RESOURCE KIT FOR CONSUMER ORGANIZATIONS

A contextualized version of “Doing It Ourselves”,

a resource kit of Consumers International (CI)

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Consumer protection in Pakistan presents a dismal picture with a large number of problems confronting the consumers both in the public and private sectors. Most of these problems stem from the crisis of governance in the country and the monopolistic, informal and under-developed nature of markets.

The government is largely indifferent to the interests of the consumers because it lacks an objective and deeper understanding of their concerns and interests. In addition, the general lack of awareness of consumer rights and responsibilities undermines the capacity of consumers to become organized and impress upon the government the need for consumer protection. The result is that government has yet to come up with an appropriate legal and institutional mechanism to redress consumer-related grievances.

The private sector has little cause for consumer protection due to monopolistic and under-developed nature of market in Pakistan. In the absence of a consumer movement, which can positively influence the market forces, the consumers are provided with unsafe and substandard goods and services without any recourse to justice. The situation has become worse in the wake of rapid privatization and limited role of regulatory bodies in the country.

The above understanding of the need for consumer protection provides substance to the collective efforts of a group of conscious citizens and activists comprising Consumer Rights Commission of Pakistan (CRCP). CRCP is committed to promote the cause of consumer protection in a broader perspective, with the aim of laying the foundations for a vibrant consumer movement all over the country.

Keeping with its objectives, CRCP has taken several initiatives. These include lobbying for legislation, awareness raising, organization of seminars, and most importantly, establishment of informal consumer groups in Rawalpindi, Lahore, Gujranwala and Faisalabad. Public response to these initiatives was overwhelming. CRCP realised that if necessary information provided, many people would be willing to organise themselves in various corners of the country, and thus contribute to the cause of consumer protection and help redress the inequalities in the country. It is in response to this realisation that CRCP decided to bring out this Resource Kit for consumers and emerging consumer organisations. This manual is a contexualized version of “Doing It Ourselves,” a publication of Consumers International (CI).

Founded in 1960, CI (formerly known as IOCU) is an international federation of consumer organizations. Registered as an independent, non-profit, non-part political foundation, it links the activities of around 200 consumer groups all over the world. CI has three main goals: to support its member, to expand the consumer movement and to represent consumer's interests at the international level. Development of a strong consumer movement all over the world is a central aim of CI, and its support comes in many ways such as training, information and advice.

CRCP is thankful to Liberal Forum Pakistan and Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung for their support and encouragement for the publication of this resource kit. Liberal Forum Pakistan is a civil society initiative that advocates liberal values stemming from a pivotal focus on individual freedom and social responsibility. Liberal Forum is working for the realization of values like supremacy of democratic principles, rule of law, tolerance, pluralism and equality of all citizens.

We hope that consumers would find it convenient, comprehensive and precise as various laws governing voluntary organizations and examples from everyday problems confronted by consumers in Pakistan have been given. We anticipate that consumers would efficiently use it to establish consumer groups and pursue the cause of consumer protection in Pakistan.

Abrar Hafeez
Secretary-general
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WHAT DOES A CONSUMER ORGANIZATION MEAN

A vibrant consumer movement is a must to make society responsive to consumer concerns and get them a fair deal both in marketplace and provision of services by the state.

The emergence and growth of consumer movements in almost every part of the globe and the increasing awareness of the need for legislative means to protect consumers raise the following questions:

- Why do consumers need to be protected?
- What are the ways and means for the protection of consumer rights and interests, and institutional arrangement for this purpose?
- What is the nature of consumer organizations that allows them to represent the consumers' interest?
- What are the basic principles that guide their work?

The fundamental imbalance in the marketplace has existed ever since the beginning of commerce. The Latin maxim "caveat emptor" or "buyer beware" expresses the reality of the consumers' vulnerability to unfair deals by the suppliers of goods and services.

It is this feeling of vulnerability and exploitation that has provided the drive for consumer protection and the emotional steam behind the consumer movement. These feelings have been converted into assertions of basic consumer rights by consumer and civil society activists, and constitute the moral foundations of consumer protection: 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, and the right to have basic needs met.

The general aim of a consumer organization is to serve and advance the interests of consumers. There are two basic approaches to meet this aim by:

- helping consumers to make better decisions and informed choices for themselves; and
- representing the interests of all consumers, including the inarticulate, disadvantaged and marginalized.

All activities are directed not only at ensuring that the rights of consumers are observed, but also at encouraging people to be conscious of the part they can play and their responsibility towards their community and environment. CRCP not only conforms to but also promotes CI's **Charter for Consumer Action** in order to help create a more responsive, responsible and equitable society. This discussion about the consumer protection triggers a question: what provides the credibility for consumer organizations to represent the needs and interests of consumers?

A Charter for Consumer Action

- **Critical Awareness:**
- Consumers must be awakened to be more questioning about the provision of the quality of goods and services.
- **Involvement:**
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onsumers must get involved and act to ensure that they get a fair deal.

- **Social Responsibility:**
- Consumers must act with social responsibility, with concern and sensitivity to the impact of their actions on other citizens, particularly, in relation to disadvantaged groups in the community and in relation to the economic and social realities prevailing.
- **Ecological Responsibility:**
- There must be a heightened sensitivity to the impact of consumer decisions on the physical environment, which must be developed in a harmonious way, promoting conservation. In addition, we must fight against the degradation of this most critical factor in improving the real quality of life for the present and the future.
- **Solidarity:**

  The best and most effective action is through co-operative efforts through the formation of citizens groups who together can have the strength and influence to ensure that adequate attention is given to the consumer interest.

This credibility comes from a number of factors:

- It comes from a large membership. Popular support is important to provide strength and backing to the consumer organizations operating on consumers' behalf.
- It can and does come from a reputation for getting the facts right.
- It comes from a sound economic base, which calls for effective work.
- It may also come from being given the mandate by the government to protect and promote the consumer interest. However, in case of Pakistan, so far no such mandate has been given by the government to any organization or group, but it may emerge as a result of some legislation.

There is, however, one key factor to the credibility of the consumer group, and that is **independence**; independent of those who produce, supply, and promote goods and services. This category includes those in the commercial sector as well as government bodies, which provide a wide range of public services and goods.

The independence and non-partisanship are crucial characteristics for genuine consumer groups; it is also the fundamental principle underlying the six qualifications for CI associates as formulated in the CI Constitution, promoting the consumer rights and interests in its drive to create a more responsive, responsible and equitable society. The requirements are:

- they must act exclusively on behalf of the interests of the consumer;
- they must be totally unconcerned with the advancement of commercial or party political causes;
- they must be non-profit making in character;
- they must not accept advertisements for any commercial purpose in their publications;
- they must not allow selective commercial exploitation of the information and advice they give to consumers; and
- they must not allow their independence of action and comment to be influenced or qualified by receipt of subsidies.

Consumer organizations, owing to their differences in origin and different environments and conditions under which they operate, naturally have different styles and emphasis in their work. Some primarily focus on advocacy and lobbying, some function as campaigning organizations, whereas some lay emphasis on comparative testing and providing sound information to consumers, and while others concentrate on educating consumers to use their resources soundly and responsibly. Despite its diversity, the consumer movement is united in its overall goal, that is to get a fair deal at the marketplace, and in the provision of services.

STARTING A CONSUMER ORGANIZATION

Better organization is half success. Organizing people is bringing them together for a common cause.

Starting a consumer organization is probably the first important step for concerted efforts to secure a fair deal for consumers. Where to start and how to begin are the most commonly asked questions.

Getting Started

Most organizations start with a few enthusiastic people who want to work together to solve a common problem. Usually this process begins with one person who is concerned or angry about something which is happening in the community and which has a direct effect on people’s lives, for example, banned and fake medicines, a factory polluting the air, lack of proper health services, or contaminated drinking water.

First step to take is to discuss the issue with friends or neighbors and find out whether they are interested and willing to get involved. From these discussions the issue can be taken further to plan local action. The initial group can thus consist of friends and others who are willing to join hands to solve a common problem in their community.

The second step is then to organize a planning meeting where the problem can be more thoroughly discussed with the entire group and where possible ways for solving the problem can be reviewed. The meeting can be held in the house of one of the group member in an informal environment. At the meeting, various items should be discussed, such as the extent of the problem, who is affected by it, what can be done about it and who is going to do what.

The initial project taken up by the group should be small, specific and achievable. Later when the group gains strength and experience, more ambitious efforts can be launched.

Forming a group

Forming an action group requires the initiators to commit much time, energy and, in some instances, money. At the first meeting when the group has established the aim of the action project, responsibilities need to be divided. The tasks should be apportioned among individuals on the basis of their talent, availability, appropriate connections or interests.

- Coordinator: The coordinator arranges meetings when necessary, oversees the activities of the groups, keeps financial records, and maintains files;
- Press Relations: A person with some writing experience and knowledge of the media should be assigned to handle press relations;
- Legal Expert/Lawyer: Since the group's activities will involve interpretation of law, it is important to have at least one member familiar with legal intricacies. In this regard, CRCP can provide advice and relevant material.

As long as the group is working on a single project, the initial members can handle all activities themselves. As activities expand, some members have to be willing to take on more responsibilities.

Getting More Support

When the project has been defined, responsibilities divided and plans of action discussed, the group may want to rally more support for their initiatives.

The next step, therefore, is to identify the people having interest or stake in the solution of the problem or issue. Help may be found among, for example, teachers, government officials, housewives, workers, religious leaders, and professionals like doctors, lawyers, etc.

In order to get these people together, a more formal meeting needs to be organized where the aims of the project will be outlined, strategies and tactics discussed and further commitments made. The general aim of the meeting will be to bring together a diverse group of people who have expressed an interest in the issue and who are prepared to spend some time working on it in order to initiate action. (See also 'Organizing a Meeting')

Initial Funding

An important task of the initial groups in the beginning will be engaging people with talents who are prepared to commit some time and money, or do some fund-raising to cover such operations such as publication of brochures, production of posters, leaflets or whatever material the group may decide to use during the formative phase to win supporters.

In the beginning, the budget needed will be small. If homes are used instead of offices and if volunteers supply the staff, most other expenses can be taken care of by a dues assessment, small enough that no one will find it burdensome. In time, when the group achieves recognition and when membership grows, the services of full-time staff person may be needed.

Leadership

The initial actions started to solve a community problem can in a later stage develop into an organization, which will work on a wider range of issues. To develop from a single-issue group into a consumer group, the leadership must have the vision and the belief that a permanent broad-based consumer organization can be an effective forum for fighting for overall consumer rights.

Organizing is building a team. To build a strong organization, team leaders need a broad range of skills. Each individual need not have each of these skills, of course, but the organization should include people with the following skills:

- Working with people: Being able to talk to people one-to-one, listen well, help them work through their own ideas, encourage their own leadership potential, motivate them, help them feel better about themselves, and push them toward making realistic commitments.
- Issues: Being able to define issues in a community, understanding what makes goad issues and what makes poor issues, and being able to work with people to define their own needs and priorities.
- Meetings: Knowing how to hold a successful meeting, set an agenda, chair, deal with some of the problems that can come up in meetings, and encourage participation by all people at a meeting.
- Organizations: Understanding how organizations work, some of the different ways that organizations can be structured, and decision-making processes within an organization.
- Strategy and tactics: Knowing how to develop both long-range and short-range strategy, set goals and establish priorities, and choose and use tactics.
- Money: Understanding how to raise money for an organization both from basic sources of external fund-raising and by establishing grass roots fund-raising within an organization, planning budgets, and managing the finances of an organization.
- Research: Learning how to do investigative research, understanding the uses of information in developing strategy and tactics, having a sense of what information is useful and what isn't and knowing how and where to look for information.
- Communications: Maintaining a system of communication within the organization, knowing how to use basic tools such as newsletters, leaflets, pamphlets, and building person-to-person communication in order to create a real group from a bunch of individuals.
- Media: Learning how to deal with public means of communication; establish working relationships with the media, integrate media into strategy, put out a basic press release, and stage press events, like walks.
- Public speaking: Improving your ability to speak with small and large groups and being

able to communicate a sense of values and vision.

