

## **Chapter 9 Information and Public Awareness**

For increasing the awareness of all stakeholders including consumers, the State Government needs to undertake related activities as well as to deal with the requests/complaints of general public under Right to Information Act, 2005.

### **9.1 Creating Consumer Awareness**

GOI, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution sanctioned and released (30 September 2006) ₹28.75 lakh for the State of Assam along with other 25 States/UTs for undertaking consumer awareness activities like display and dissemination of relevant publicity material during local festivals, involvement of Information and Public Relation Department and PDS outlets in the State; identification of village sign boards, wall paintings, hoardings in local language for displaying consumer awareness messages; organizing exhibitions, publishing and distribution of hand bills/pamphlets in local languages; imparting training to teachers etc.

Audit scrutiny of the records revealed that the GOA after keeping the fund unutilised for more than two years, released the amount (₹28.75 lakh) in February 2009 for 23 districts @ ₹1.25 lakh for consumer awareness activities. The Director, however, had drawn the said amount on 27 March 2009 and disbursed to 23 districts @ ₹1.25 lakh during July 2009 to September 2010.

As of September 2010, only 15 districts furnished utilisation certificates for the implementation of the awareness creation programme. Thus, abnormal delay in undertaking the consumer awareness activities even after availability of financial resources and partial implementation thereof was indicative of casual approach of the Government towards creating/increasing awareness about PDS amongst the stakeholders i.e., beneficiaries as well as the functionaries of the State Government.

### **9.2 Implementation of Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005**

In order to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority and also to ensure consumer's right to information regarding FPSs, entitlement, price, number of cards attached to shop etc. the Right to Information Act, 2005 came in force w.e.f. 12 October 2005. To deal with requests for information, one Joint Director, FCS&CA was designated as Central Public Information Officer (CPIO) in the State of Assam.

Audit scrutiny of the records of the Director, revealed that during the period 2006-09 (calendar year), 14 applications were received under the Act in connection with PDS, out of which information were furnished directly in six cases and seven cases were forwarded to appropriate authority for furnishing information and only one case

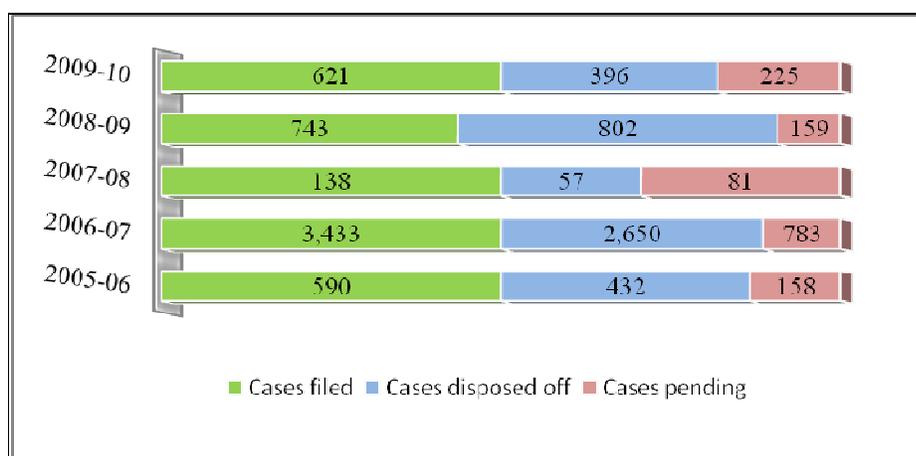
remained pending. The status thus indicated the failure in the campaign to make people aware of consumers' right to information.

### 9.3 Redressal of Public Grievances

In order to provide the latest information to the public on matters of the functioning of the Department of Food and Public Distribution, eight district fora were set up on permanent basis and 15 set up on part time basis in 27 districts (earlier 23) of the State.

The details of cases filed and disposed off in respect of PDS under the Act during 2005-10 are shown in the chart below:

Chart- 1



Source: Data collected from the Director, FCS & CA, Assam.

The reasons for delay/non-disposal of filed cases were attributed by the authority to be due to:

- (i) vacancy in the post of Judges;
- (ii) inadequate staff in district fora, and
- (iii) lack of persuasion by the Government Advocate.

**In sum, the information and public awareness programme has not been given the importance as envisaged.**

#### **Recommendation**

**State Government needs to address the issue of public grievances effectively and ensure implementation of Consumer Awareness programmes.**