

## Consumers International (CI) – A Study

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**ABSTRACT**

This article presents information about Consumers International (Global Association of Consumer Unions) and its offices at various regions. It is also discussed about the role of Consume Voluntary Organisation in the society, benefits in having a Consumer Voluntary organization.

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**Keywords**

Consumers International,  
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**Introduction**

"Human beings, all over the world, are born with certain potential capabilities. The purpose of development is to create an environment in which all people can expand their capabilities, and opportunities could be enlarged for both present and future generations. The real foundation of human development is universalism in acknowledging the life claims of everyone"<sup>1</sup>.

The protection of interests and rights is vital to the general welfare of any society. This is more true in the case of consumers also. The consumers who constitute the largest segment of society are unorganized calling for well regulated mechanism to over see that consumers get satisfaction from their rights. An individual consumer becomes strong when he joins with his fellow consumers and fights together.

**A Consumer Organization** is an organization of the consumers, by the consumers and for the consumers. Their main object is to cater to the needs of the consumers who are generally exploited by merchants and middlemen. The efforts of consumers can be more effective only when they unite to work together and they can learn from the experiences of others when they can share them<sup>2</sup>.

**Roles and Contributions of Consumer Associations (VCOs):**

Consumers need to join and support consumer associations because a Consumer Association has an important role to play and contributions to make<sup>3</sup>. *The 5 roles and contributions identified are:*

**Role 1: Community Development Centre**

Consumer associations are in fact associations for community development. They provide community development services, ensuring that "goods, services and gifts of nature" are utilised for the "common good" of all. They also educate and create awareness amongst consumers to play their role in a responsible manner.

**Role 2: Community Advisory and Support Centre**

Consumer associations play an important role in providing advice to consumers and helping them in time of need to seek redress and a fair deal in the market place. Such a watchdog and support role keeps things checked and under control.

**Role 3: Community Information Centre**

Another role and function of consumer associations is to conduct research, gather information and disseminate such information to consumers. This is to enable consumers to make informed choices, right decisions, and protect them from unscrupulous trade practices.

**Role 4: Community Education Centre**

Imparting and disseminating consumer education to the community is another important role of the consumer association. The best consumer protection is self-protection. Consumers require consumer education to protect themselves in the market place.

**Role 5: Centre for Consumer Protection**

The most important role of a consumer association is to advocate consumer protection. Consumer associations must be vigilant all the time and proactively advocate consumer protection, particularly in ensuring adequate laws and regulations and their enforcement.

The history of consumer movement and associations can be seen from the following presentation.

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Mrs. V.N. Laturkar – "Social Marketing – A holistic Concept of Management" paper published in Indian Journal of Marketing, May / June – 2001. Page - 13

<sup>2</sup> Dr.T. Neeraja – "Consumer Organisations" paper published in the book "Consumer Education" published by Department of Consumer Affairs, Food and Civil Supplies. Government of AndhraPradesh, Hyderabad Page – 55

<sup>3</sup> Bishan Singh (For Direct Selling Association of Malaysia) – "Consumer Education on Consumer Rights and Responsibilities, Code of conduct for Ethical business and Importance of Product Labelling" book published in the year 2002, available in the

### History of Global Consumer Associations:

In the Second Chapter the history of global consumer movement has been presented. In this chapter it is intended to present the consumer movement which caused to establishment of Consumer Associations / VCOs.

In the modern age the consumer movement was started at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in America and spread to Sweden, England, New Zealand, Malaysia, Hong Kong and other countries<sup>4</sup>.

The consumer movement was started in England by the then ruling Labour Party in 1955. The government had released a notice with the name of 'Consumer Society' to establish 'Consumer Council' for qualitative goods. In this way the consumer movement was started in Great Britain.

Ralf Nadar had started the consumer movement in America. He had launched a fight against the General Motors Company for supply of inferior quality of cars in America. This made him the *father of consumer movement*.

On 15<sup>th</sup> March 1962, the president of American senate John F. Kennedy announced four (4) rights to the consumers. (They are the right to protect, to communicate and to select, to appeal). Consequently March 15<sup>th</sup> has been celebrated as World Consumer Rights Day. Indian Government also announced the Consumer Rights Day in the year 1989.

