

CUTS@50

– A Vision Document



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From a modest beginning in 1983 as a rural development communication initiative launched through a wall newspaper 'Gram Gadar' ('Village Revolution'), CUTS has achieved significant growth both geographically and in terms of functional areas. Today its work spans a multi-pronged agenda targeted to the realisation of CUTS Vision of "Consumer Sovereignty" and its Mission of "consumer sovereignty in the framework of social justice, economic equality and environmental necessity, within and across borders."

This Vision Document was developed in 2008, the 25th anniversary of the organisation, and attempted a roadmap for the organisation's journey over the subsequent 25 years from 2008. The Vision Document has since been used by the organisation as a guiding document in its process of evolution and has been subsequently refined over time. It builds on the Vision Statement of the organisation and various Mission Statements of its Centres to specify a direction for the organisation's progress over time as well as the status that is targeted for achievement by its 50th anniversary in 2034.

As noted in the Preface, such a road map is dynamic and needs to be revisited periodically for aligning with current and future developments. Therefore, in June 2013, CUTS organised a Senior Staff Retreat at Jaipur (India) – the Headquarters of CUTS International. This meeting deliberated on the Vision Document, which was revised, and this is the fourth revision.

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Published by



Consumer Unity & Trust Society

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Email: cuts@cuts.org, Website: www.cuts-international.org

Printed by

Jaipur Printers P. Ltd.

Jaipur

ISBN: 978-81-8257-144-0

© CUTS, 2010

First published in August 2010

Second and revised edition in February 2011

Third edition in May 2012

Fourth edition in November 2013

#1103

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PREFACE



Pradeep S Mehta
Secretary General

November, 2013

From a modest beginning in 1983, CUTS has achieved significant growth both geographically and in terms of functional areas. This growth is organic and evolutionary – marked by a refreshing spontaneity in responding to the need of the hour, especially in the realm of consumer welfare and public policy issues.

What started as a consumer organisation in the traditional mould has attained uniqueness through the realisation that the consumer needs to be economically, politically and socially empowered *via* diverse channels such as international trade, competition law and policy, economic and business regulation, economic and political governance, etc.

Its current and future activities are aligned with the five ‘Transformative Shifts’ as envisaged in the High-Level Panel Report on Post-2015 Development Agenda. They will be further synergised with the Goals and Indicators of the Post-2015 Development Agenda as we make progress.

Also, CUTS has distinguished itself through its stress on consumer-producer synergies and good governance for sustainable increase in consumer welfare, given that the ordinary consumer is not just a functional unit but an actual human being whose welfare and growth depends significantly on her/his association with economic production and the income generating opportunities arising from such association.

This organisational expansion through geographical and functional branches has thrown up new challenges for the leadership. While in a single office, management and staff might automatically develop understanding to work in a coordinated manner towards a common ‘Vision’, it is not so in an organisation such as CUTS because of its steady geographical and functional diversification over a period of time.

A decision was, therefore, taken by the senior management under my leadership to articulate and elaborate the rationale underlying the CUTS Vision based upon the experiences and skills developed over time, to consolidate our energies and provide guidance for their pursuit in a manner which could be followed and synergised by its diverse and geographically spread-out centres.

It was also envisaged that this Vision Document would serve an additional purpose of acquainting the relevant stakeholders with the organisation’s thinking, goals and operational modalities.

Here it is important to note that this Vision Document is far from a manual of processes. The perspectives and guidance provided in this Document are translated into concrete Centre-specific Strategic Business Plans. While it charts the horizons of the organisation over a medium-term of next two decades, the Strategic Business Plans would be more short-term in nature, covering a period of five years or so.

The plans are formulated to not only to incorporate the broader aspects of organisational development as provided in this Vision Document but also to respond to contemporary challenges and the state of the environment.

This Vision Document has been developed through intensive brainstorming among the senior management aided by a well-designed

Comments
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mechanism of involvement of all staff inside CUTS to communicate their feedback. At a more advanced stage, drafts have been commented on by a wide gamut of external associates through live interactions and correspondence.

This Vision Document is dynamic and regularly reviewed internally. Since its first publication in August 2010, it has been reviewed thrice – in February 2011, in May 2012 and the instant one before you. This version has been renamed as 'CUTS@50', while the earlier one was named as 'CUTS in 2034'.

1. Introduction: Linking Present and Future Agenda to CUTS Vision

This Vision Document tries to envision the evolution of the organisation over the next two decades. It builds on the Vision Statement of the organisation and various Mission Statements of its Centres to specify a direction for the organisation's progress over time as well as the status that is targeted for achievement by its 50th anniversary.

The document takes into account various developments taking place and being envisaged across the globe. Significant parts of the developing world, especially India, China and regions in South and South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, are growing at a rapid and unprecedented pace. However, such growth has been accompanied by increasing inequality. Such increases, if extreme, can produce social tensions which can disrupt economic growth itself. Moreover, these are objectionable from a social justice point of view. Thus, efforts to make economic growth inclusive have to be mainstreamed into the development strategy of all countries.

Following the trans-Atlantic financial crises in 2008, the global economy was also adversely affected as it exposed the gaps between real and financial economy, which *inter alia* lead to a reduction in growth rates in many developing economies. This only asserts the need for inclusive growth as it has become more important than before.

In other words, it is an imperative to ensure that such growth results in increase in availability and quality of essential goods and services to all sections of the population, rich or poor and at affordable prices and is associated with the increase in capabilities and endowments of the poor and marginalised sections of the population (bottom of the pyramid). An effort to address 'Consumer Sovereignty' from a holistic point of view, considering the consumer not only as one who consumes but who produces and owns endowments to support his consumption, helps to address the lowest denominators of economic activity.

This approach ensures that growth in economic activity results in benefits for all. In this regard, 'consumer' is defined in a broader sense and perspective, as it includes citizens, which translates as consumers of governance, when everyone pays taxes, directly and/or indirectly. This is an approach promoted by CUTS through its activities over a period of three



An effort to address 'Consumer Sovereignty' from a holistic point of view, considering the consumer not only as one who consumes but who produces and owns endowments to support his consumption, helps to address the lowest denominators of economic activity ...promoted by CUTS through its activities over a period of three decades and will become even more relevant in the years to come

decades and will become even more relevant in the years to come.