- Power: Learning how power works, and how it can be shared and managed for the benefit of the consumers.

Starting A Consumer Organization

The most ambitious and effective form of consumer action is the consumer organization, which employs a professional staff and acts on behalf of consumers on many issues.

There are three ways such an organization can be formed:

- it might grow naturally out of an existing campaign of concerned people;
- it can be set up immediately if the organizers of the groups can raise enough money from other organizations and individuals to support a small full-time staff; and
- it can be launched by conducting a fund-raising drive; once enough money is raised, the group can hire staff, get to work and consolidate its efforts by its success.

Each of these approaches has advantages and disadvantages. The first approach has the advantage of creating an automatic constituency, which will be a source of continuing support and potential volunteers. Since the second approach lacks this constituency, it might be difficult to influence legislators. Using funds from certain organizations and individuals might also limit the group's activities.

Attempting to raise funds from large numbers of citizens can be very difficult unless the organizers have a reputation for integrity and effectiveness, or unless the idea is so powerful that consumers naturally support it. On the other hand, if the approach is successful, it will develop a loyal constituency. Small contributions from large numbers of citizens will not put limitations on the group activities.

Establishing a membership organization is one way of building mass support on a continuing basis. Since members have a stake in the outcome of the group's projects, they are a good source of volunteer workers. Special fund-raising events can, of course, supplement the income from members.

Whatever approach is chosen, it is important that the organizing effort has both broad representation and a clear purpose.

Launching the Organization

Once the group has agreed on objectives and activities and has obtained some basic financial support, it is ready for its first public meeting. This meeting is meant to introduce the new organization to the public and gain support.

First, however, a few procedural steps have to be taken. The organizing committee should either be formalized as a board or, if the group is a membership organization, elections should be held to select a board, followed by hiring the staff.

A press statement calling on all consumers to attend the public meeting should be sent out. If finances allow, the group might consider putting small advertisements in the important newspapers and/or printing posters announcing the event. Leaders of various civil society organizations should be given written invitations to attend the organization's launch, e.g. women organizations, youth clubs, etc. Prominent local personalities, journalists and important people from concerned pressure groups (family planning, environment, etc.) should also be invited.

The chair should give brief introduction, state of consumer protection in the area, some interesting details of what the proposed organization will do and why all consumers should support it. It should be stressed (possibly by putting forward a resolution) that the new organization is voluntary, non-profit making, not connected with business, and independent of political bias.

The meeting should discuss the structure of the proposed organization as outlined in the draft constitution (see next chapter) and introduce the Executive Board officers such as Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

WRITING A CONSTITUTION FOR THE ORGANIZATION

A constitution of an organization is a document containing the fundamental principles that governs it.

As soon as a group of people get together to work on a joint activity, they need some form of organization. How that organization then decides to work will be the group's constitution. Following are the laws available through which a voluntary organization can be registered. A careful study of these laws is required before taking final decision. A person in the group who has some legal sense can consult and coordinate with other concerned quarters in this regard. Laws available are:

- Consumer Cooperative Societies registered under the Cooperative Societies Act, 1925
- The Society Registration Act, 1860 (XXI Ordinance of 1860)
- Trust Act 1861
- The Voluntary Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961
- Companies Ordinance 1981(XLVII of 1984)

All these laws require certain framework, which can be said constitution. A constitution may cover:

- name of the organization
- aims & objectives
- membership: criteria, procedures and meetings
- appointment of office-bearers
- finances of the organization
- dissolution of the organization
- amendments to the constitution

A model constitution

A model constitution is given below, which is an example of what a constitution should look like. This model can be adapted to an organization's special needs and local environment.

1. Name:

'The Organization shall be known as _______ (name of organization), hereinafter referred to as the Organization.'

2. Status and Aims:

'The Organization is an independent, autonomous, non-profit making, non-sectarian, and non-partisan organization, the aims of which are to increase the awareness of consumers, to identify and promote the proper interests of consumers and the means of their protection, and to provide a channel for consumer opinion and representation.'

3. Functions:

'The Organization shall base its work on the consumer rights and responsibilities in promoting and protecting the consumer interests. The right to basic needs, safety, information, choice, representation, redress, consumer education, and a healthy environment, and the responsibility to promote critical awareness, involvement, social concern, environmental awareness, and solidarity, shall form the framework for the activities of the Organization.'

'The functions of the organization in the furtherance of the above aims shall be:

(a) to undertake investigations of the supply of goods and services within the framework of the rights and responsibilities charter;

(b) to publish reports of these investigations and reports on other matters of local and general consumer interest, and otherwise to publicize their conclusions;

(c) to act as a channel for consultation or communication between consumers and those who serve them;

(d) to cooperate with other local and national consumer bodies and other organizations and individuals in the furtherance of the above aims; and

(e) to do such other things as may be conducive to the attainment of the aims of the Organization.'

4. Membership:

'The Organization shall consist of members acting solely in their capacity as consumers (defined as those who obtain goods and services for private use and consumption) for the purposes of promoting the aims and functions listed under articles 2 and 3.

(a) **Membership:** Membership shall be open to any consumer of either sex, whose application for membership shall be approved by the Executive Committee.

(b) **Disqualification of members:** The Executive Committee shall have power to suspend for a period of not more than three months or to expel any member if just cause be shown, provided an opportunity be given for that member first to be heard at a meeting of the Executive Committee. If a member's fee has not been paid by_______(time) of the year in which it is due, the membership shall be deemed to have lapsed.

(c) **Ethical Standards:** Membership of the Organization shall not be used, by members or by the Organization, for the purpose of obtaining any special privilege, nor shall the Organization, or any member in his/her capacity as a member of the Organization, lend its or his or her name to commercial advertising.

5. Financial Year:

The financial year shall end on ____________.

6. Meeting and Voting:

(a) Annual Meetings

A General Meeting conducted according to Standing Orders shall be held within six months of end of each financial year. At least one month's notice of the General Meeting shall be given in writing to members. The business/agenda of the General Meeting shall include receiving a report and audited statement of accounts, election of Executive Committee members, appointment of auditor, and any resolution put forward by the Executive Committee or by not less than five members, which has been received by the Secretary in writing not less than 14 days before the date of the meeting.

(b) Special Meeting

A Special General Meeting shall be called when deemed necessary by the Executive Committee or at the request in writing to the Secretary to not less than ______ (numbers) members, such request to state the nature of the business to be discussed. At least seven days' notice in writing, stating the business to be discussed, shall be sent to members of any Special General Meeting. Only business specified may be transacted.

(c) Quorum

One third of the members of the Executive Committee or any sub-committee shall constitute a quorum. At General Meetings one-third or ______(numbers) members, whichever shall be the lesser, shall constitute a quorum. In the case of a meeting at which no quorum shall be present within thirty minutes of the time fixed for the meeting, the meeting shall stand adjourned for seven days when those present shall be deemed to be a quorum.

(d) Voting

Except as provided in Article ____, questions brought before the meeting may be decided by a show of hands. Decisions shall be by majority vote unless otherwise provided for.

7. Officer-bearers and Duties:

The officers of the Organization shall be a Executive Coordinator, Coordinator, President, Vice-president, Honorary Secretary, and Honorary Treasurer.

(a) Executive Coordinator shall preside at all meetings of the Executive Committee and at the General Meeting.

(b) Coordinator shall deputize for the Executive Coordinator in his or her absence.

(c) Honorary Secretary shall have responsibility for administration and co-ordination of the Organization’s activities, for recording the proceedings of all meetings of the Organization and the Executive Committee, and maintaining liaison between sub-committees and the Executive Committee.

(d) Honorary Treasurer shall be responsible for all finances of the Organization and shall present an audited statement of accounts at the General Meeting.

(e) Executive Committee shall be responsible to the General Meeting for the management of the affairs of the Organization within the terms of policy laid down by the General Meetings of the Organization. The Executive Committee shall consist of members, nominated by the Executive Committee and by members of the Organization. The Executive Committee shall have power to co-opt up to a total of ______ (number) additional members in any one Committee year, and the co-option shall be effective only for that year. Members of the Executive Committee shall retire annually, but shall be eligible for re-election. The Executive Committee shall meet not less than ___ (months) times during the year. The Executive Committee shall authorize the opening of a bank account, cheques upon which shall be signed by any two of the following officers: Executive Coordinator, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer.

(f) Sub-committees: The Executive Committee shall have power to appoint such permanent and ad-hoc sub-committees as may be required.

(g) Election procedure: The Executive Coordinator, Coordinator, Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer shall be elected by ballot at the Annual Meeting. Nominations for such officers shall be made in advance of the Meeting by a Nominating Committee appointed by the Executive Coordinator. The slate of nominees shall be mailed with the notice of the General Meeting. Additional nominations may be made at the General Meeting. Elections shall be made at the General Meeting by a majority of the votes cast.

8. Amendments to the Constitution:

'No new rule shall be made, nor shall any of the rules herein contained by amended or rescinded without the consent of two-thirds of the members present and voting at a General Meeting of which due notice has been given specifying the intention to propose such new rule or amendment.'

9. Dissolution of the Organization:

'In the event of the dissolution of the Organization being agreed by not less than two-thirds of the members of the Organization present at a General Meeting of which not less than three weeks' notice specifying the intention to propose dissolution shall have been given by the Hon. Secretary, the funds of the Organization shall, after all outstanding debts have been settled by devoted to some purpose appropriate to the aims of the Organization.'

Note: A detailed comparative analysis of law available for registration can be provided by CRCP, if required.

IDENTIFYING AND PLANNING ACTION ON CONSUMER ISSUES

Issues can only be solved if properly identified and planned coherently and rationally.

Whether the problem is big or small, capable of being resolved in a month or only after years of hard work, the first steps to a solution are always the same, identifying the problem and getting organized. An issue is a problem to be solved, but not every problem makes a good organizing issue. Consumer campaigns have to be chosen with care; and organized with sincerity and diligence.

What makes a good organizing issue?

In general good organizing issues will have broad appeal and people will be motivated to action. A good issue is defined by a number of important characteristics:

First of all, an issue must come from the community. A survey of, for example, friends, neighbors, co-workers, community leaders and members of your organization should reveal the areas of most serious concern. Is it lack of health care, high energy costs, inadequate housing, or poor quality food?

After surveying you should have:

- several dimensions of the problem
- a variety of causes and culprits
- differing opinions on what, if any, action can be successfully taken
- a good indication of how many people are interested enough in the issue to work with you toward a solution.

