corruption in securing entitled services. This consisted of a few team members who rendered services to people coming for assistance or using information and communication technologies. The CGCC members also used the services of the cell, particularly when they were feeling trapped somewhere in the system. The information about the cell was circulated by various media so that a maximum number of people could benefit. A total of 210 phone calls were received. Most of these callers were persons who were facing a situation in which service providers were demanding bribes to render the entitled services. More than 43 callers/visitors who had been denied the services earlier or who had been asked previously for a bribe succeeded in obtaining services without paying a bribe. The RTI AIS provided all support and guidance in using RTI and other grievance redress mechanisms provided by the government to fight such cases. These were cases in which delivery of services had been delayed or entitlements

¹⁴ *Chaupal* is a community building or open space in the rural areas of North India where meetings take place and people generally visit there in the evening to meet people

¹⁰ Jaipur & Tonk

¹¹ MGNREGS, SGSY and IAY

¹² Harsulia & Mundia

¹³ As per finding, the total bribes paid by the entitlement holders under MGNREGS were found to be Rupees 149 million. 21 percent of people reported that they had paid bribes to obtain jobs under the programme and 53 percent of them reported that they paid an average of 146 Rupees to register for the scheme. 43 percent of them paid an average of Rupees 40 to obtain payment of wages.

were not provided to citizens.

In line with the RTI *Chaupal* at *Gram panchayat* level, several block level RTI *Chaupals*¹⁵ were organised in all 17 blocks of both districts to discuss day-to-day issues related to cases of corruption and the filing of RTI applications as solutions for such incidents.

For an example, consider the registration of new job cards at MGNREGS. In the initial stage when MGNREGS became available for all of the rural population, rural families were registered and given free job cards, which were necessary to obtain employment under the scheme. The applications of those who missed their first opportunity to obtain a job card were deliberately held back by front level service providers as a means to extract extra gains. The corruption vulnerability survey had found that bribes were accepted in 56 percent of such cases. An RTI application that demanded to know the status of the application for a job card served as a warning to the public official to process the application quickly. As a result, a job card would be delivered.

There was special attention given and efforts made to cause the selected *Gram panchayat* to be completely transparent and free of corruption. The officials and elected representatives were given the opportunity of an exposure visit and also made familiar with ways in which to implement the development schemes with transparency and to provide information as required. They were also given support to keep records of the processes. Providing proactive disclosures under RTI was given special emphasis and documents of the *Gram panchayat* were made available to the villagers. The names of the beneficiaries under different programmes were published on the wall of *Gram panchayat*. In these MRGPs, extensive activities were organised to address RTI awareness, the filing process, identifying areas of corruption and using RTI as a tool so that local residents could avail themselves of all services without paying bribes.

Along with generating a stir at the demand side of service delivery, CUTS put pressure on the supply side. The experiences gathered in various activities at the grassroots level were shared with champion policy makers in a constructive dialogue process. There were 11 high level events for dialogue among the CUTS team, CGCCs and policy makers, who included the minister, the principal secretary of the Rural Development Department, district collectors and chief executive officers of the two selected districts. Sharing ground experiences directly with policy makers provided them with an opportunity to understand policy implications and the need to make changes.

Overall, a total of 450 RTI applications were filed in the two districts. Many of them dealt with issues of corruption. Proactive disclosure of the rules and regulations of the identified programmes helped people to understand the process and thus better avail themselves of their entitlements. The networking among CGCC members helped in sharing of knowledge and in bolstering the battle against corruption. After having exposed several anti-corruption cases, the members of CGCCs were recognised as local leaders of anti-corruption activities and, as a result, gained power and stature. The

¹⁵ RTI block level *chaupal* was created at block level in line with village *chaupal* to discuss RTI related challenges.

establishment of two RTI model *Gram panchayat* enabled more than 90 people to learn to file applications under RTI and to fight corruption. As a result, the citizens acquired more confidence in their ability to tackle corruption. Several official orders were passed by the state government to strengthen transparency and accountability in the system. The outcome was transparent functioning of *Gram panchayat* and efficient service delivery for the people.

5. Phase 3 – Narrowing the scope and focus to increase the impact of the intervention

The model *Gram panchayat* that was developed in the second phase of the intervention was successful in exposing corruption and bringing systemic changes by frequently filing RTI applications. Learning from the outcomes of this pilot, the area of implementation was subsequently narrowed to six blocks (sub-district units of Jaipur and Tonk Districts) and the focus was restricted to MGNREGS. The reason for this decision was that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was the first major Act to institutionalize RTI and social audit¹⁶ (a social accountability tool)¹⁷ in all stages of its implementation. Thus, entitlements in the programme are explicitly linked to an existing system of accountability and transparency.

The four selected blocks in Jaipur had approximately 2,16,358 job card holders and two blocks that were selected from Tonk had approximately 93,000 job card holders who were entitled to guaranteed employment of 100 days under MGNREGS. In this phase, to intensify the process, more community volunteers were added. In total, 128 community volunteers from the six blocks were selected. They were taught the provisions of the NREGA, RTI Act and other complaint redress mechanisms issues related to delivery of entitlements in NREGS and corruption in the implementation process. CGCC members from the selected blocks mobilised the community volunteers and motivated them to fight corruption to ensure better delivery of entitlements.