While promotion of such universal increase in consumer welfare is a worthy agenda, it is essential to realise that such promotion is constrained by several factors, which include natural resources and governance deficits. The last couple of decades have witnessed many challenges to food, energy and water security – three most basic needs of the consumer and aided by poor governance inadequate availability of means and access to these needs adds to the asymmetries of a welfare state. While promotion of the universal satisfaction of basic needs and attainment of capabilities is a laudable and imperative programme it has to be done intelligently and by addressing social, economic and environmental challenges and dimensions of ‘Sustainable Development’.



Inclusive growth, particularly social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and good governance through consumer empowerment, is the most important pillar on which sustainable economic development of a nation rests

Inclusive growth, particularly social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and good governance through consumer empowerment, is the most important pillar on which sustainable economic development of a nation rests. As developing nations reach new highs in prosperity, there are certain challenges to sustainable development. In articulating its Vision for the future, CUTS would lay greater emphasis on the promotion of sustainable development outcomes through its work on ‘Good Governance’, ‘Effective Regulation’ and ‘Rules-based Trade’.

It, thus, envisages a marked increase in the emphasis placed on various challenges and dimensions of ‘Sustainable Development’ its work agenda on Trade, Regulation and Governance by strengthening and sharpening its activities and interventions in its holistic pursuit of citizen and consumer welfare.

It should be borne in mind that this Vision Document is not a manual for processes/methodologies being implemented and to be adopted by the organisation. It specifies the objectives of the organisation and how the attainment of these objectives is being influenced by the social, economic and environmental milieu of our times. Implications are drawn for focusing more effectively on functional and geographical areas of the organisation. It provides a direction for the organisation’s progress over time but is not a comprehensive plan of action as that should not be based on a dogmatic approach. Such plan of action should involve shorter time horizons (for example, five years) and take into account contemporary circumstances and needs.

1.1 CUTS Vision: Meaning and Implications

From a modest beginning in 1983 as a rural development communication initiative launched through a wall newspaper *Gram Gadar* ('Village Revolution'), CUTS has come a long way over the last three decades. Today its work spans a multi-pronged agenda targeted to the realisation of its Vision of 'Consumer Sovereignty' and its Mission of 'consumer sovereignty in the framework of social justice, economic equality and environmental necessity, within and across borders.'

In simple language, the Vision relates to the creation of 'Value for People' in their diverse roles as consumers, producers and depositors/suppliers of human capital. As every citizen in an economy performs more than one and sometimes all these roles simultaneously, such creation of value should be looked upon as a single unified Vision for achieving greater 'Consumer Welfare' through 'Consumer Empowerment'.

'Consumer Sovereignty' refers to a situation in which consumers influence what gets produced and, therefore, consumed. While businesses steer the economy through their actions they ultimately respond to demands from and influencing powers of consumers. Thus, consumer preferences dictate producer activities provided consumers enjoy access to accurate information on goods, services and technologies, freedom to choose among alternatives, and the right to redress. The same line also applies to citizens whose taxes are used by the State to run the government, and citizens also use their voting power to exercise their choice.

The mentioned preconditions for 'Consumer Sovereignty' have been formalised through adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of 'UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection' in April, 1985, and their further amendment in July 1999. Such formalisation was sparked by the realisation that consumers often face imbalances and deficiencies in economic terms, educational levels, and bargaining power. Eight rights are incorporated in these guidelines: right to basic needs; right to safety; right to information; right to choice; right to be heard; right to redress, right to consumer education and right to healthy environment.

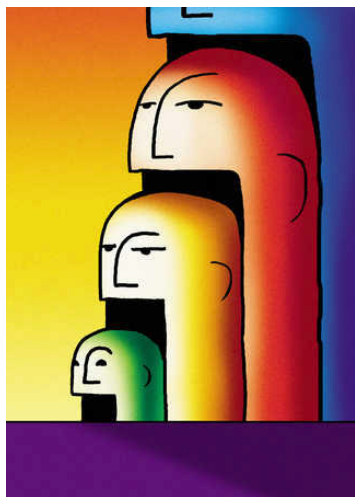
Out of these, the 'right to basic needs' has also been postulated through the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is also important to note that this 'Consumer Charter' complements with 'Transformative



“...realisation of its Vision of ‘Consumer Sovereignty’ and its Mission of ‘consumer sovereignty in the framework of social justice, economic equality and environmental necessity, within and across borders.’”

Shifts’ as articulated in the High-Level Panel Report on Post-2015 Development Agenda.

It is important to note that CUTS envisaged many of these ‘Transformative Shifts’ while celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2008 by organising an International Conference titled ‘Global Partnership for Development – Where do we stand and where to go?’



...CUTS seeks to work out of the box and act not only as a facilitator of regulation of practices affecting consumer welfare but also as a think- and action-tank making difference to all aspects of economic governance affecting consumers – as a ‘Change Agent’

Therefore, the pursuit of true ‘Consumer Sovereignty’, as embodied in the simultaneous attainment of consumer rights and responsibilities, requires a holistic conception of the consumer as a citizen who not only consumes certain essential services facilitated by the government but also buys priced goods, services and technologies in markets and is, therefore, affected by available choice, the availability of accurate information on alternatives and the right to redress and get compensation in the event of malpractices by producers and suppliers.

While organisations for the protection of consumer rights, viewed in the narrow sense as alleviation of the risk of the consumer being charged a price higher or provided quality of goods/services/technologies lower than what is justified under current economic conditions, are quite common, those which not only promote such access but also ways and means of changing economic governance conditions for the betterment of the consumer are rare.

It is this void that CUTS is filling. In doing so CUTS seeks to work out of the box and act not only as an advocate and facilitator of regulation of policies and practices affecting consumer welfare but also as a think- and action-tank making difference to all aspects of economic governance affecting consumers – as a ‘Change Agent’.

There is, thus, also a convergence between the pursuit of ‘Consumer Sovereignty’ for all sections of the society and that of ‘inclusive growth’ – benefits of growth should reach all sections of the society and promote access by all of them all essential goods, services and technologies. Therefore, ‘Good Governance’ is an essential element of ensuring that the markets function well and ‘Consumer Sovereignty’ is at the core, not periphery, of the functioning of markets.