A good issue is achievable. If there is nothing you can do about a problem it does not make sense even to begin. However, do not be overly pessimistic. Seemingly insurmountable problems have been solved after years of fighting. For example, when NEPRA conducted a hearing of WAPDA’s petition for an increase in the electricity tariff, CRCP and some other organizations like Senior Citizens Forum intervened on the behalf of domestic electricity consumers to avert WAPDA’s bid to arbitrarily increase power tariff. It is important to point out that when the hearing was started, many people were not hopeful that NEPRA would be able to stop WAPDA from increasing tariff. However, it was made possible with the joint efforts of various community organizations.

A good issue should appear simple you should be able to explain the core of an issue in a few sentences. It should be clear that there is right and a wrong side and that you are clearly on the right one.

Defining what makes a good issue can be easier than actually choosing one. And the way in which issues are chosen can be critical for consumer organizations. Grassroots concern is probably the best way of identifying an important issue.

As a group that has only just started, it would be advisable to narrow your issues to one area, such as substandard food, where the need for services is greatest and where you have the best chance of making a difference. Always remember that your group can expand to other areas later.

Criteria for a good Issue

- must come from the people
- if won, will result in a real improvement in people's lives
- builds the organization
- is manageable
- has a good chance of being won
- is understood by the public
- has many phases

Developing strategies and tactics

A major error that many organizations make is that, once they have chosen an issue for action, they forget about strategy altogether and engage in a series of hit-and-run tactics with no particular plan.

Strategy begins as soon as the organization has decided to tackle an issue. The first thing that needs to be done, once the issue has been chosen, is to define the goal or goals. Each campaign has short range and final goals. The question that we need to address ourselves to is:

- What do we want to bring about?
- What will we consider as constituting our victory? Or in other words, once the issue is chosen we have to anticipate where the victory can be won and what it will look like?

Often we are not clear about our desired goal. Selecting preferred outcomes requires careful thought and evaluation, yet it is an essential priority before we can develop a strategy for action.

Strategy proceeds with an analysis of the weakness of your target and how it can be used to your advantage. When developing a strategy the organization must also consider both who its potential allies are and what the organizational needs are.

Changing the situation: Questions to ask

If you want to change a situation because you have discovered a problem that needs to be solved, some critical questions need to be asked regarding your capabilities, your intentions, your limitations and your power.

What change do you want to bring about? What specifically needs to be changed? What is the goal (long term and short term)? What shall be defined as the victory?

What are your own resources? Assess what is and is not feasible, considering your often limited resources in terms of time, money, and human resource, etc.?

Who can be your allies? Who else is interested in or concerned with the issue? With whom can you combine forces on the issue in question? Which other groups have a stake in the issue?

Who has the power to solve the problem, to bring about change?

What is the best strategy? Each issue may require a different strategy.

What are your tactics? What is or what are the concrete activities that you plan to undertake?

Tactics

Only when you have chosen an issue and fully worked out your strategy can the question of tactics be considered.

A major consideration in choosing is to avoid the bureaucratic channels. Time is hardly ever on the side of the citizens' organization. The opposition may be a large institution with money, which can easily knock you out in a long battle.

Though different issues may require different tactics, some elementary rules have been drawn for general application. Tactic means doing what you can do with what you have. It is the art of how to give and how to take. Here our concern is with the tactics of bringing about a change. And what follows are the rules of tactics in order of importance:

1. Power is not only what you have, but what the others think you have.
2. Never go outside the experience of your people.
3. Wherever possible, go outside the experience of the other party.
4. Make the party live up to their own book of rules.

5. Assertiveness is one of the most potent weapons.

6. A good tactic is one that people enjoy.

7. A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag.

8. Keep the pressure on.

9. Threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself.

Tactics should always be part of a larger issue campaign and strategic plan, which involves a number of targets and a wider choice of approaches.

Basically, to change situations, three methods can be distinguished:

- information and publicity techniques
- techniques to solicit support
- techniques to influence those who have power.

These three techniques or methods are complementary: they do not exclude but supplement one another. Moreover, the order of the three techniques mentioned above shows a logical sequence. People need to be informed, in order to solicit their support, so that the powerful can be influenced convincingly.

Information and publicity

These methods include:

- using the mass media, using press releases, letters to editors, interviews.
- establishing and operating a resource centre providing speakers and resource persons to address and participate in meetings, etc. This may include literature to supplement speakers.
- organizing your own forums and seminars.
- Arranging walks, setting up exhibitions and participating in fairs
- using various forms of media.
- making stickers, posters etc.

Soliciting support

To bring about the change you want, you have to get support. First decide which group or groups you want to get the support from:

- general public
- key groups in society, for example, community leaders and social activists
- groups related to the issue, for example, the medical profession

Some of the methods are:

- letter writing campaigns, which is a coordinated effort to send expressions of concern to newspapers, government officials, etc.
- telephone campaigns
- influence public hearings, by attending, testifying, and presenting your viewpoint, etc.
- demonstrations and protests
- boycotts or buy-ins (actively supporting certain products or shops). Buy-ins are often easier to organize successfully than boycotts. However, it is not advisable in the initial phase of an organization until it gets enough support.

Influencing the powerful

To work directly on those who are in the position to change the situation and solve the problem is another important tactic. It will depend on the issue who exactly you will be trying to influence. It may be

- professional groups
- business community
- government or governmental departments

Some methods are:

- writing memoranda, policy papers
- starting lawsuits or public interest litigation
- submitting draft legislation, taking part in legal working parties, revising existing legislation

Guidelines for action:

- Understand the local conditions
- Take a global approach (all issues have various aspects: e.g. environmental, educational, nutritional, health, etc.)
- Start your programme in an area where you have a chance to succeed
- Incorporate economic activities (poverty and lack of awareness is often the root of the problem)
- Develop self-management capacities; utilize local techniques and resources
- Promote continuity; do not concentrate on aid to individuals

- Enhance local cultural values and creativity
- Stimulate structure of genuine representation and participatory planning

NETWORKING WITH CONCERNED QUARTERS

Networking is cooperation and communication with individuals and organizations sympathetic to your cause.

Indeed, such networks are so natural and informal that it is easy to overlook their capacity for bringing about change. Yet many of the most significant advances in consumer work have been achieved by networks of people who are linked together only by their common commitment and determination.

Networks should reach out to embrace diversity. They are alliances of individuals or organizations working together toward a common goal. They can be temporary, created only for a limited purpose, such as creating awareness about a substandard and hazardous cooking oil, or they can be permanent, dedicated to a long-term, comprehensive programme such as networks against environmental pollution. Networks tend to be decentralized and egalitarian with the participating groups contributing to the costs.

Ideally, a network functions as mutually reinforcing. It performs those tasks that require individual initiative, quick response, flexibility and risk-taking, and it provides organizational structure, mobilization of institutional resources, visibility and respectability.

A network contributes to the gathering and sharing of critical intelligence, including tracking government policy initiatives and the reactions of the business community.

Why a network

The theory behind networks is simple and obvious. By working together, organizations can more effectively harness and focus their collective energies to influence change. When working separately and without coordination, organizations duplicate efforts and sometimes even work at cross purposes.

Under the umbrella of a network each organization becomes part of a greater whole which can speak with a unified voice. Networks multiply resources including professional staffs, mass volunteer memberships, geographically dispersed branches, expertise and influential relationships with government decision-makers.

In developing its strategies and tactics, a network can draw upon the collective expertise and insights of a diverse team. Some groups possess sophisticated media skills and enjoy especially good relations with key reporters. Others may have legislative drafting and advocacy skills. Still other groups may be able to provide support services such as volunteers to operate computer services or research facilities.

Conditions for Effective Networking

- Solidarity between all concerned, including the understanding of the different degrees of facilities and resources, which each partner has.
- Mutual trust between partners and absence of ulterior motives.
- Clearly defined roles of coordination within the network, whereby the coordinators:
- Service the needs of partners
- Match-make: linking like-minded and like-endowed partners
- When required by network partners, act as the network spokesperson
- Spontaneity; a network is born from a common desire to cooperate. It is organic and it is not something which can be unilaterally "established, imposed, or created".
- Equal involvement at all levels, particularly where networks involve people working at different levels (international, national, and regional). It is essential that grass-root groups and central units should be able to communicate fully and openly.
- Well-defined, specifically stated and measurable goals.
- A stable and sustainable internal organization.
- Awareness of the need to disband the network once its immediate goals have been achieved.
- Openness to cooperation with other networks. In networking unity is achieved through the diversity of interests, targets, disciplines and themes, and levels of activity.

Possible Obstacles

- A danger of elitism, where by network activities are dominated by a small number of organizations.
- Lack of understanding of the different and specific interests, concerns, and capacities of the different partners in the network.
- A chronic lack of funds and other resources for many organizations to tackle questions of language and to select information from overabundant supply.

Networks can produce letters to legislators or decision-makers in sufficient numbers to impress upon them the depth and breadth of support for the campaign. Each organization that joins a network enhances the credibility and legitimacy of the campaign, and therefore helps to draw more and more groups into active involvement.

Building a network

In all successful issue-oriented campaigns a core network of truly committed organizations or individuals develops. They may be prominent physicians or surgeons, educationists, senators, lawyers, public health or consumer advocates or environmentalists and citizens' groups. These individuals may be public figures or private, in public office or not. What distinguishes them is that each is so personally committed to the cause that he or she is prepared to subordinate the demands of profession and family to the cause. These persons initiate, organize, energize and excite the campaign.

As discussed above, campaigns involve many groups, both old and new. One of the great achievements of networks is that their members activate and energize the organizations, which they lead, or to which they belong. This is true in professional associations such as in the voluntary health organizations and in non-governmental bodies such as NGOs like Consumer Rights Commission of Pakistan (CRCP). The Helpline Trust, The Network, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Aurat Foundation, etc.

Some networks are more effective than others, and there are a handful of lessons and principles that help explain the relative success of networks. These principles relate to leadership, outreach, mutual trust and sharing. There are also common problems or pitfalls that can undermine the cohesion and hence the success of any network, no matter how lofty its goals.

Leadership

Unlike organizations, networks have no formal leadership structure. Rather they are led by those who have the energy and commitment to reach out to others. Often a network leader will be financially supported by an organization, committed to a particular cause. Or leadership may come from a research organization or an NGO that is not prepared to support a public leadership role, but will tolerate informal, unofficial leadership from its staff.

Such natural leaders are sometimes known as 'sparkplugs', because they ignite the energies of others. The most effective sparkplugs embody most if not all, of the following qualities:

- a sense of personal mission that drives them;
- a low threshold for appropriate outrage;
- a willingness to take calculated risks;
- integrity and trustworthiness;

- the persistence of the long-distance runner;
- a good sense of humor and perspective;
- a capacity for vision;
- spontaneity, flexibility, and adaptability;
- prudent optimism and grounded hope;
- low ego needs; and
- the capacity to harness the energy of others.

Network sparkplugs/leaders must have low ego needs. They must be more than happy to share leadership with others, to recognize when others will be more effective spokespersons and to give credit to others. Though there is no formal mechanism for electing (or firing) a network leader, networks are naturally self-correcting. Thus, the leader who pontificates but does not listen, who is satisfied that he knows and understands all that needs to be known about the issue, who insists upon serving as the sole representative or spokesperson for the movement, will soon find that people simply stop working with him, and gravitate toward better network leaders.

Since networks are informal and invisible, they foster diversity. Participants in a network join in common action only to the extent that they choose. Unlike the formally designated leaders of an organization, no member of a network automatically represents or speaks for others.