This phase of intervention was focused on identifying the gaps in service delivery under MGNREGS. This was accomplished by the use of qualitative tools of assessment of the delivery of services. Several families were found to be not registered and excluded from the benefits. Many families had not obtained guaranteed jobs for 100 days, even after requesting them. In many cases the worksite facilities were not provided as required. The assessment process revealed frequent instances of corruption in wage payments and fudging of the muster rolls, etc. These were tackled by community volunteers using RTI and other transparency and accountability mechanisms existing under the NREGA.

Numerous meetings between service providers and service users were conducted to resolve issues related to poor delivery of entitlements. The project management team, along

¹⁶ Social audit is an auditing process that involves various stakeholders including citizens.

¹⁷ Social accountability is an approach to governance by which citizens, civil society organisations and other non-state actors hold government and services providers responsible for their performance, using an array of mechanisms.

with CGCC members, facilitated these meetings in which community members jointly raised their grievances and put pressure on service providers for corrective action. Opportunities for higher level authorities to meet and listen to actual beneficiaries of the schemes are infrequent. These meetings which higher level officials attended increased the pressure on front-level, public officials.

Approximately 158 of such meetings were conducted at various levels. Around 1,050 grievances were put forward by the entitlement holders during these meetings and actions were taken to resolve 300 of them by the authorities concerned. The members of CGCCs maintained a record of all grievances discussed during these meetings for the necessary follow-up. The grievances were mainly related to the unavailability of work when requested, delayed wage payments, payment of lower wages than what was due, misbehaviour of workmates, poor worksite facilities, corruption in wage payment, fake names on muster rolls, etc.

The approach adopted under Phase 3 enabled the following to be achieved:

- The inclusion of many eligible entitlement holders who previously were excluded from the delivery of entitlements.
- Old and new entitlement holders began to receive several entitlements provided in the NREGS programme, such as guaranteed days of employment, wages, allowances and facilities at the worksites.
- The effective participation of the targeted and identified entitlement holders in all stages of MGNREGS – identification, planning, monitoring and evaluation – in the six blocks selected in the Jaipur and Tonk districts.
- Enhanced power of the people, allowing them to demand information and better service delivery.
- Improvement in the quality of governance and reduction of corruption in the implementation of the MGNREGS in Rajasthan, especially in the six blocks of the Jaipur and Tonk districts.

6. CGCC Model

The CGCCs were envisaged as a group of empowered CSOs or individuals who were equipped with the knowledge, information and ability to provide support to ordinary citizens and have a deep outreach capacity into the communities. Hence, the CGCC had to perform the role of a “watchdog,” as well as a local resource centre for the application of RTI.

The members of CGCCs signed a memorandum of agreement with CUTS and were assigned certain tasks to perform. They operated under their individual identities and were paid a small honorarium each month for their involvement in the intervention. The CGCC approach, which is informal in nature, was used successfully during the intervention and proved to respond to a grassroots need.

In each phase, the intervention was implemented by CGCC

members. They were central figures in the intervention, helping CUTS to obtain information from the grassroots to present to government and policy makers fight at the level of appellate authority to bring about changes. At the same time, they worked at the grassroots level with citizens, other CSOs, service providers and elected representatives, enhancing the clients’ power to demand information.

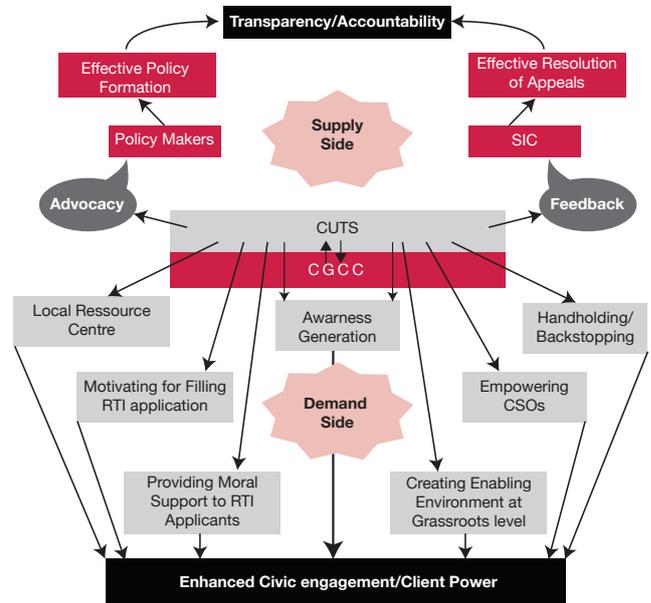


Figure 3. Interactions between CUTS and CCGC

The principal functions of CGCCs were the following:

- Working as a local ‘resource person-cum-centre’ for RTI & MGNREGS,
- Generating awareness among local citizens and motivating them to file RTI applications,
- Providing moral support to RTI applicants in their fight against corrupt service providers,
- Acting as a proactive watchdog against corruption and in support of good governance,
- Creating an enabling environment for good governance at the grassroots,
- Holding the hands of RTI users to ensure that the impact created is maintained and,
- Empowering grassroots CSOs/NGOs.