1.2 CUTS Programme Agenda: Pathways to its Vision

1.2.1 Aspirations Originating from Vision

Over the next two decades, in partnership and association with like-minded organisations in India and internationally and not through a transactional manner but adopting a life-cycle approach to long-term partnership development, CUTS aspires to further promote its 'International NGO' status and become a premier 'Consumer Voice' from the South. The name of CUTS will become synonymous with all aspects of 'Consumer Welfare' through 'Good Governance', 'Effective Regulation' and 'Rules-based Trade'.

As articulated, CUTS aims to enhance 'Consumer Welfare' through a holistic conception of consumer well-being. 'Consumer Welfare' is seen as determined by not only the facilities available for consumption (information, redress, quality etc.) but also the endowments/capabilities of individuals and households and behaviour of firms which determines the cost of production and, therefore, the prices that consumers pay.

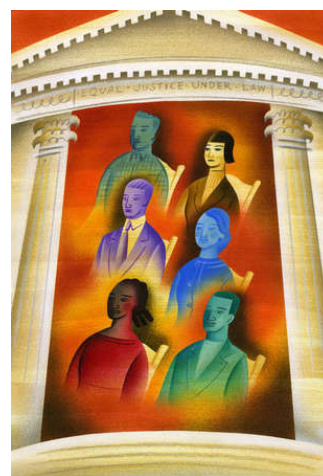
Moreover, CUTS' activities and interventions extend to all groups of consumers, with an emphasis on supporting marginalised groups through their empowerment and facilitation of participation in the process and outcomes of economic governance. Thus, the objective is to enhance the sovereignty of all groups of consumers and the pursuit for social justice and economic equality is embedded into the design of CUTS activities and interventions.

This stress on social justice and economic equality coupled with its 'International NGO' status will help CUTS in its aspiration to become a civil society analogue of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) which helps developing countries get a higher share in global benefits through better governance of global public goods and, consequently, a more balanced economic development across regions.

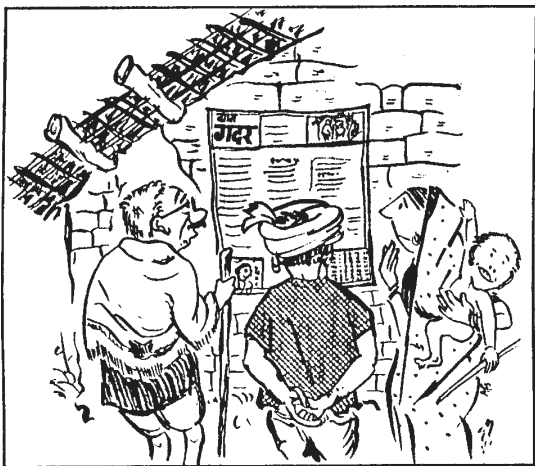
While UNCTAD works with governments as a nodal facilitator of better economic governance at the global level influencing top-down processes, CUTS has the potential to perform the same role in regard to civil society and community-based organisations, not just consumer protection organisations, through bottom-up actions at local, national, regional and international levels and, in turn, with governments, particularly in the developing world.



...organisation operating at national as well as international levels in...felt by both consumers and organisations catering to them – a void which can be filled by CUTS



While UNCTAD works with governments as a nodal facilitator of better economic governance at the global level influencing top-down processes, CUTS has the potential to perform the same role in regard to civil society and community-based organisations



The initiative involved publication of a one-of-its-kind (even to date) wall newspaper – *Gram Gadar* (Village Revolution) through a network of over 75 activists situated in villages all over the state of Rajasthan

1.2.2 An Evolutionary History: Pointers to the Future

CUTS began out of a rural development communication initiative in Jaipur, India, in 1983. The initiative involved publication of a one-of-its-kind (even to date) wall newspaper – *Gram Gadar* ('Village Revolution') through a network of over 75 activists situated in villages all over the state of Rajasthan. In 1984, the Monopolies & Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969, was amended to include unfair trade practices, which along with experiences from rural campaigns provoked a group of concerned citizens in Jaipur to form and launch CUTS on March 15, 1984, the World Consumer Rights Day.

Consumer action is, therefore, the *raison d'être* for the birth and existence of CUTS, which was responsible for getting the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 enacted in India. To give a more focused attention to consumer issues, *CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training* was set up in 1996, to enable consumers, particularly the poor and the marginalised to achieve their right to basic needs, sustainable development and good governance through a strong consumer movement.

From a modest beginning out of a garage in 1983, today the organisation has expanded to different parts of India and internationally with over 150 human resources from diverse backgrounds.

In its headquarters in Jaipur, India, there are three Programme Centres:

- Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training
- Centre for International Trade, Economics & Environment
- Centre for Competition, Investment & Economic Regulation

Along with a Resource Centre in Kolkata, India, which is working at the local level on all three core areas of 'Trade', 'Regulation' and 'Governance' and another in New Delhi, working on media and parliamentary outreach, the organisation is working on various aspects of human development in its traditional as well as contemporary sense through:

- Centre for Human Development, Chittorgarh, Rajasthan

Over the last decade and half and in order to address a demand-driven agenda of local stakeholders, CUTS has



...the organisation has three programme-specific centres in Jaipur – CART, CITEE, CCIER ...two other programme centres ...CRC and CHD...presence in Africa at Lusaka (Zambia), Nairobi (Kenya) and at Accra (Ghana). In Europe, it is present in Geneva. A centre in Hanoi, Vietnam completes its geographical coverage towards the east

established an International Centre in Geneva, Switzerland and Regional Centres in the following places:

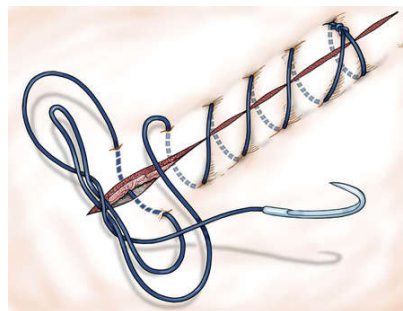
- Hanoi, Vietnam – South East Asia
- Lusaka, Zambia – Southern Africa
- Nairobi, Kenya – Eastern Africa
- Accra, Ghana – Western Africa

Furthermore, CUTS has established 'Strategic Partnership' with like-minded civil society organisations (CSOs) in more than 40 countries in these regions. Over the next decade, CUTS envisages expanding its geographical spread by establishing Regional Centres in South America, Middle East & North Africa, Central Asia and also establish another International Centre in Washington DC, USA, which along with Geneva, is one of the most important places of international economic governance.