Participants

Networking, the informal shared efforts of concerned individuals throughout society, is a critical part of any successful policy campaign. Those who form the network may be bound by professional ties, or only by a shared personal dedication to the campaign issues. Ideally, such networks include ample participation by each of the following:

- Political leaders, willing to step forward and lead.
- 'Policy entrepreneurs': By profession or training, these may come from such diverse backgrounds as surgery or law, engineering or public health. What they share in common is deep commitment, combined with a zest for combat in the arena of public policy formation, and the development of political (including media) skills. Many have developed professional and social relationships with key government policy makers. Especially important are mid-level government health policy officials, who are themselves internal lobbyists for strong consumer protection.
- Authorities: Those prepared to provide a solid foundation of scientific and behavioral expertise in support of legislative proposals. Especially valuable are those who combine impeccable credentials with media clarity and presence.
- Media experts: There has emerged a core group of public interest advocates who have

developed specialized skills and strategies for the low-cost strategic uses of media in policy advocacy. Their skills range from the ethical but strategic handling of investigative leads and strategy to harness the low cost use of electronic media targeted at the key decision-making groups or even individuals, to the avoidance of press conferences to which no one comes.

- Responsive journalists: Probably ranking in importance only a notch below social activists, are journalists who care about consumer issues. It is crucial for the campaign leaders to maintain as complete a roster as possible of responsive journalists and to maintain constant communication with them.
- Community leaders and activists: Within the organizations, which make up the network leading citizens active in public affairs are invariably found. While some consumer issues may not be their primary public affairs priority, they can often be activated to respond to specific needs of the campaign, for example, contacting unresponsive legislators with whom they may enjoy close relationships.
- Targets of opportunity: An alert and imaginative leadership will seize upon the political potential of public figures, who may provide an advantageous opportunity to further the campaign.

INFLUENCING THE AUTHORITIES

An active but balanced interaction with authorities is crucial to press them for improvements.

The aim of lobbying is not to convince the public, but to convince the authorities of the consumer's convictions. To do this, when the consumer's convictions actually range through the whole spectrum from antipathy through apathy to sympathy obviously requires a range of tactics, techniques and timing. It follows that lobbying is more of an art than a scientific discipline with fairly rigid rules. Again, like art, there are the professional lobbyists and the amateurs, the main difference being that the professionals do it solely for money, the amateurs for the love of it or for the love of a particular cause.

Lobbying with a community benefit basis always seems to suffer from a lack of funds and expertise, but this is more than compensated for by the more widespread interest and support that can be generated. This interest and support can take many forms, legal and technical advice from experts, advice from civil servants who regard themselves more as "servants of the public," and many of these advisers will prefer to remain in the "backroom". It will be the people "up-front" who will write the letters to the newspapers and to bureaucrats, members of parliament and ministers.

Planning

Planning is important. In defining the approach a number of important things have to be considered including:

- understanding the authority you are planning to lobby for example CRCP collaborated with the government of Punjab in its endeavor to form consumer courts and councils through out the province.
- find out its functions and its responsibilities also in relation to other authorities
- go through its plans and programmes, particularly in relation to your own plans

When contact is established it is necessary to educate the authorities about the issue, why your organization is involved and what the position of the organization is. You can do this by

- sending them working papers, write ups, notes etc.
- inviting them to address your group on the topic or by organizing a discussion, like

CRCP invited officials from Monopoly Control Authority (MCA), Ministry of Science & Technology to contribute and share the views on quality standards and trade practices in Pakistan.

Getting Your Facts

Your first step, however, in any lobbying effort is to get the facts. It is important to ensure that every statement that is made is either known to be true or there is no known reasonable evidence to refute it. The opposition to any proposal will be constantly searching for loopholes and weaknesses and will take advantage of any mis-statement or doubtful claim to discredit the whole campaign. Make sure that you have considered all possible arguments against your proposal and have acceptable answers to them. Even look to the irrational and emotional arguments against your case, for matters can become emotional and then reason tends to be the first casualty. Remember emotion will not sway bureaucrats and politicians.

Making use of expert opinions

“Experts” are extremely influential when decisions about consumer policies are made. Try always to make the point that consumer views should be considered equally important, but be prepared to play along with the existing power structure where necessary. Have sympathetic professionals and other scientists to make your points for you as the occasion requires and cultivate who could be persuaded to support your cause.

Proving your support

Your message will be much more credible if you can demonstrate that others feel as strongly about it as you do. For example the publication of a declaration or quoting an organization like the World Health Organization, CI.

Knowing who your friends are

Cultivate elected representatives and officials sympathetic to your point of view. Politicians in opposition will often be glad to be “fed” nuggets of information. They may prove useful allies for the future too, if their own party comes to power. But do not forget to look within the existing government, though unpalatable. Remember you can find friends in the most unlikely places.

Translating your research findings into telling questions

For example: Fenade or Imodium/Imodium drops have been classified as inessential and dangerous drugs in Pakistan, where they were even banned by the government. But one may ask why they are still available in the market? Why are such potentially harmful drugs available through over the counter sale? It is also noted that generic forms of aspirin cost X% less than the brand marketed by a recognized company. What is the Health Ministry doing to ensure that our hospitals and dispensaries are getting the best value for money by purchasing generics? What are they doing to encourage generic prescribing nationwide? Get a sympathetic politician to ask them, or write them into an "open letter" to the Health Minister, or similar dignitary. Get a distinguished panel of doctors to sign it, and then get it published in the most important newspaper or journal you can. Make sure that the Minister is invited to publish his reply, and follow up on it with further questions and comments.

Developing briefing materials for friendly politicians & policy-makers

The materials should be packed with facts with which to make telling points, yet not so over-loaded with technical detail that they become confusing. When in doubt about how to do this, go for simplicity and remember that politicians and policy makers will want to relate things to their region, constituency, or support group wherever possible.

Being positive as well as negative

Follow criticism with coherent suggestions for improvements. This is important with the press as well: they will always expect an answer to the question, "well then what should be done?"

Knowing the system

The complexities of any bureaucracy (reports, committees, official guidelines, legal drafting, formal resolutions and all the rest of it) are undoubtedly more effective than any sleeping pill, but if you are lobbying for a new policy, a change in the law, or trying to get your views recognized in an official report, knowing what's going on and anticipating what will happen next is an essential part of influencing people and events.

Knowing when to step outside the system

Sometimes things will never get done if you stick to the proper channels, you will have to resort to demonstrations and protests. But when you anger the authorities do so in a conscious and calculated way, in order to gain a specific objective.

ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are the backbone of most social movements.

Once a group has been organized, how does the group engage not just new members, but new active members, people who are willing to give more than their subscription fee, or how does it make old members active for that matter? There are four points to consider:

- What makes people volunteer?
- On what grounds should volunteers be chosen?
- How to go about engaging volunteers?
- How to retain volunteers?

What makes people volunteer?

It is a mistake to believe that altruism is the only characteristic of volunteering, and that it is not appropriate for people who volunteer to have an immediate stake in the outcome of their own volunteering. Volunteering is not only, or not even necessarily based on a goodness of heart, but involves a healthy dose of self-interest. The question, "What is in it for me?" is a fully relevant and completely acceptable one.

Some seek work experience and training (students on vacation, those awaiting results, the unemployed); others seek recognition, involvement, escape, contacts or new friends (housewives, retired people, the handicapped, persons who have just moved into the community). Still others seek a chance to be of service or to be worthwhile or to give a meaning to their existence.

What criteria should be used to choose volunteers?

Contrary to what is normally thought, volunteers do not choose to donate their service, but are nearly always chosen to do so. It is extremely important to realize that very few people volunteer spontaneously, even if your work attracts them and they share your goals and interest. When your organization gets involved in action projects you will need people to do the work that has to be done to achieve your goals.

Numbers are important, but even more important is to get the right people. List the specific jobs that need to be done. Spell out the duties involved and the time needed to complete them. Break up large jobs into meaningful components and reasonable portions. Divide the workload evenly among the volunteers and in such a way that no person is given an assignment in which failure is almost inevitable.

How to engage volunteers

- Set up a “talent bank” which consists of forms filled in by members (old and incoming) providing information on skills, interests, experience and availability.
- After deciding on an action project, write out job descriptions, figure out how many people you need, identify the type of skills you need.
- Develop a prospect list of people who seem likely to be interested, and suitable for the jobs you need. Include in your prospect list both members and non-members.
- Ask your prospects to work with you by contacting them personally. Explain your reasons for choosing them. Show how their involvement will not only benefit your organization or the community as a whole, but explain also “what is in it for them”. Promise and provide proper training Do not make the job sound easier than it is. It is better to get a few “Nos” than to end up with someone who is not likely to produce.
- Provide orientation to the cause, the organization, and to the individual’s job. Put yourself in the place of the new person and figure out what it is that he or she really needs to know and who he or she needs to meet to increase interest and enthusiasm and effectively to fulfill the assignment.
- Start the action project not later than a few weeks after engaging the volunteers.

Basic Rules

- It is important to determine which benefits the volunteer seeks.
- It is a mistake to engage automatically the expert on the subject without regard to other essential skills and characteristics.
- Volunteers should be engaged to fill specific, defined needs.
- Make it possible for your volunteers to benefit tangibly from their involvement in your organization while contributing to the project goals.

How to retain volunteers

A common failing is that groups do not give enough time to the stimulation of the interests and involvement of their volunteers. Volunteers should receive continuing orientation so that they know what is happening. This is essential because people want to know that their efforts make a difference and that they are part of an exciting cause.

It is also important to realize that people are just as apt to walk away if they feel they are being underused, as if, they are being overused. For instance you should:

- publicly through your newsletter acknowledge the volunteers contribution.
- If your project attracts the attention of the mass media, share the limelight
- provide certificates and/or letters of appreciation, of thanks, and of reference.
- provide opportunities for volunteers to turn their activities into learning experience
- welcome full participation in decision-making and keep volunteers fully informed.
- delegate responsibilities
- make volunteers feel welcome and part of the team
- give volunteers an awareness of the effectiveness of their and their organization's work.
- be sure that you and your volunteers have some concrete outcome in mind against which progress can be measured.

ORGANIZING INFORMATION

An organized and properly documented resource centre facilitates smooth functioning of a consumer organization.

For organizations working for social change, whether at the international, national or local level, information plays a vital role in their work. An effective documentation service helps the organization to;

- keep up-to-date with local, national and international developments;
- assist the community in analyzing its own environment;
- link up with like-minded organizations;
- learn about the experiences of other groups and generate new ideas;
- give information on specific issues for a specific purpose, for example to advise consumers about quality of food items as a survey by CRCP proved that most of the brands of *ghee* available in the market are substandard and injurious to human health, and
- build its credibility by using accurate information in arguing a case on behalf of consumers.

While consumer organizations are usually recognized as information producers, we sometimes forget that in order to achieve this, we must also be voracious consumers of information.

Where do we get our information? How do we store it so that we can find that particular piece of information when we need it? How do we let those we serve know what information we have?

To maximize its use of information, an organization should:

- decide clearly on the scope of its information service;
- identify sources of information;
- analyze information received;
- classify and store information for easy retrieval; and
- inform its users of information it has available.

Scope

A dilemma for those organizing information is the vast range of subjects covered by their organization: consumer law, economics, advertising, standards, nutrition, to name just a few.

