



TheNetwork
for Consumer Protection

Consumers are also citizens

■ Who is consumer?

We are all consumers. People are synonymous to consumers.

Consumption is basic to human survival and it must be shared, strengthening, socially responsible and sustainable.

Contrary to the common perception, it is not necessary to be a customer to qualify as a consumer. However, the concept has been associated with market so closely that it has assumed a very restrictive meaning.

We are all consumers - whether we act as buyers or not.

It is crucial to broaden our understanding about consumers in order to be inclusive of poor citizens and their rights as consumers – whom markets can ignore but State and consumer movement cannot.

■ Citizens as consumers

State recognizes people as citizens. Whereas markets treat people as consumers and value them as customers.

It is important to remind ourselves that markets are regulated by the States. And peoples' status as citizens is more overarching than market consumers.

This is important for people, especially poor, to realize their citizenship and to assert it to be protected as consumers.

In the age of globalization, this realization has become more important than ever before.

Citizen-consumer standpoint provides much higher and encompassing pedestal for people to demand and assert their rights including right to good governance. This standpoint also links up consumer movement with other human rights movements.

■ Why consumer protection?

Citizens need protection of their consumer rights in three ways:

- in the market place against problem goods and services; against bad and restrictive trade practices; against exploitative prices and unethical marketing;
- from governments as supplier of basic goods and services for poor and vulnerable consumers; as formulators of public policies so that they are just, equitable and protective; and as provider of good governance;
- from the State to provide reliable consumer protection structures which ensure safety against weaknesses and failures of the market and which ensure good government.

The importance of consumer protection has assumed renewed significance today. Globalism and its various instruments have posed new challenges for consumer protection especially in poor countries.

The greatest challenge for consumer movement today is to raise cogent and effective voice for bringing fairness in free market economy – at local, national and global levels.

■ How consumer protection can be ensured?

Through informed, motivated and organized citizens acting as assertive and responsible consumers.

The Organization

■ What is TheNetwork?

TheNetwork for Consumer Protection, commonly known as "TheNetwork", is a national, public interest, not-for-profit organization.

It is registered with Securities Exchange Commission of Pakistan under Section 42 of the Companies Ordinance 1984 (Registration No: 1-01014). It is a company limited with guarantee not having a share capital.

TheNetwork undergoes a thorough annual financial audit as a statutory requirement.

■ Who owns and runs TheNetwork?

TheNetwork is governed by its Board of Directors, which is democratically elected from a general body of voting members, which in turn is carefully selected from a general pool of non-voting members.

The selection of members takes place according to a well laid down criterion of personal standing in the society and the track record of social contributions and activism. No organizational memberships are offered.

To pursue its mission, TheNetwork employs a team of committed staff, which is organized under various units, programs and projects. An executive coordinator heads the secretariat.

■ Who funds TheNetwork?

TheNetwork raises support from various multilateral and bilateral organizations. It has been supported by OXFAM, UNICEF, WHO, Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, Consumers International and Department for International Development (DFID). Currently, a five years major program in consumer protection is mainly being supported by DFID.

TheNetwork also generates funds through

membership fees, subscription fees, donations and occasional consultancies. As a cardinal principle, no cash or kind support is sought or accepted from commercial organizations.

■ TheNetwork's evolution

The organization came into being in 1992 as "Association for Rational Use of Medication in Pakistan" in wake of a drug tragedy. For some years it did policy advocacy with a mission "to promote rational use of drugs and essential drug concept in order to optimize the usefulness of drugs and help bring equity in their access". Watchdog role was also assumed to keep an eye on problem drugs, non-available essential drugs and drug prices. Later, a project on protection of breastfeeding against unethical marketing practices of baby food manufacturers was also initiated.

Building on this experience, TheNetwork developed a vision to become a national consumer protection organization with a broad mandate and multi-pronged strategy.

■ Board of Directors

Dr. Inam ul Haq (Chairperson)

Former federal drug controller, Ministry of Health, Islamabad.

Mr. Abdul Latif Shaikh (Vice Chairperson)

Director, Pharmacy Services, Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi.

Dr. Ms Tasleem Akhtar

Chairperson Pakistan Medical Research Council (PMRC).

Professor Naseem Ullah

Principle, Rawalpindi Medical College, Rawalpindi.

Prof. Akhlaque un Nabi

Former Provincial Secretary Health, Sind.

Prof. A. Samad Shera

Secretary-General, Diabetic Association of Pakistan, Karachi.

Lt. Gen. (R) M. A. Akhtar

Ex-Surgeon General Pakistan Army.

Dr. Azra Talat Sayeed, Ph.D.

Director, Roots, Karachi.

Mr. Aslam Azhar

Ex-Chairman Pakistan Television Corporation, Islamabad.

Professor Tariq Iqbal Bhutta

Former Principle Nishtar Medical College, Multan.

The Worldview

■ We envision an equitable society where:

- consumers enjoy basic rights as specified in the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection and in Consumers International's Charter of Rights;
- consumers are involved in making the decisions that affect them;
- consumers appreciate social justice and have access to a just system of redress and where
- consumers act as responsible members of society.

■ The mission statement

To protect and promote the interest of all Pakistani consumers: by educating them about their rights; by providing them independent information about goods and services; and by informing them about government's performance as protector of their rights, especially the poor consumers. To promote the interest of consumers by facilitating their organization and by advocating for pro-consumer policies that also address structural inequities. The organization also promotes responsible and sustainable consumption practices in society, as well as the development of alternative systems.

■ Core values

TheNetwork is a non-partisan organization that does not seek favor or receive any benefits from any section of the commercial private sector, including any contractual agreements with staff. The organization supports pro-people (especially pro-poor) development, and historically marginalized groups, such as women, in Pakistani society. Internally, TheNetwork is democratic in nature and believes in participatory decision-making, transparency and accountability. It does not discriminate on the basis of class, caste, creed, race, age, sex or religion.

“Consumer activism is exercising citizenship.”

The Work

■ **Advocacy & Research Unit**

As an engine room of the organization it houses projects on pharmaceuticals, protection of breastfeeding, tobacco and water. This unit also undertakes media advocacy.

■ **Consumer Mobilization Unit**

The unit roots the organization among consumers through education and training. It envisions a vibrant network of consumer groups and organizations around the country.

■ **Information and Publication Unit**

The unit houses a resource center, and regular publications of the organization. It has a team of editors, reporters and designers with state-of-the-art desktop publication facilities. At present the regular publications include The Network Drug Bulletin, Sarfeen-aur-Sehat and Breastfeeding Newsletter. ConsumerWise and a Urdu consumer magazine are being planned.

■ **Legal Affairs and Governance Unit**

A project on Consumer Policy & Legislation is located in this unit. Consumer complaints handling section is being developed which would provide legal advice and facilitation to aggrieved consumers. Also cases would be selected and worked out for possible Public Interest Litigation.

New Areas

■ **Program on International Trade and Consumers**

A comprehensive program is being developed on new regime of trade liberalization and consumers. Areas of interest include WTO Agreements on TRIPS

and access to medicines, TBT, SPS and GATS. TheNetwork is working with CI as a partner in its global trade program.

■ **Governance Program**

As a part of the work program of Legal Affairs and Governance Unit, a long term program on governance is being developed. To promote good governance from the standpoint of Citizen-Consumer and to demystify structure and function of the government for people a detailed program is being worked out.

■ **Testing Laboratory**

For independent testing of food items, water and medicines, preparations are underway for establishment of a small testing laboratory in Islamabad.



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