In other words, CUTS has distinguished itself as one rare CSO in the world promoting South-South Cooperation between and among state and non-state actors by developing, nurturing and implementing a 'Hub & Spokes' model of rights-based approach to development through 'Consumer Empowerment'. This distinction is reflected in the appointment of CUTS senior representatives in many high-level panels and committees deliberating on and finding solutions of contemporary challenges to economic governance at local, national, regional and international levels.

CUTS' achievements in the first 30 decades of its history have been considerable. It has emerged as a champion of the common and often disadvantaged stakeholders and this agenda has naturally led to a diversification of its programmes which now span good governance, trade and development, and economic regulation, with rights-based approach to sustainable development and human development in its traditional as well as contemporary sense as cross-cutting themes. Thus, its agenda is not just about 'Consumer Protection' but enhancement of 'Consumer Welfare'.

One important diversification has been the expanding work on policy research which is otherwise neither a traditional area of the consumer movement nor that of philanthropic activities. While the former has been mainly fighting for consumer rights against business and systemic malpractices, the latter is mainly catering to immediate social and economic needs of the poor and marginalised sections of the society through 'soft developmental' activities.



A common thread running through its diversifications is that each has contributed to the strengthening of attainment of consumer rights as enumerated in the United Nations Guidelines on Consumer Protection



...civil society and community-based organisations to work together with state and other non-state actors. Such an approach intrinsically induces transparency, accountability and ownership, especially by opening up the process of developing and implementing social and economic policies...



...formulation of trade policies at the national, region and international levels through bilateral, regional and multilateral negotiations and stakeholder consultations, and the impact of trade on poverty and social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development are, therefore, key aspects of CUTS' activities and interventions under the rubric of 'Rules-based Trade'

Though CUTS' own beginnings were similar to that of traditional consumer organisations but as the organisation has moved along fighting many battles in policy fora and courts it realised that it is equally important to influence policies so that consumer sovereignty prevails.

Thus, CUTS is now recognised state as well as non-state actors as a premier policy- and action-research and advocacy group working on a myriad economic policy issues at local, national, regional and international levels. This work is strengthened by its close interaction with stakeholders at grassroots and evidence-based advocacy and development of human resources through capacity building of state and non-state actors.

Importantly, this policy work is attracting the attention of traditional philanthropic actors as there is an increasing realisation that systemic and sustainable changes for enhancing 'Consumer Welfare' through rights-based approach to development can happen through policy reforms and their effective implementation.

While traditional philanthropic (soft developmental) activities are enhancing 'endowments' of the poor and marginalised sections of the society, they are not necessarily increasing their 'entitlements' to rights-based development including their right to avail opportunities in a market economy. That can happen through continuous and systemic policy reforms and their effective implementation.

Through its work on '*Good Governance*', '*Effective Regulation*' and '*Rules-based Trade*', CUTS is not only addressing this need in India and the developing world at large but also advocating for systemic changes in various areas of international economic governance. In other words, CUTS aspires to address its Vision of 'Consumer Sovereignty' by establishing the fact that 'Consumer Interest' is synonymous with 'National Interest' of addressing social, economic and environmental dimensions and challenges of 'Sustainable Development'.

A common thread running through its diversifications is that each has contributed to the strengthening of attainment of consumer rights as enumerated in the UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection. From 'women's empowerment' in Rajasthan to 'better governance and accountability of public service delivery' in India to 'strengthening competition regimes in African countries' to 'fostering equity and

accountability in the international trading system’ each and every activity and intervention of CUTS has individually and/or collectively strengthened consumers’ rights to basic needs, better choice and representation as well as sustainable consumption in some manner or the other.

In short, the basic premises of CUTS’ work is to enhance ‘Consumer Welfare’ through the fulfilment of ‘Consumer Rights’ by questioning and asking for greater ‘Transparency and Accountability’ in the system of economic governance and by addressing ‘Social, Economic and Environmental’ dimensions and challenges of sustainable development through ‘Consumer Empowerment’.

One of the *modus operandi* of expanding CUTS’ horizon and thinking on ‘Consumer Sovereignty’ through ‘Good Governance’, ‘Effective Regulation’ and ‘Rules-based Trade’ has been forming and maintaining ‘Strategic Alliances’ with like-minded organisations, particularly in the developing world. Over the last two decades CUTS has worked together with a number of civil society and community-based organisations from across Asia and Africa on such issues of common interest, thereby strengthening such alliances.

This has helped CUTS to work in trenches so as to reach out to a large community of practitioners, policymakers and experts beyond its direct ‘Sphere of Influence’. Over the next two decades, not only that CUTS aims to strengthen such alliances but also to multiply its effectiveness as a ‘Change Agent’ by facilitating/forming ‘Network of Networks’ as that would help the organisation to ‘Reach Out to the Unreached’.

In doing so, it will address the need for and challenges of bridging macro-micro gaps in policy formulation and their effective implementation through policy- and action-research, advocacy and networking, and by developing the capacity of human resources to better avail their right to opportunities in a market economy through traditional capacity-building activities as well as sharing information between and among various stakeholders of ‘Consumer Empowerment’ and ‘Sustainable Development’ – from grassroots to policymaking at local (sub-national), national, regional and international arenas of economic governance.

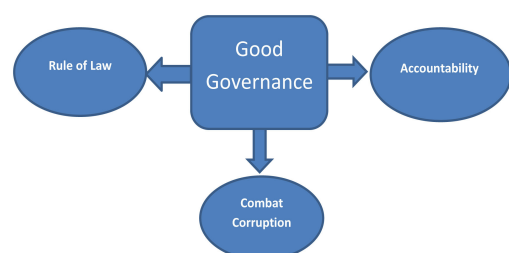
Moreover, while questioning and asking for greater ‘Transparency and Accountability’ in the system of economic governance, CUTS is maintaining full transparency and accountability of its own work. Not only that information



...effective competition law and policy regime, welfare maximising sector regulations and an enabling investment regime are, therefore, all necessary for the optimisation of consumer welfare. These subjects are dealt with under the rubric of ‘Effective Regulation’

about sources of funding and activities are widely disseminated to the relevant stakeholders of particular activities and interventions and to the public at large, its annual financial statements and other statutory documents of operations are available on its website. Given this high level of 'Transparency and Accountability', CUTS was accredited by Credibility Alliance, which is a network of CSOs in India working on governance and related aspects of NGO management and operations.