The answer, though not an easy one, is to set priorities. Your information and documentation service serves two basic functions:

- monitoring developments of consumer interest and
- providing information on specific topics at the request of those writing articles or making statements on behalf of your organization or organizing a media campaign.

News and developments, both local and international need to be monitored so that your organization can react promptly to a new consumer problem, for instance, or a change in government policy affecting consumers. Information about current positions of like-minded consumer organizations in other countries, as well as those of other governments on specific issues will help your organization to formulate its own stand.

To meet the second function, the systematic collection of useful information is best confined to the topics of the organization's main ongoing work. It is tempting to collect information on topics that could possibly be of interest sometime in the future, but this may prove costly, both in time and in resources. It is more efficient to begin collecting the most significant materials on a given topic only when your organization starts work on the topic.

Sources of information

Information can come from various sources. When selecting information, keep the following questions in mind: How up-to-date is the information? How much complete is the information? Who is the source (author, publisher)? What are the possible biases of the source?

Information is costly. Consumer groups, even the larger ones, need to tap the collections of other libraries and information centres. These include:

- Academic and institutional libraries are invaluable sources of a wide range (and frequently expensive) academic and scientific journals and reference books. Most of these libraries have a membership scheme for other institutions or interested individuals. You should also investigate whether your organization can join their inter-library loan schemes.
- Libraries of other consumer and related organizations whose collections are directly relevant. For those to which you have easy access, it may be useful to find out the subjects of their special collections and to exchange acquisition lists.
- Special libraries of professional institutions are also useful. For example, the library of the national standards organization, which collects the country's standards may also

maintain a collection of international standards, and government policy on house ownership and housing, and library of NGOs like SDPI can serve as useful resource centres.

- International agencies are vast producers of frequently good, up-to-date and free information. United Nations agencies such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements provide a wide range of materials that are useful to consumer groups.

Selecting and obtaining information

Selecting the subjects on which to store information is a vital step in organizing any documentation centre. The world is overloaded with information: 6000 to 7000 papers are produced daily in the field of scientific research alone.

Decide on a list of relevant newspapers, periodicals and serials that you would like to receive regularly. From time to time, titles can be deleted (when the material proves no longer relevant or useful) and new ones added. This list will be a useful indication of the coverage of your information centre.

To fulfill requests for information on new topics, traditional librarians' aids such as indexes, bibliographies, resource lists are a primary source. At present, CRCP is also maintaining an updated Consumer Information and Documentation Centre.

On-line databases, for those who can afford access to them, can provide a quick listing of relevant documents.

While there is a lot of useful material that can be obtained free of charge, even the poorest of consumer groups must pay for some essential publications. The major national daily newspapers, for example, are a must for organizations working at a national level.

If you find it difficult to pay for the publications you want, you can either suggest an exchange (of periodicals or magazines) or offer to review the publication (usually a book) in your magazine. Neither option is entirely 'free'. An exchange scheme will cost you postage in addition to the cost of the copies of the magazine itself. Reviewing a book is a time-consuming and skilled task, and reviews take up valuable space in your publications.

Analyzing the information

First, look through the materials you receive to see if they are relevant and/or useful. Keep in mind these questions:

- Is the material something we have requested or ordered?
- Is it about a topic that is of direct interest to us?

- Does it say something different from materials we already have?

All materials that are irrelevant or give no new information are ‘junk mail’ and should be directed to the wastepaper basket.

Second, classify the materials you want to keep. Since they may require different storage methods, the different types of materials should be separated first. The main types are:

- periodicals or serials;
- books;
- clippings, monographs, pamphlets, other loose-leaf materials, and
- audiovisual materials (cassette tapes, video tapes, slides, photographs)

The second level of classification involves tagging the material so that you can find it again afterwards. There are two main types of identification tags. They relate to:

- the source (author, publisher)
- the subject (title, subject matter)

Informing others

The work of organizing your information will be useless unless your users are informed of what is available. Here are a few ways to inform people:

- a news or bulletin board. Put up clippings of the most relevant and significant news on the board. Change the information regularly, for instance, once a week.
- a new arrivals rack. Put up a selection of the best new book arrivals. Change the selection regularly.
- Keep a readers’ interests profile. These are simply notes on interests of the most important users of your information service (board members, staff, volunteers, advisors, etc.), Once you know their interest, you can route incoming relevant materials to them.
- You may also want to circulate regularly the acquisition or accession list of books and other non-periodical materials received.
- If you have a short list of periodicals, which you receive regularly, you may wish to consider circulating a photocopied compilation of the contents pages of these periodicals.
- If resources are available, you may wish to consider publishing a news digest. This brings together abstract of selected information. An example is CI’s Consumer Currents.

Someone once said that the information and documentation unit of an organization is not a storehouse; it is power-house. Make the best use of it.

RAISING FUNDS

Adequate financial resources not only ensure effective execution of plans but also extend autonomy to the organization.

There are four main sources of income for consumer organizations: (1) membership fees (2) sale of its publications and other products (for instance posters, T-shirts), which carry messages related to the work of the organization, (3) direct public appeals and (4) grants from appropriate donor organizations.

It is possible for the source of funding to distort the independence of the consumer organization. So consumer groups ought to be careful about taking money from those who might influence the organization's impartiality, independence or freedom from bias.

Ways to fundraise are many. The choice of which method or methods to use depends largely on what kinds of acceptable potential donors there are philanthropic organizations or individuals that can make small but widespread donations, as well as the ability of the organization to provide the number of people and the money needed for the fundraising activities.

Membership fees

Membership fees and pledges, based on members' ability to pay so that those on tight budgets are not barred from your organization, are the most obvious sources of revenue.

A decision about the importance of fees is critical in determining what the membership will be. Some groups regard fees as the 'backbone' of the organization. These groups establish membership fees based on minimal operating needs. Other groups see fees as a way of bringing in additional support, and receive their main support through grants and the organizing of fundraising events.

Types of membership fees:

- flat fee, based on anticipated expenses divided by the projected number of paying members.
- fees in kind, to prevent fees excluding people who cannot afford to pay, you might want to offer some kind of exchange, e.g. volunteering a certain number of hours per month.
- Discounts, a special reduction in fees can be offered to specific population groups, e.g. the elderly or unemployed.

- sliding scale, based on the ability to pay, or on scale benefits to be received.

Basic principles of fundraising

- **Ask for contributions**

Money is rarely given without being asked *for*. Volunteers and staff involved in fund raising have to be prepared to ask for contributions.

- **Get sufficient people to help**

Whether volunteers or staff, there must lie sufficient people to undertake and carry out successfully the requirements of a fundraising campaign.

- **Communicate the need and the programme**

People who give want to be assured that their money is going to meet a need that is important, and to an organization that is effective.

- **Select the target-donors carefully**

Volunteers and staff are too scarce and too valuable to waste in widespread and largely useless efforts. Too many rejections and no answers discourage fundraisers.

- **Know what is needed**

If fundraisers do not know how much money is needed to run the kind of programme the organization requires, do not expect prospective donors to know.

- **Be specific**

Know the overall goal; but let the prospective donors know how much of that goal they are expected to meet. Vague requests for money tend to get routine contributions. Set a definite sum to be raised.

- **Be persistent**

If the campaign is addressed to the general public, plan the campaign to run over a sufficient period to get the appeal across. If an appeal is addressed to an individual donor, remember that people get a lot of mail, telephone calls and even visits, and the best fund raising solicitation may get lost unless it is followed up effectively.

- **Fundraising knows no season**

Keep the organization and its fund raising campaign in the public eye. Regular communications to the general public and to individual donors should be maintained throughout the year. If people have already contributed, these communications show them that the money is being well spent, and the way is paved for an increased contribution the following year. Most donor organizations on the other hand have a timetable for dealing with applications. Find out what the tables are.

- **Say ‘thank you’**

When individual gifts do come, letters of thanks are a must, as personal and warm as possible. When a general fundraising campaign has been successful, announce it in the press or on radio/TV, and thank the public for their help.

Promoting your Newsletter

This can be an effective way of increasing your income. For ways of doing this, see article ‘promoting Newsletter’.

Direct appeals

- Mail appeals.
- The dispatch of a ‘personalized’ appeal to a list of potential generous donors. This should come from the Executive Coordinator of the organization or from a senior volunteer or figure in public life.
- The dispatch of an ‘appeal’ letter to selected groups of potential donors, e.g. doctors, lawyers, educationists, etc. You can obtain mailing lists from community, and other groups. Keep fundraising letters brief and to the point, usually no more than one page. It is helpful to have such letters signed by a prominent and popular national figure. Do not expect to get rich quickly. An exceptionally good return is Rs. 2 for every Re. 1 spent.
- Personal appeals

  This method is heavily dependent on the availability of volunteers and staff, but it is the best way of approaching a potential donor. Armed with the facts and convinced of the organization’s case, the fundraiser’s best chance of obtaining a donation is by a personal approach. In view of the expense in volunteer/staff time, this method should be used to approach those donors with the most to give. Remember that considerable preparation beforehand and follow-up will be required.

Fundraising events

Walks, fairs, and donation parties, etc. are popular events for fund-raising. There are many ways of raising money. Not all are appropriate for every organization. Special events such as fairs and auctions are time-consuming and should be undertaken only if you are confident of a substantial return. Fundraising events should not be organized only for the sake of raising money. They should have the dual purpose of raising public awareness on a specific issue or on the range of issues on which you are working.

The major steps to take are:

- making a list of all the possible events you could organize
- choosing one or more of the ideas
- itemizing costs of putting on the event
- setting an income goal
- preparing for the event
- post-event discussion

Examples of specific events

1. Donation parties

- Plan a theme such as a 14th August or Eid celebration.
- Ask members to bring refreshments.
- Set a minimum donation such as Rs.25
- Publicize the event throughout your organization and within the community by using posters and flyers.
- Have some form of entertainment if possible. This may include a musical group, talk by an interesting speaker, etc.
- Stage a brief presentation about your organization and have literature available for people to read and discuss.

2. Auctions & Sales

- Select and get permission to use a site, like that of weekly bazaar.
- Contact everyone in your community for donations, restaurant-owners, car dealers, bakeries, gift shops, etc.
- Have form letters for each donor to fill in and sign.
- Keep detailed records of donors and bidders and arrange how items will be picked up or redeemed. Have a special table for redemption.
- Number all items and make lists of auction goods available to those attending.
- Start the bidding below market value for the item.
- Do not let the donor know the amount of the winning bid. Feelings can be hurt when a beloved item goes for only Rs. 50.
- Ask members and the public to contribute articles for the sale. Specify the type (and condition) of articles that are acceptable. You do not want to be a dump for junk and useless articles.
- Decide on the venue for example school or a community centre. The location is important. If the people who are likely to come to such a jumble sale come from a certain section of the city, organize it there.
- Publicize the sale. State how the funds collected from the sale will be used. Concentrate the publicity in the area where you expect most interest.

- Have brochures on your organization available. Consider pulling on an exhibition about your work.

Outline of a fundraising campaign

Statement of the case

This should state:

(a) the aims of the campaign;

(b) what the problems is;

(c) how much money is needed, and when; and

(d) what is being done and what will be done with the money raised.

The statement should be the official 'line' of the fundraising campaign. Campaign literature, request letters, slogans, presentations, etc. should follow this basic line.

Basic structure of the campaign

This should set out the structure of the fundraising committee. It should identify the volunteers and organizations, which will support the campaign. The structure should also deal with the salaried staff involved in the campaign, and the relationship of this staff to the campaign committees and to the organization.