The Ministry of industries in New Zealand had started a consumer council in the year 1959. This consumer movement had gained greater momentum from 1968 onwards; it spread like a wild fire in New Zealand.

### Consumers International (CI):

Consumers International was founded in 1960 as the International Organization of Consumers Unions (IOCU) by a group of national consumer organizations. The group recognized that they could build upon their individual strengths by working across national borders. The organization rapidly grew and soon became established as the voice of the international consumer movement on issues such as product and food standards, health and patients' rights, the environment and sustainable consumption, and the regulation of international trade and public utilities<sup>5</sup>.

Consumers International is an independent, non-profit organization. It is not aligned with or supported by any political party or industry. It is funded by fees from member organizations and by grants from foundations, governments and multilateral agencies.

Consumers International (CI) supports links and represents consumer groups and agencies all over the world. It has a membership of over 250 organizations in 115 countries. It strives to promote a fairer society through defending the rights of all consumers, especially the poor, marginalized and disadvantaged, by:

- Supporting and strengthening member organizations and the consumer movement in general.

- Campaigning at the international level for policies which respect consumer concerns.

Consumers International's Head Office is based in London. It has Regional Offices in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Santiago (Chile) and Accra (Ghana), and in London.

### Rights and responsibilities:

Consumer policy promotes the establishment of legislation, institutions and information that improve quality of life and empower people to make changes in their own lives. It seeks to ensure that basic human rights are recognised, and promotes understanding of people's rights and responsibilities as consumers. These are<sup>6</sup>:

- the right to satisfaction of basic needs
- the right to safety
- the right to be informed
- the right to choose
- the right to be heard
- the right to redress
- the right to consumer education
- the right to a healthy environment.

Consumers also have responsibilities to use their power in the market to drive out abuses, to encourage ethical practices and to support sustainable consumption and production.

Developing and protecting consumers' rights and their awareness of their responsibilities are integral to:

- eradication of poverty
- good governance
- social justice and respect for human rights
- fair and effective market economies
- protection of the environment

To conclude, Consumer Protection and Welfare is not the task of a single entity of the society rather, it is the collective responsibility of the State.

"*No pain, no gain*" is the right technique for consumer protection. The consumer must be aware of his basic rights and should fight for these rights. The famous principle of "Caveat Emptor" – Let a buyer beware - must be replaced by "Caveat Venditor" – Let a seller beware – by strong determination on consumer side.

"*Prevention is better than cure*". So the consumers should approach the government Central and State redressal grievances departments (ISI Bureau, Agmark Department, Civil supplies Department, Weights and Measures Dept., Advertising standards council of India. MRTP Commission, Registrars of trademarks, All India Bank Depositors Associations, Food Inspector, and consumer cells provided by various departments), vigilance commission and consumer voluntary organizations before filling the case in the consumer redressal forum / commission.

"*Work is worship*" is a proper proverb for the consumer protection agencies. The Central and State Government consumer redressal grievances departments, consumer protection councils, consumer redressal forums / commissions, consumer welfare fund committee, CWF, Ministry of civil supplies, consumer research centers, consumer voluntary organizations should work collectively and devotedly to attain the objectives of consumerism.

<sup>4</sup> Mandadi Krishna Reddy, UN Vishweshwar Rao and Somireddy Chandrashekhar (of CARC / CAPCO) – "Viniyoga Darula Udyamam (Telugu)", published by Consumer Awareness and Research Society, Hyderabad. Page – 1 (The Research Scholar has translated the data in to English)

<sup>5</sup>

<http://www.consumersinternational.org/templates/internal.asp?NODID=89647#what#what>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.consumersinternational.org/templates/internal.asp?NODID=89647#rights#rights>

*“Union is Strength”* is a proper proverb for consumer voluntary organizations. A voluntary activity is an activity in which people contribute their time and energy without compulsion. The people in the voluntary organization should work with a spirit of dedication and fight for a common cause which is in the interest of the entire society. With the same objective the voluntary organizations should work and render

their services to meet specific goals which are important for the consuming society as a whole.

Consumer movement is an example of the proverb *“Calm before storm”*. The businessmen should invite consumer welfare from the bottom of the heart by turning over a new leaf.