Furthermore, CUTS has also been instrumental in creating institutions outside its fold such as the International Centre for Trade & Sustainable Development in Geneva, Switzerland in 1996 and South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics & Environment in Kathmandu, Nepal in 1998. Both work on a myriad range of issues of trade, economics and development with footprints across the world.



Good Governance is characterised by three components: rule of law, accountability for results and actions, and efforts to combat corruption

Looking at the huge demand of capacity building in the area of competition and regulation, particularly on law and economics of regulatory regimes, it has also created CUTS Institute for Regulation & Competition in New Delhi in 2008. Its motto is to enhance knowledge and strengthen capacity.

1.2.3 Core Areas of Operation

In order to ensure that consumers earn sufficient income as well as possess the ability to comprehend and use available information on products, services and technologies for sustainable consumption, initiatives for consumer empowerment are essential. Similarly, there is a need for transparency and accountability in the supply of essential services, particularly public services, which is often facilitated by the government in many developing countries. Consumer empowerment resulting in transparency and accountability in the provision of essential services falls under the rubric of 'Good Governance'.

As elucidated by noted Indian economist, C. Rangarajan, the Chairman of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (2004-), "Good Governance is characterised by three components: rule of law, accountability for results and actions, and efforts to combat corruption."

CUTS is working on all these components of 'Good Governance' and its approach to strengthen 'Governance' is three-pronged:

- increasing people's participation at various levels of governance and implementation of policies/laws/rules;

- assessment of the effectiveness of policies/institutions/ government departments, implementation of welfare schemes/programmes, etc. in achieving developmental as well as institutional outcomes; and
- holding government agencies/departments accountable in the provision of quality goods, services and technologies in social (primary healthcare, education, etc.) and utility sectors (telecommunications, electricity, water etc.).

Given the importance and relevance of ‘Good Governance’ in contemporary discourses on social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, CUTS intends to venture into new areas of ‘Good Governance’ in addition to consolidating its existing approach. One such area is prevention of corruption, especially by analysing the factors that contribute to corruption in public services, impact of corruption on the poor/poverty and ways to combat corruption (by curbing opportunities for corruption, etc.).

In implementing its activities and interventions in various programme areas in developing and least developed countries – thus, working in trenches, CUTS has developed and institutionalised a ‘Bottom Up’ methodology for the civil society and community-based organisations to work together with state and other non-state actors. Such an approach intrinsically induces transparency, accountability and ownership, especially by opening up the process of developing and implementing social and economic policies to involvement by ‘key stakeholders’.

Additionally, the work that is being done in partnership with local organisations, helps in building their capacities and there is better ownership and political buy-in at various levels. One of the key achievements of CUTS’ work in this area has been the use of ‘Social Accountability’ tools, thereby developing the capacity of local civil society and community-based organisations to monitor public expenditure in specific sectors.

At the same time, adequate choice for consumption, availability of products, services and technologies at prices low enough to facilitate adequate levels of consumption (more and better access), adherence of producers to satisfactory standards of quality especially safety norms, and adequate information for consumers about product characteristics are also pre-conditioned on the existence of sound regulatory regimes, and optimal regulation of individual sectors that takes into account technological



...high level of ‘Transparency and Accountability’, CUTS was accredited to Credibility Alliance, which is a network of civil society organisations in India working on governance and related aspects of NGO management and operations



A new subject of interest for CUTS...is 'Corporate Governance' so as to steer it in a direction that enhances benefits accruing to consumers and other stakeholders



...genesis of CUTS' expansion (both programme implementation and physical expansion) to countries/ regions outside India was based on the principle of South-South cooperation not only among civil society organisations but also governments and business communities

specificities and the nature of demand and supply characterising a sector. This is because consumers are becoming more and more aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Therefore, the development of well-functioning markets is a pre-condition for 'Consumer Welfare' and, indeed, one of the objectives of '*Effective Regulation*'. Moreover, an enabling investment regime is essential for optimisation of competition over time.

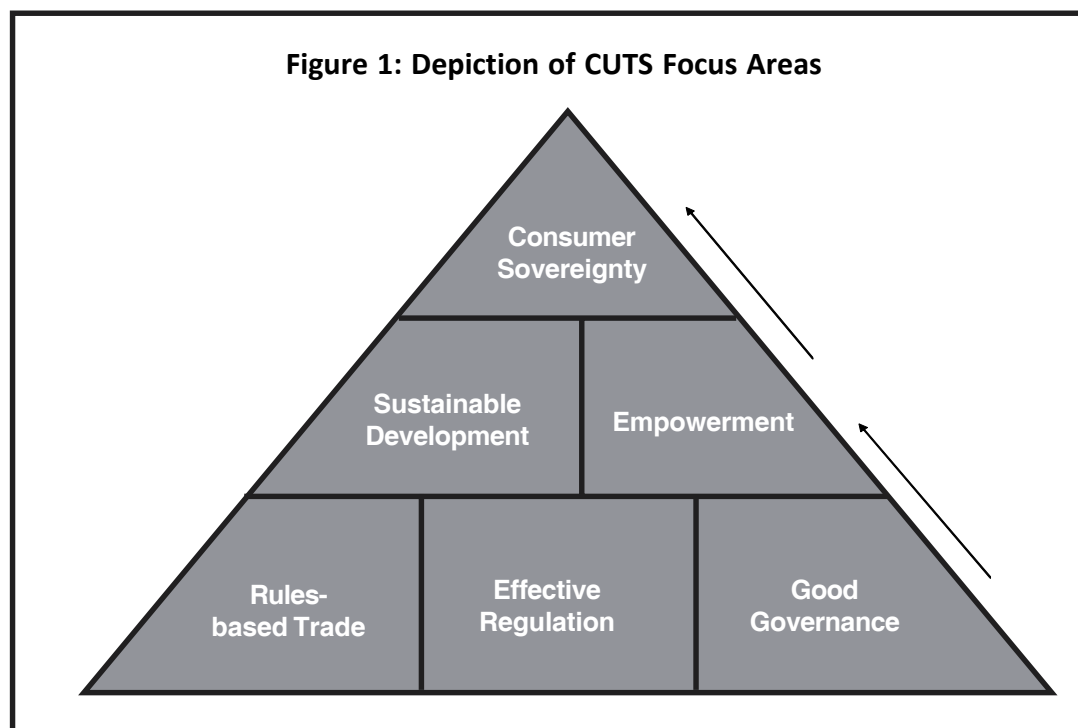
An effective competition law and policy regime, welfare maximising sector regulations and an enabling investment regime are, therefore, all necessary for the optimisation of consumer welfare. These subjects are dealt with under the rubric of '*Effective Regulation*'. A new subject of interest for CUTS under this area is 'Corporate Governance' so as to steer it in a direction that enhances benefits accruing to consumers and other stakeholders.