Developing CGCCs proved to be highly useful. It required considerable efforts to select credible CSOs and individuals, build their capacity and provide continuous handholding throughout the intervention. However, once CGCCs were formed and had become active, they created a great impact on the functioning of *Gram panchayat* and front level administrative offices. The wide and deep reach capacities of CGCC

members into the communities, bringing out grassroots issues from rural areas and presenting them to the policy makers, helped CUTS to bring policy level changes too.

However, in a few places, the members of CGCCs could not be retained as some did not understand initially that the fight against corruption could become intense and jeopardise their relationship with the service providers with whom they previously worked.

7. A few critical implementation issues

A few critical implementation issues arose during the intervention. The team, along with members of CGCCs and community volunteers, worked on solving the problems constructively and ended up with successful redesigns. We refer to these implementation issues as “critical” because planning how to deal with them can be the key to achieving success in redesigning intervention.

1. The attitude of policy makers and bureaucrats towards initiatives against corruption was not encouraging. Initially, a majority of the service providers avoided the discussions, meetings, etc. However, gradually champions within government departments were identified and approached. Later, others began to joining the intervention, especially after recognising the benefit of being known as a pro-RTI bureaucrat and receiving media coverage.
2. The problem of frequent transfers of bureaucrats and front level service providers at the *Gram Panchayat* level interrupted the rhythm of project progress. However, this also served as an opportunity to replicate the model in the new locations to which the officials were transferred. It was frequently quite difficult for the team to orient new officials to the project’s activities and, as a result, the process had to begin anew.
3. Most of the local CBOs in the project catchment area have small budgets and depend on government grants. As a result, it was difficult in some blocks and *Gram Panchayat* to identify adequate numbers of CGCC members to work on issues related to corruption.
4. There were several CBOs who initially joined the intervention to be part of the consortium without giving much thought to the future consequences and who withdrew from the activities later on. Some of the CBOs that also were involved in running government-sponsored activities under various programmes and involved in unfair practices in collusion with public officials, did not continue with the initiative. In those cases, other CBOs were identified and included in the consortium.
5. Advocacy with government regarding anti-corruption measures was very challenging. However, due to the reputation of CUTS as a trustworthy organisation among the senior ministers and bureaucrats,

it was possible to secure the cooperation of line departments and to achieve changes.

6. Initially people were also afraid to file RTI applications and exercise their right to demand information about the delivery of entitlements. Hence, CUTS, as well as CGCC members, filed (and covered the cost of) many RTI applications on behalf of citizens. When people came to better understand the power and potential of RTI, they began to come forward to use RTI.
7. The lengthy election process of *Panchayati Raj* institutions also created problems in advocacy, the dialogue process and ensuring participation of service providers in several block *Chaupals*.
8. Setting up an RTI model *Gram Panchayat* to be fully transparent, accountable and free of corruption was very challenging as the government operates hundreds of schemes and programmes for people living in rural areas, each having the potential for corruption.
9. Since supply-side capacity was also very weak to deal with the RTI applications, the government was not sufficiently prepared to implement the Act when parliament enacted it. This also was the reason for poor performance of government officials in their dealing with RTI applications. The government had no established process with which to deal with cases in which information officers had failed to provide information for any reason.

8. Conclusion

Effective implementation of the RTI Act was not a priority of government officials, especially in rural areas. The earlier mind set of officials had not changed. The officials favoured concealing information, rather than providing it to ordinary people. The ability to implement the Act and to provide information was also an issue. In such a situation, the intervention proved to be very effective. It increased the ability of officials and of the clients both in a demand and supply side. The knowledge generated among the CGCCs, RTI applicants and other CSOs created a sustainable cadre of persons who were involved in providing support to people to fight corruption and to receive their entitlements.

The greatest success of the intervention enhanced the voice and power of poor and marginalised persons. In doing so, it enabled other stakeholders such as government officials, elected representatives and civil society organisations to advance the agenda of transparency and accountability in the implementation process of development programmes to improve development outcomes.

There are always some champions among the policy makers, implementing authorities, etc., in the system, who are serious about reforming the processes. They should be engaged constructively. The media also should be considered as a relevant stakeholder, particularly when fighting corruption. Developing a network of CGCC members and proactive

citizens is also very useful in lobbying against corruption. The development of model *Gram panchayat* suggested a framework for replication.

Although reforms rarely bring immediate improvements in service delivery, this intervention was able to bring a tangible improvement in the delivery of entitlements, bringing more people to the purview of entitlements, reducing corruption, solving grievances and, above all, bringing systemic changes. These changes are still visible in the areas where they were implemented and can be measured and witnessed.

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