The target for the first year and thereafter

Fixing the target of money to be raised is very important. It should be realistic but should also provide a challenge. It should be high enough to attract prestigious leadership to the committee. Targets for subsequent years should also be set, provisionally, to be revised, based upon the first year's experience. Subsequent targets should be higher each year to acknowledge skills acquired and to meet growing needs.

Fundraising methods

The plan should outline the various methods of fundraising to be used, detailing the amounts to be raised by volunteers and staff through these methods.

Administrative and support requirements

This should indicate the number of volunteers and staff necessary, the office space, office equipment, campaign literature, travel requirements, supplies, etc. to carry out the campaign. Public information and media requirements should also be considered.

Special events

A listing of special events should be drawn up. These might include a campaign launching dinner, a fun fair, World Consumer Rights Day, special guest speakers, a TV/ Radio appeal, a walk, a raffle, a poster campaign, a mail campaign, a sale, and so on.

Time schedule

A campaign calendar should spell out the timing of each aspect of the plan over the 12 months of the campaign. Public information and media requirements should also be considered.

The budget

A budget should be drawn up to include estimated campaign income, staff salaries, cost of supplies and equipment; cost of campaign literature, postage and travel costs.

3. Fairs

- Seek permission from local officials to use the grounds you have selected.
- Estimate the crowd you anticipate, the time of the event and plan a rubbish collection system.
- Plan the activities. These might include games, bake sales and refreshments.
- Have a large booth to display literature on your organization.
- Publicize the fair by distributing leaflets, posters, balloons or banners,
- Notify the local media and keep them informed.

6. Grants

Donors or funding agencies are organizations such as foundations, government departments, international agencies or charities that have money to finance development or charitable activities. They receive their money from individuals or governments who give it for specific purposes.

This is why donors have specific requirements and conditions for granting money. Some can only give money for certain types of activities (e.g. education), others only for certain kinds of beneficiaries (e.g. the poorest, children, women, etc.), others only for certain geographical areas (e.g. the rural areas or marginalized communities).

Whenever possible try to have personal contact with donors: visit them, invite them to visit your organization, find people who know someone in a funding agency to introduce you, get names of people in funding agencies, get someone who knows a donor to submit your project proposal, get letters of referral from organizations that have been funded by the donor. When you write to a donor, personalize your letter if possible.

Donor Research

If you are starting out and do not know any funding agencies yet, start by making a list.

- Write to embassies in your country asking for a list of donor agencies in their country.
- Write to international organizations, such as the United Nations, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, the European Economic Community, for the same.
- Approach local charities and NGOs and ask for the names and addresses of their international donors.
- Look up funding agencies in your local library.

- Ask other voluntary groups and organizations for names and addresses of donors.
- Ask your colleagues and friends.

Write to all the funding agencies you can, asking them for their funding criteria and areas of interest. Explain who you are and what kind of work you do. Send them a brochure or flyer about your organization.

Submitting a project proposal

You can submit the same project proposal to more than one donor. In fact, unless you are fairly sure that a particular donor will fund your project, it is advisable to send the proposal to several donors. In that case, tell them that you have sent the proposal to other donors too.

Send the project proposal with a covering letter in which you briefly introduce your organization and state the purpose of the project and the amount of money you are asking for. If it is a large project, it is best to make it clear whether you are asking the donor to fund all or part of it. In the information that funding agencies send to enquirers, they usually state their fields of interest as well as the maximum amount they can grant.

The first time that you apply to a particular donor it is helpful to attach with your project proposal any leaflet about your organization as well as reports on previous projects and, if possible, letters of referral or testimonials on previous projects your organization has done. Also enclose your latest annual report if available.

Project proposal

This is a document outlining the project and its costs in order to seek financial support from a funding agency (donor).

In order to get support you need to convince the donors that you are tackling a legitimate problem and that you can be successful. Therefore, you must explain:

- The issue or problem you are tackling and why.
- The goals you have set yourself.
- The methods you will use.
- The results you plan to achieve
- Who is to benefit from the project.
- The structure of your group or organization.
- Why your group can and should carry out this project.
- What it will cost and how much you want the donor to give.

The way in which you present this information is important for convincing the donors. Be precise and clear.

Do not use too many words. Make it easy to understand the problem you are tackling and what you want to do.

Note: Donors directory can be provided by CRCP, if required.

CARRYING OUT A SURVEY

Surveys facilitate systematic arrangement of opinions. It helps knowing the popular perceptions of various groups and makes planning scientific and pragmatic.

A consumer survey can be used to gather information on a variety of subjects, such as:

- the extent of a consumer problem
- the causes of the problem
- the reaction and effects of the problem on the consumer
-
- the effectiveness of laws and regulations to protect the consumer.

Questionnaires, interviews and observations are some of the major tools used for conducting surveys.

Once the decision is made that a survey needs to be carried out there are tree stages to follow:

- Getting ready
- Conducting the survey
- Analyzing the results

Getting ready

The aim of any survey is to find out what a particular group of people do or think about something. So first define exactly what you want to find out. Then work out which group of people you are interested in. Often it is impossible to interview everyone in the total group. When the total group is too big to interview everyone in it, a sample has to be taken. (discussed later)

The next step is to design the questionnaire that will be used in the survey. For designing and pre-testing the questionnaire you might like to bring a group of people together. Also contacting an expert as consultant might be helpful (for example, from any of the social sciences department in the university).

Depending on how much information is sought and what will be done with it, designing the questionnaire could take from a few days to several weeks. Take time to pre-test the questionnaire to be sure that no questions might be misunderstood and no crucial questions left out. Surveys are in general time-consuming as well as requiring a large number of people to administer as well as to tally the responses.

- Prepare the questionnaire, which has either to be filled in by the interviewer or by the consumers themselves.
- Phrase questions carefully to avoid any possible misunderstanding, yet to eliminate the need for lengthy explanations. Define all terms that may be subject to more than one interpretation. Provide very clear instructions, with examples if possible. Before conducting a survey, test it on a small sample to be sure it elicits the type of information you are seeking. On the basis of your pre-test, change your instructions to eliminate any source of misunderstanding.
- Make the questionnaire easy to complete. Use multiple choice rather than open-ended questions whenever possible. In an interview, it is helpful to provide categories into which oral answers can be classified. Keep the questionnaire short.
- Before you use the questionnaire or decide on its final content, set up techniques to analyze the results. Know in advance what you want to find out and which questions will provide the information you seek. Eliminate all unnecessary questions because you will be making unwanted work for yourself and the respondent.
- Determine who should be surveyed. If you want your results to be scientifically significant, check with a statistician on the proper way to select a sample, phrase the questions, and analyze the data. Determine what size and type of return you will need to make your survey valid. Include some questions on income and occupation so you can determine how representative your returns are.
- Set the time period for the survey to be conducted. If you extend the period too long, you run the risk of respondents learning about the questions in advance and possibly changing their answers, or not responding because they put the survey aside to do later and forget it.
- Decide in advance how you will disseminate and publicize the results of the survey as well as whether you will publicize the start of the survey.

Conducting the survey

There are three main types of surveys: personal interviews, postal questionnaires and telephone interviews. Personal interviews are, generally speaking, quick, efficient (and expensive when you do not have volunteers). Postal questionnaires are sent out with a covering letter to explain the purpose of the surveys, usually with a reply-paid envelope. It should be noted however that postal surveys rarely yield large-scale returns, and therefore, may not be worth the cost in terms of money, time and effort. Telephone interviews or telephonic surveys are suitable for brief questionnaires only.

A survey normally involves a sample. A sample is a conveniently small number of the total group of people. If it is property chosen, then what is true of the sample will probably be true of the total group. It is always difficult, and often impossible, to avoid completely any element of bias creeping into a survey. In general the smaller the sample the greater the care which must be taken. Here are some ways for taking a sample:

- Random Sample: A random survey is done with a small group of people who all have an equal chance of being interviewed. The small group is representative of a larger group and through this conclusions are drawn. A procedure for selecting the sample is, for example, to take every 100th name from an electoral register or every 100th name from the list of subscribers to a magazine. This method should be used when the questions apply to most of your target population.
- Random Route Sample: The interviewers are given a starting point, and then given detailed instructions on contacting, say, every 10th house from that address taking right and left turning alternately.
- Quota sample: This is used when you want to contact a special sample of the population. For example you need to interview a sample of 100 women, but you would like all age categories to be represented in the sample.

Asking questions

Personal interviews preferably should be carried out by trained interviewers. However, many organizations might not have the funds for that and will, therefore, have to rely on volunteers. They will often be able to do a good job if briefed thoroughly and given practice.

Interviewers must have the ability to establish contact with all types of people. They must be conscientious and able to resist the temptation to find short cuts in completing questionnaires. Training should include two to three days in the office, explaining how to ask questions and how to record answers. Then two to three days supervised interviewing should be conducted in which the potential interviewer is accompanied by the coordinator who, possibly, records the interview, and finally, analyses the approach, including an appraisal of the taped interviews. After training, the interviewer should work closely with the coordinator who will be responsible for checking the work before it is submitted to the office.

As every job is different, even ‘trained’ interviewers will need briefing before every survey. This can be done personally, the interviewers must go through the objectives of the survey, its formulation and layout. ‘Dummy’ interviews can be carried out among the interviewers to iron out any difficulties in using the questionnaire.

The questionnaire

There are two sorts of questions. The pre-coded questions, which have a list of possible answers from which the person being interviewed, can choose. Open-ended questions do not suggest any answers. The main requirements for developing a questionnaire are:

- it *should* be easy to analyze;
- it should not be too long;
- the questions must avoid bias. Questions, which indicate an expected answer, should not be used. For example, “Do you think that we should give in to terrorists?’ The same sort of bias can result, however, if the questions do not fully cover the possible alternatives. For example the simple question, “Where did you go on holiday?” excludes the possibility that no holiday was taken;
- the questions should always be comprehensive. It is quite common to find when analyzing questionnaires that some additional information would have been helpful, but then it is too late. Additional information could be useful if you wish to breakdown the results into categories such as age groups or geographical location or income differences.

Except for the simplest cases always pre-test the questionnaire.

Analyzing the results

First of all check that all questions that should have been answered have been and, where relevant, that only one answer has been given. For open-ended questions, you need to put the answers into a number of categories. Then you can group together all the answers to each question. If you have taken a representative sample separating, for example, age groups, you should add up the results separately, so that you can compare their answers as well as look at the results for the total group.

To group the answers together you need to design a tally sheet. The adding up will be much easier, and safer, if you put a stroke opposite the answer on your tally sheet every time it comes up on a questionnaire. When you have got your totals, fill them in the total column.

For the pre-coded questions, just add up the number of people giving each of the possible answers and fill it in the total column.

For the open-ended questions you will first need to write down all the different answers you were given. Then you can add up the number of people giving the same answer.

When you have got all your totals, you can analyze the results. Because the sample was carefully chosen to represent the total group, generalizations can be made from the sample’s results.

Today, computerization has of course, made analyzing survey replies a much less tedious job.

Some recommended projects for surveys

- surveys on market prices, market facilities, availability of essential goods.
- survey on public transport; buses, trains, taxis, airlines, and their reliability, punctuality, cleanliness,

price, etc.