However, regulation does not only pertain to domestic producers. International trade offers a chance for domestic producers to specialise in lines of production in which these are efficient relative to producers from other countries. Surpluses of domestic consumption over production in these lines can be exchanged for surpluses from other countries in other lines of production. Such exchange or international trade facilitates higher levels of consumption marked by lower prices and higher quality, as well as an enhanced range of choices for consumers.

Thus, international trade and its relationship with development constitute an important engine in the optimisation of consumer welfare marked by the attainment of postulated consumer rights. The formulation of trade policies at the national, regional and international levels through bilateral, regional and multilateral negotiations and stakeholder consultations, and the impact of trade on poverty and social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development are, therefore, key aspects of CUTS' activities and interventions under the rubric of '*Rules-based Trade*'.

These core areas of '*Rules-based Trade*', '*Effective Regulation*' and '*Good Governance*', constitute the areas of specialisation of CUTS and are depicted in Figure 1. All three areas are geared to address social, economic and environmental challenges and dimensions of 'Sustainable

Figure 1: Depiction of CUTS Focus Areas



Development' through various tools and their application for 'Consumer Empowerment'. A dis-aggregation of these core areas is presented in Table 1.

Furthermore, with inputs from activities and interventions in these core areas of operation, CUTS is pursuing human development in its traditional as well as contemporary sense. CUTS Centre for Human Development is working in several villages and districts of South Rajasthan by developing skills and capacities through training and publication while projects

Table 1: Dis-aggregation of CUTS' Core Areas

Programme Areas	Issues
<i>Rules-based Trade</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WTO Issues • Regional Economic Cooperation • Trade and Development Linkages
<i>Effective Regulation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition Policy and Law • Sector Regulation • Investment Climate • Business Regulation & Corporate Governance
<i>Good Governance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumer Protection • Access to Information • People's Participation • Social Accountability



CUTS to roll out more effective intervention plans in geographical regions/ countries, it is imperative that the capabilities of these centres are improved further

relating to health, environment and development, enhancing civic and political education of people at grassroots, and building up strong networking between influencers and organisations.

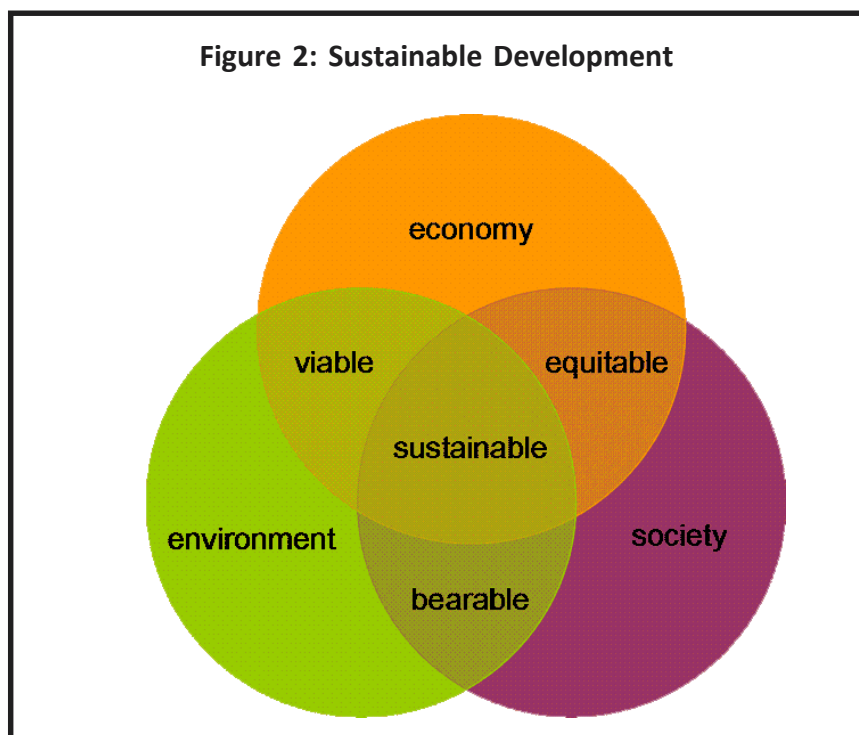
Given that regulatory reforms are gaining pace in the developing world, with an increasing number of countries enacting competition and sectoral regulatory laws, CUTS felt the need to address a severe shortage of institutional capacity to both implement the regulatory reforms and facilitate the spread of knowledge on regulatory matters in developing countries. Therefore, CUTS Institute for Regulation & Competition was established in New Delhi in 2008 with the aim of offering research, educational and training programmes on competition policy and law and sector regulatory laws.

1.2.4 Post-2015 Development Agenda

In future, by addressing the inter-play between 'Consumer Empowerment' and 'Sustainable Development', CUTS will steer its activities and interventions in a manner so as to align them and contribute towards the achievement of 'Transformative Shifts' as envisaged in the High-Level Panel Report on Post-2015 Development Agenda – 'A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development'. These 'Transformative Shifts' and their brief descriptions are as follows:

- **Leave no one behind** – There can be no excuses. This is a universal agenda, for which everyone must accept their proper share of responsibility.
- **Put sustainable development at the core** – Only by mobilising social, economic and environmental action together can we eradicate poverty irreversibly and meet the aspirations of eight billion people in 2030.
- **Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth** – We should make it easier for people to invest, start-up a business and to trade. And we can do more to take advantage of rapid urbanisation: cities are the world's engines for business and innovation. With good management they can provide jobs, hope and growth, while building sustainability.