- survey on advertisements: the types of advertisements, frequency, the media used.
- survey on health clinics; hours open to the public, prices, cleanliness, friendliness of staff, location, surrounding.
- survey on low-cost housing: ventilation, sanitary facilities; convenience, lighting, security, people per unit area, maintenance of facilities, waste disposal, noise.
- survey on consumer attitudes to environmentally sound products.

TESTING CONSUMER PRODUCTS

To countercheck the products available in the market through scientific methods is vital to verify the claims of the manufacturers and put pressure on them.

The main aim of product testing is to produce information to help consumers make a rational choice or warn them of substandard products. When a variety of brands or models of a product are tested against each other, it is called **comparative testing**. The independence of consumer organizations from business interest, preserved through accepting no advertisements or product samples, is fundamental to producing unbiased product assessments.

Levels of testing

Tests can vary from very extensive tests in which many characteristics of a product are tested with the objective of giving as complete information as possible to very simple tests in which only one aspect is tested, for example, price per unit. The choice of what characteristics to test and how to test should be determined by what information is important to the consumer.

Testing step by step

Product testing for consumers involves the following steps:

1. Choosing the product to be tested
2. Choosing the brands or models
3. Choosing the characteristics for testing
4. Choosing and working with the laboratory
5. Verifying the test results
6. Evaluating the test results
7. Presenting the results to the consumers

Step 1: Choosing the product

The choice of the type of product to be tested may be based on one or more of these criteria:

Product is widely used

Spending money to test a product that is used by few people is not practical unless, for example, the product is dangerous. Information about products that are very widely used will be useful to many readers and may save them a lot of money and/ or trouble.

The need for Information

A product may warrant testing if many questions about it are received by the consumer organization from members or readers. (See also 'Setting up a Complaints Redress Service'.) Consumer organizations also need to keep track of new product developments and inform consumers.

Suspected problems

Complaints from members, newspaper articles, other consumer magazines, or from the CI's **Consumer Alerts** about faulty or hazardous products may be the reason for testing a product to warn consumers or to exert pressure on government for better regulations.

Cheap tests

If it is possible to do a test inexpensively, one should not hesitate to do it, as it gives the opportunity to publish tests of products that otherwise could not have been considered for testing. The wider the range of products covered by a magazine, the more people will be attracted to it. Consider sharing costs of the test with other consumer organizations.

Step 2: Choosing the brands and models

The selection of brands and models of products to be tested may take into account the following:

- market share of different brands
- how typical a product is of a particular category
- new developments in product design or features
- existing information about weaknesses in product design or manufacture

Care should be taken in selecting models, which are sold in sales at reduced prices or buying from shops with an unusually low turnover unless, of course, the intention is to investigate the condition of goods sold in these circumstances. It is a good practice to ask manufacturers/importers/distributors which brands/models they sell and if they will still be on the market at the time of publication.

Since it is universally accepted that it is the manufacturer's or supplier's responsibility to ensure that all units of any product bearing their brand name should achieve a minimum standard of quality and safety, the consumer organization may reasonably rely on the results of tests on one sample. In this respect the consumer organization is putting itself in the same position as the ordinary consumer when making a purchase. If, however, the intention is to investigate sample consistency for particular characteristics, then a greater number of samples of each brand/model will be needed.

Samples should be obtained through the normal retail channels and care should be taken to ensure that samples for testing have not been specially prepared.

If more than one sample of each model is to be bought, they should be bought from different shops. If transport for bulky consumer durables cannot be arranged directly, it is preferable that they be delivered to a private address rather than to the laboratory or the office, which would immediately make it obvious to the dealer why the sample was being bought. In spite of difficulties, every effort should be made to preserve anonymity and the shoppers should be those who might reasonably be thought to want the goods for their own use. In addition, the shoppers should collect, where possible, user instructions, guarantees, service manuals, and any other relevant documentation and make a note of the documents they have collected.

Step 3: Choosing the characteristics for testing

Never send the products to a laboratory with the instructions: "Please test these". Very often, the laboratory people want to test all kinds of physical and/or chemical properties of the product, which have little value to the consumer. Draw up a specific list of characteristics that are needed. To decide which characteristics should be tested, start by making a list of user requirements.

For most products, the major product characteristics apart from price are performance, safety, and convenience of use. Information about other aspects of products is usually also essential if consumers are to make informed choices. These include specifications (particularly dimensions and weight), reliability, servicing and guarantees.

After the list of characteristics has been compiled, study it carefully to choose which aspects to test. It is not always necessary to test all the characteristics on the list. You may choose not to test some characteristics for the following reasons:

- Testing is too expensive (for example, endurance tests for many products).
- No agreed test methods are available.
- There is no reliable laboratory.
- The results are already known from other reports (for example, composition of food such

as protein, fat, and carbohydrate content).

- Other reports have shown that nearly all products have acceptable quality with respect to the characteristic (for example, camera lens quality).

Step 4: Choosing and working with the laboratory

When selecting an outside laboratory for testing, choose one with experience in the type of work required. Comparative testing places unusual demands on the testing facility, particularly regarding the need to rigidly follow an agreed time scale. Therefore, it may be advantageous to re-employ the same laboratories.

If you have any doubts as to the quality of work of a laboratory, find out what procedures they use for checking the accuracy of their instruments against outside reference instruments. Unsatisfactory accuracy procedures can be an indication that their general approach and work is sloppy.

A number of other important factors can affect the choice of a laboratory: its independence of commercial interests, which could bias the results, questions about confidentiality, and a number of aspects of laboratory procedure that may be of importance. It is often possible to get help from universities, technical colleges, schools and other institutions (including government or local authority laboratories, like Pakistan Council for Scientific & Industrial Research (PCSIR), Pakistan Standards Institution (PSI), Pakistan Science & Technological Information Centre (PASTIC), National Institute for Health (NIH), etc.) who may be favorably disposed towards the consumer point of view and prepared (sometimes for only a small fee) to make their own testing facilities available to consumer organizations. They may, however, be unwilling to help if the results are challenged.

When the samples have been delivered to the laboratory, regularly contact the people in charge. By doing so, you remain informed about the progress of the test and can make the necessary decisions in time when difficulties arise.

Step 5: Verifying the test results

To reduce the chance of incorrect or misleading results from unrepresentative or faulty samples or from human error, consumer organizations engaged in comparative testing should take adequate steps to verify results.

Methods for verification of test results include:

- submitting draft reports to technical experts for comment prior to publication
- comparing test results with other similar published reports
- checking results against manufacturers' published data
- checking whether observed faults in a product are due to poor design or incorrect

manufacturing practice, and

- informing manufacturers of the test results for their own products, and inviting their comments on the findings before publication.

If, in the latter case, the manufacture disagrees with the findings, the onus is on him to provide data to the consumer organization to support his case. Consumer organizations should consider manufacturers' comments carefully, but remain free to decide what action to take.

Step 6: Evaluating the test results

The laboratory results must now be translated into appraisals of the characteristics of the product that will be meaningful for the consumer.

Classifying consumers

There is no 'standard' consumer. Evaluation and presentation must as far as possible take into account the varying needs and requirements of different groups of consumers. At the simplest level, there are two groups of consumers, one for whom price is the most important factor, and another who gives quality the highest value.

To find out the distinct groups of consumers for a particular product, it may be necessary to rely on a categorization of consumers that is based on experience and on discussion with people who are familiar with the way consumers use the product (including market researchers, retailers, manufacturers and other consumer researchers).

Ranking and weighting

The process of ranking products consists of taking a set of measurements of different characteristics and assigning a 'weighting' or relative importance to the results for each characteristic. In most cases, however, the number of characteristics used by the consumer is small (three to seven).

When this has been done, the predetermined weights can be applied to the weightings and an overall weighted sum calculated for each product.

Ranking scales

Most consumer organizations treat measurements to characteristics by translating them into 5-point scales, which may be designed by words or symbols to make the results easier for consumers to understand.

Step 7: Presenting the results to the consumer

The presentation of the findings (and the explanation of what they mean) is a responsibility shared between the technical and editorial people. A basic precept for publishing any kind of information is to know your audience. Test findings may be used for a variety of purposes such as for presentation to a legislative body or to a standards-making organization or to consumers. They need to be presented differently to the different audiences. We deal here only with publishing information for the consumer.

There are several elements of presenting test findings.

1) Explain your rationale. While not explicitly spelling out the precise weighting formulas used to calculate the ratings, you should make it clear which characteristics you think are important. By making those judgmental factors explicit, you give readers the freedom to disagree, and to assign different weights themselves.

2) Consumer organizations usually give product ratings in two ways:

   One is to provide an overall rating, which says that a particular brand or model has been ranked better overall than the rest. This can be given as a “best buy” rating.

   The rating may also be given according to the product’s performance in the many individual tests that went into the ratings.

   Frequently, consumer organizations present the results in both of these ways. Consumers who agree with the weighting may want to use the “best buys” and recommendations, or if they do not agree, they can base their judgement on the weighting they prefer.

SETTING UP A COMPLAINTS REDRESS SERVICE

The right to redress means the right to a fair settlement of just claims. It involves the right to receive compensation for misrepresentation, substandard goods and services.

Complaints redress service: The rationale

Setting up a complaints redress service is a policy decision that a consumer organization may take depending on its resources and need. Its main advantages are:

It will give the organization a picture of the market place and help the organization plan its work priorities such as in which areas to concentrate research, market surveys, testing and so on. Complaints are only symptoms of underlying or more fundamental problems in society and having a complaints redress service is like having a feeler which will lead to the source of the problem.

- The complaints record will provide an invaluable data base for detailed studies.
- The organization will gain popularity and credibility with consumers who use the service and attract more members.
- Individual complaints can lead the organization into other activities to promote or enhance consumer protection such as holding press conferences to highlight injustices, actions against specific products or persistently erring companies, campaigns for socially responsible market, lobbying for amendments to legislation, and so on.
- Complaints handling is one way of educating consumers about their rights as the complaint process becomes a learning experience for the individual consumer and when shared in consumer periodicals, becomes an educational experience for all who care to read about it.

Human and financial resources

The main constraints involved in setting up a complaints redress service are the human and financial resources that would be necessary to run it efficiently. This is especially acute for organizations, which lack full time staff and funds. The following policy decisions will have to be made:

- What type of complaints are to be handled.
- Should the organization depend on a panel of legal experts as volunteers or hire a legal adviser and support staff?
- Should the organization charge complainants a fee for assisting them or offer the service free of charge?
- Should the service be provided only to members?
- How can the organization facilitate the people to exercise their own rights?

In making these choices each organization will have to decide what would be best for their organization based on their own objectives, resources and priorities.

Staff training

In order to manage an efficient complaints redress service, staff will have to be trained to receive, record and respond to consumer problems in a manner that will serve the best interests of the consumer as well as the organization. The kind of training that will be needed will involve the following:

- Staff will have to be trained on getting all the necessary information as accurately as possible and instructed on the scope of the complaints redress service.
- Staff must receive basic training on consumer rights in all areas of consumer transactions such as hire, purchase, tenancy, sale and purchase of goods, door-to-door sales, warranties and guarantees, and so on. This will involve some basic para-legal training. In addition, the staff must at least be aware of the current legislation and the rights conferred on consumers by these laws, what remedy or redress is available when such rights are violated, and be able to advise on the implications of the course of action suggested.
- Staff should also be aware of the relevant authorities, which have jurisdiction over consumer problem areas and the correct procedures when referring complaints to them.