Figure 2: Sustainable Development



- **Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all** – We need a transparency revolution, so citizens can see exactly where and how taxes, aid and revenues from extractive industries are spent. These are ends as well as means.
- **Forge a new global partnership** – We must fight climate change, champion free and fair trade, technology innovation, transfer and diffusion, and promote financial stability. And since this partnership is built on principles of common humanity and mutual respect, it must also have a new spirit and be completely transparent. Everyone involved must be fully accountable.

CUTS' core areas of operation and its *modus operandi*, in particular forging and creating 'Strategic Partnership', are aligned with these proposed 'Transformative Shifts'.



With inputs from Research, Advocacy and Networking, Capacity Building of state and non-state actors on cognate areas of 'Good Governance', 'Effective Regulation' and 'Rules-based Trade' and their linkages

2. Characteristics of CUTS

2.1 Values

CUTS' Vision and its underlying centrist ideology combined with the experience of its leadership suggest that the following values should guide the implementation of its agenda in the pursuit of its aspirations:

- Adhering to high standards of transparency and accountability
- Adoption of a 'Centrist Approach' in research, advocacy, networking and capacity building
- Ensuring outcomes rather than just outputs
- Focus on subject and geographical areas where a vacuum and need exists
- Responsibility to enhance the capacity of various stakeholders and partner organisations across the developing world
- Continuous strengthening of human resources within the organisation to ensure consistency and timely delivery of good quality of work

2.2 Negative List

It has been CUTS' experience that sometimes issues are taken up that are not worth allocating resources and/or related to the organisation's 'Vision' or 'track record' or much divergent from its 'Centrist Approach'. Therefore, the following is a 'Negative List' that CUTS follows:

- Work to further the interests of a single firm or conglomerate
- Work on inadequately funded assignments requiring investment of organisation's own scarce funds that could be employed more productively elsewhere
- Work on assignments that require the explicit use of scientific and technological skills such as ascertaining the quality of roads, assessing the quality of agricultural technologies
- Assignments that require banner waving, slogan shouting etc.
- Advocacy that requires projection of views that have not been verified through research



...a 'communication strategy' is imperative. Such a strategy clearly specifies the various means/tools of communication which are used for different 'target groups'

2.3 Geographical Expansion

The genesis of CUTS' expansion (both programme implementation and physical expansion) to countries/regions outside India was based on the principle of South-South cooperation not only among CSOs but also governments and business communities. South-South cooperation remains an

extremely significant process in contemporary international development and continues to motivate CUTS.

CUTS approach to South-South cooperation has been shaped further by the philosophy of trilateral development cooperation – cooperation between a southern provider of technical assistance and a southern recipient funded by a northern donor.

In the years to come, CUTS intends to expand as well as consolidate, wherever required in pursuance of its Vision. There are two aspects of geographical expansion: a) project implementation; and b) physical presence. Over the next decade, in addition to vertical consolidation (intensification) of its activities across the developing world, CUTS has the ambition of horizontal (geographical) expansion to South America, Middle East & North Africa, Central Asia and establish another International Centre in Washington DC, USA. Some thinking and actions have already been initiated in this regard.

In terms of project implementation, in addition to operating in five regions: South Asia, South East Asia, Eastern, Southern and Western Africa, CUTS intends to undertake activities and interventions in other parts of the developing world. Several factors are considered while choosing the geographical location of a project including demand on the ground, availability of local partner(s), familiarity with the country/region, existence of CUTS contacts, interest among the donor community to support activities in the organisation's core areas, etc.

These factors were considered by CUTS in opening each of its overseas centres (in Lusaka, Nairobi, Accra, Hanoi and Geneva) and would continue to be considered in contemplating opening of new overseas offices in future. The Year 2013 is a 'milestone' for CUTS on account of the establishment of its third Regional Centre in sub-Saharan Africa. This Regional Centre in Accra, Ghana will cover its activities in Western Africa and act as those in Lusaka, Zambia (covering Southern Africa) and Nairobi, Kenya (covering Eastern Africa).

2.4 Consolidation of Overseas Presence

CUTS' activities and interventions in the geographical regions are in most cases implemented and/or managed in cooperation with CUTS overseas centres in these regions. In



CUTS has always followed a process of participatory decision making at every level and stage of implementing its functions. As a tool to achieve this, each Centre has a monthly meeting format where every colleague is given an exposure in all work-related aspects of the Centre, thus empowering them and create better ownership



‘Capacity Building’ of internal staff through exposure visits, short trainings, internships

order for CUTS to roll out more effective intervention plans in these regions/countries, it is imperative that the capabilities of these centres are improved further.

Such improvement can be achieved in the following ways:

- ‘Capacity Building’ of internal staff through exposure visits, short trainings, internships
- Achievement of linkages between Programme and Regional Centres through experience sharing such as ‘*short deputation*’ of specialised staff from CUTS Programme Centres at overseas centres and *vice versa*). This would help evolve cross-cultural understanding and sensitivities
- Close cooperation and synergy between Programme Centres, Regional Centres and International Centre in Geneva in regard to programme development: A concerted process of having ‘*Desk Officers*’ at the CUTS headquarters responsible for liaisoning and coordination of this process has been initiated and would be further strengthened.
- Greater emphasis develop joint-projects between the Programme Centres, Regional Centres and International Centre
- Effective utilisation of its strength as a ‘Southern Organisation’ having an active presence in Geneva
- An evolving mechanism for close interaction between CUTS headquarters and its Programme Centres, Regional Centres and International Centre

3. Methodology to Achieve the Vision

This section outlines CUTS' thinking on achievement of its Vision and its working methodology for implementing the 'toolbox' of Research, Advocacy, Networking and Capacity Building without going into details which are outside the scope of this document. In the context of its activities and interventions:

- Research involves the evaluation and analysis of primary data and secondary evidence to arrive at recommendations for furthering progress towards its Vision
- Advocacy refers to the generation of awareness about these recommendations and dissemination of other knowledge/information relevant for the mentioned progress as well as capacity building of CUTS and its partners which are needed for understanding and pushing the implementation of these recommendations
- Networking involves the creation of lattices through which such advocacy can be effectively conducted and this includes capacity building of the relevant stakeholders
- With inputs from Research, Advocacy and Networking, Capacity Building of state and non-state actors on cognate areas of 'Good Governance', 'Effective Regulation' and 'Rules-based Trade' and their linkages



...each of the Programme Centres of CUTS develops Strategic Business Plan, for a period of five years, with a detailed description of objectives, outcomes, etc. of their respective areas of work and a corresponding strategy for implementation

3.1 Planning

In order to develop the methodology for achieving progress towards its Vision, each of the Programme Centres of CUTS develops *Strategic Business Plan*, for a period of five years, with a detailed description of objectives, outcomes, etc. of their respective areas of work and a corresponding strategy for implementation (funding, human resources, etc.). In doing so, each Programme Centre takes into account and assists in doing similar work in Regional Centres and the International Centre.

Each Programme Centre specifies an annual target for funds to be raised for projects and, thus, arrive at an aggregate figure for a five-year period. The planning process for developing a *Strategic Business Plan* is initiated in the year preceding its implementation through a consultative process involving staff of each Centre, members of its advisory body, staff of other CUTS Centres and representatives of the senior management.



...that the effectiveness of the organisation's advocacy depends on its outreach and dissemination capability, the development of a comprehensive 'advocacy plan' and within it a 'communication strategy' is imperative

CUTS has always been clear and unambiguous in communicating its messages to specific target groups. Given that the effectiveness of the organisation's advocacy depends on its outreach and dissemination capability, the development of a comprehensive 'advocacy plan' and within it a 'communication strategy' is imperative.

Such a strategy clearly specifies the various means/tools of communication which are used for different 'target groups' – outreach meetings for project-related stakeholders and media, project and policy briefs, briefing and discussion papers, focus group discussions, local, national, regional and international conferences, etc.

Furthermore, the organisation is in the process of developing an in-house Monitoring and Evaluation Unit to carry out regular outcome- and impact-audits and guide the project teams to ensure that the work is on stream.

3.2 Leadership and Decision Making

CUTS has always followed a process of participatory decision making at every level and stage of implementing its functions. As a tool to achieve this, each Centre has a monthly meeting format where every colleague is given an exposure in all work-related aspects of the Centre, thus empowering them and create better ownership. Such meetings are recorded and reviewed regularly by the team and the senior management.

Each CUTS Centre is provided a fair degree of independence in decision making – administrative and financial. Such independence extends to the conceptualisation and implementation of Centre-specific Strategic Business Plan, especially in respect to project development, staff planning and management, etc.

Formulation and implementation of Strategic Business Plan of a Centre is handled by its Centre Head/Coordinator. More detailed implementation such as project development is handled by a dedicated group of a centre's personnel including a designated programme officer who, along with her/his team members, is responsible for timely progress of the project. Activities and interventions are implemented under the guidance of a Centre Head/Coordinator, often with the involvement of the senior management, Centre's advisory body and/or project advisory groups, which consist of a panel of reputed experts/practitioners with relevant knowledge/experience.



CUTS has always followed a process of participatory decision making at every level and stage of implementing its functions

3.3 Resources

For implementing its working methodology, as described above, the organisation places equal emphasis on all three aspects of 'Resources' – Human, Physical and Financial. Given their dynamic nature, regular discussion takes place among the senior management to address required changes in 'Resources' Planning.

The organisation has a 'Human Resources Development Policy' for recruiting professionals and support staff from diverse socio-cultural background, keeping in mind gender balance and other features of diversity.

In regard to physical resources, the organisation has the necessary space and provides state-of-the-art facilities for a more productive working environment. It has acquired a piece of land in Jaipur to build its campus, which will help the organisation with more space and better facilities.

The organisation has various sources of funding – from governmental including bilateral donors, multilateral/inter-governmental organisations and foundations. Most of these funds are project-specific. In recent times, the organisation has been successful in securing some funds through competitive bidding for specific projects.

The organisation is yet to be successful in mobilising significant amount of support through endowments, donations, etc. It is developing a 'Strategy' to improve its ability to attract such support from potential sources. However, it would have to be careful in maintaining its independent character while seeking such endowments.

In its 30th anniversary year in 2013, CUTS is organising a series of lectures by eminent personalities across the world on topics of its work agenda. These lectures will help raise the profile of the organisation globally and also help CUTS to fine tune its work agenda and raise long-term funding. The lectures will be published in a volume while a videotape also be produced to help visibility.



The organisation is yet to be successful in mobilising significant amount of support through endowments, donations, etc. It is developing a 'Strategy' to improve its ability to attract such support from potential sources

4. Conclusions

This Vision Document provides directions for the next two decades of CUTS – recommendations for continuity with change emerge from the analysis in the previous sections. It will help the organisation consolidating and synergising its activities and interventions in cognate subjects of ‘Good Governance’, ‘Effective Regulation’ and ‘Rules-based Trade’ for achieving ‘Consumer Sovereignty’.

While the organisation’s core areas of operation would continue and will be consolidated, there would be an increase in emphasis on issues such as social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, corporate social responsibility, and transparency and accountability in the systems of economic governance.

Over the next two decades, considerable geographical expansion is anticipated – in Latin America & the Caribbean, Middle East & North Africa, Central Asia and another International Centre in Washington DC. New Regional Centres would be set up on the basis of project funding and core/long-term support but continuation of operations would be based on sustainability through the generation and consolidation of local demands, future opportunities, etc.

In future, the organisation will place greater emphasis on outcomes- and impact-oriented cutting-edge activities and interventions by consolidating and synergising its work across subjects and geographical regions.

CUTS is an organisation striving for continuous improvement. One of the ways for achieving this would be to undertake an ‘External Evaluation’ of CUTS so as to better identify its ‘Strengths, Limitations, Opportunities and Threats’, which will help the organisation addressing major factors in ‘External Environment’ in which it will work as well as improve its ‘Internal Environment’ of functioning.

An Organisational Strategic Business Plan will be developed which would help CUTS operationalising this Vision Document. A Monitoring and Evaluation framework will also be developed to monitor the progress of the organisation in achieving the goals set in this Vision Document by the 50th anniversary of CUTS in 2034.

This Vision Document will be revisited in 2018 to take stock of what the organisation had visualised and what it has been able to achieve in terms of this Vision.



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ISBN 978-81-8257-144-0

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