Registration system

Complaints should be received and recorded in such a manner that it will make data retrieval easy. A simple registration form can be devised that will record all the relevant information such as

- name,
- address and telephone number of complainant,
- date of complaint,
- photocopies of documents as proof of validity of complaint, such as receipt, contract, etc.
- name, address and telephone number of individual, company or authority

- nature of complaint, complained against,
- nature of redress preferred, etc.

If required, information on the occupation and income range of the complainant can be requested to ascertain whether the complainant is a person with the financial means to have the complaint referred to a lawyer if necessary.

A file should be opened for each complaint and given a reference number, where the registration form and the relevant documents handed over by the complainant will be filed along with the ensuing correspondence.

A record book should also be opened as a master file, which will contain all the complaints received. This record can be kept according to type of complaint received and a fresh book opened each year. This will make writing up monthly and annual reports of complaints received much easier as well as facilitate analysis of types of complaints received. Organizations with computer facilities computerize all this data.

Not all complaints are received in person. There may be complaints, which are received by letter or by telephone. For complaints received by letter, a registration number can be allotted and a file opened and if any relevant information is missing, the staff can get in touch with the complainant. Most telephone complainants seek advice and if the problem seems too complicated to be advised on over the telephone it would be best to ask the complainant to come in person. One danger of giving advice over the telephone is that the complaint staff will not have the benefit of reading carefully through the relevant documents and sometimes consumers can misunderstand or misrepresent the whole problem.

Going to court

The decision on whether to file a court action is not an easy one. However in case of NWFP and Federal territory, Islamabad, there exists consumer legislation which can be used to redress consumer grievances. For the organization that offers free complaints redress services, now comes the time to decide whether the complaint is worth pursuing in court and who is going to foot the bill. For the consumer a major consideration will be what are the chances of success and what will happen if they lose.

Apart from these, some major considerations to think about are as follows:

- is there a class of consumers who are affected and will benefit or is it an individual case, i.e., collective rights vs. individual rights?
- even if it is an individual case, by taking the matter to court, will it mean a major development in a particular consumer law which will consequently benefit all consumers?

- if a case is filed, will it force the other party to the negotiating table or enhance the complainant's chances of a successful settlement with a higher award?
- is the case being filed as a strategy to block or frustrate the attempts of certain vested interests or lobbies and to buy more time to think of alternatives?

Depending on the answers to these and other questions, each organization will have to decide whether to file the action in court and assist the consumer with the legal costs involved.

How to act on a complaint

Before you can even act on a complaint, you have to gather all the relevant facts relating it.

- When and why did the complaint arise? It would be best to ask the complainant to relate from the beginning what happened and what specifically the complaint is about.
- Ask the complainant for copies of all the relevant documents for proof of the transaction having taken place.
- In some cases, time may be of the essence, so check whether the complaint has to be made within a specific time period and to whom it has to be made.
- Write down name, address and telephone numbers of the dealer and the manufacturer, or individual or organization against whom the complaint is being made.
- Were any verbal promises made, or if the complainant has already made verbal or written complaints, a record of previous complaints and other relevant developments should be kept.
- What does the complainant want to do about the complaint: cash or credit refunds, replacements, repairs, compensation for damage or injury suffered, written or public apology, and so on?

Action by letter

- describe the complaint of the consumer if it is a product, describe the make, brand, model number, and when it was purchased.
- state where the purchase was made, from a whole seller or at a retail outlet and so on.
- state the problem; what is wrong with the product or service and why the complainant is dissatisfied. enclose copies (not originals) of everything relevant to the complaint e.g., warranties, contracts, receipts, cheques, invoice, bills, etc.
- state what the complainant want by way of satisfaction of the complaint, refund, replacement, repairs, etc.
- ask the other side for their comments.

- tell the other side by what date you want them to respond, allow two to three weeks.
- send copies of your letters to the relevant government agencies who might be helpful if the problem is not solved. This will let the other side know that you mean business.

Record and file actions

Remember to ensure that all verbal dealings with the other side are recorded in detail and filed for future reference.

Even telephone conversations should be noted down, including the date on which they took place, and filed. If there are meetings to discuss the problem, minutes of these meetings should be prepared and filed. Be professional about keeping a written record of everything that transpires between you and the other side. This will be important later if it becomes necessary to file legal action. On a practical note, it will make it easier for anyone else who has to take over the file to understand the sequence of events and proceed from where one office bearer left off.

Once the first letter has been sent off, remember to keep a record of the deadline you have given for reply. If there has been no response, send a second letter which will act as a reminder of the first, restating the problem and reminding them of the date of the first letter you wrote and that the deadline has passed.

Notify the other side that you are now going to seek the help of the relevant government agencies directly. When writing to these government agencies, enclose copies of your previous correspondence with the other party, response if any and why it was not satisfactory. Send a copy of the letter you are writing to the government agency to the other party to let them know you are determined and will not give up easily. You will also be giving a message to the other party that the confrontation may now be made public and this could mean bad publicity or loss of business or even worse, action being taken against them by a government authority.

If the other side is a company that is sensitive to bad publicity about its products or services, the matter will probably be settled. Some companies may settle for the sake of goodwill while others may do nothing fearing that if they give in then they are admitting that their products are inferior or will have a bad image. If all else fails, there is always the power of publicity through consumer newsletter and magazines, to shame irresponsible companies into doing what is right and just.

Ideas for further action

- Informing the press about the issue, e.g., a product that is hazardous to the health and safety of consumers, to warn the community and relevant authorities;
- Carrying out a market survey or test following a complaint on a particular product, for publication in the organization's newsletter or magazine and in the press;
- preparing a memorandum to the authorities suggesting legislation to protect the interests of consumers in certain transactions;
- referring case studies to the relevant authorities suggesting amendments to existing laws;
- writing manuals on areas of consumer interest to inform consumers of their legal rights;
- highlighting success stories of complaints handling in consumer magazines;
- singling out consistently bad traders for specific action.

Follow-up action

The role of the complaints redress service goes much further than merely writing letters and resolving the complaint to the satisfaction of all parties. The real success of a complaints redress service is to ensure that similar problems do not repeatedly appear in their records.

It is the aim of the complaints redress service not only to offer assistance to consumers but more importantly to be able to identify the sources of problems and to find a solution to overcome them. The measure of success of any complaints redress service is not in serving an increased number of consumers every year and recording an increased number of success stories, but in being able to eliminate the source of these problems.

A word of caution

The key to a successful complaints service is to ensure that an efficient system of handling complaints is set up and trained staff who are competent and confident of the advice they offer to consumers are managing the service. The credibility of an organization is at stake every time a complaints officer attends to a complainant and the reputation of the organization hinges on the accuracy of the advice this officer is going to give. It is well worth the organization's time and effort to ensure that these officers receive proper training by a legal professional and that complicated legal problems are always referred to legal professionals for their advice and recommendations.

It should also be expected that once the service becomes well known for its problem solving function, more and more complaints are going to pour in. The organization will then have to make a policy decision on how to tackle this increasing workload, if it had originally decided to offer a free complaints service, then it would also follow that the organization does not feel an obligation to the complainant in the way it would have felt if it had charged for its services. Therefore, it will be free again to decide in what way it would like to limit its services to consumers so as not to be counterproductive in the long run.

INTRODUCING CONSUMER EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Consumer education in educational institutions can not only serve as a key to mass level advocacy for protecting consumer interests, but also help in engaging a large number of volunteers as well.

For the most part there is an imbalance between the power of producers and distributors on the one hand and consumers on the other, which leads to the latter's exploitation. Producer interests and consumer interests do not always coincide. Consumer education is important because it can help redress the balance.

Consumer education can be introduced in schools, colleges and universities at two levels:

Curriculum, and

Extra-curricular activities.

Consumer Education in Curriculum

Consumer education can be incorporated in curriculum, and such a change can be introduced at school and college levels. It can help in convincing many different people of its importance. One can place it in the long-term goals of a consumer organization, since it is relatively difficult to change the curriculum. In Pakistan the curriculum is centralized, and there are provincial text book boards, government curriculum wings and advance studies boards, etc. to recommend the studying material. As far as the government educational institutions are concerned, one can convince the authorities concerned of the need of incorporating consumer education in curriculum, but it is a long process. As far as the private educational institutions are concerned, it is relatively easier to introduce changes in curriculum.

In this regard the following suggestions can prove helpful:

- Hold short courses, seminars or workshops for teachers to show how consumer education can be integrated into the existing syllabus.
- Mount displays or exhibitions on consumer topics both in and out of educational institutions to give a clear idea of what consumer education is about.
- Put up posters on consumer topics in the educational institutions and in suitable places in the community, such as in women's clubs, youth associations, etc.

- Encourage libraries to maintain newspaper clippings on consumer topics, for example, news related to junk foods, drugs, smoking or misleading advertisement, etc.

Consumer Education in Extra-curricular Activities

Consumer education can also be introduced in extra-curricular activities in schools, colleges and universities. In this respect, colleges and especially the universities can play very significant role. Consumer education in extra-curricular activities is easier to introduce in both government and private institutions in addition to informal channels.

In this regard, consumer clubs and societies can be established, small-scale research and surveys can be conducted, speakers invited to deliver talks, and debates and forums planned. All these and similar activities can not only help build up student interest in and awareness of consumer problems, but students can also be engaged as volunteers in consumer organizations.

These consumer clubs can organize different types of activities with the help of the consumer organizations:

- Talks and discussion groups on consumer protection
- surveys and exhibitions on different consumer-related themes
- informative quiz for consumers
- debates and declamations
- speech contests
- competitions, e.g. essay writing or poster drawing on consumer issues

Consumer organizations can prepare material, which can be provided to teachers and students to increase the awareness of consumer issues among students.

WORKING WITH MEDIA

Media can help consumer organizations to reach maximum number of people with few resources and less time.

For every person who may learn of your plans directly through your own activities and publications, there may be thousands who can be reached through the electronic and print media. In Pakistan, media can be divided into three broad categories on the basis of language; English, Urdu, and vernacular like Sindhi, Siariki, etc. This difference of languages also determine their respective readership and outreach. Consumer organizations should keep these differences in mind while communicating with their target groups.

Publicity is needed for one or more of the following reasons.

- to raise money;
- to engage volunteers;
- to inform the public about the issues you deal with;
- to change attitudes; and
- to influence government policy and legislation.

What is news?

To work with the media the consumer organization will need to develop a sense of what is news and what is not. Generally, journalists are looking for news, where there is conflict or controversy, danger to the community, something unusual or some outstanding achievement.

Frequently, it is necessary to make the news attract the attention of the media. For instance, the refusal of a supermarket to start a refund scheme to encourage the recycling of bottles might not attract press attention. But if the supermarket customers were to demonstrate their protest by organizing the dumping of all used bottles at the front door of the supermarket, that would be news.

Press Release

While actions and events like these attract media attention, it is important to put the issue or event on paper or the press release. The press release is simply a statement to the press summarizing a story and telling the journalists where to go for further information. A good press release should save the journalist some work. Sometimes press release is used verbatim.

The appearance of a press release should tell the journalist at a glance if it is going to be of help or not. It should give a confident, easy-to-read impression and provide certain basic information in addition to the text of the release.

More importantly, a sub-editor has to be able to handle a press release with ease; he/she must have room to write in instructions to the printer or to rewrite parts of that text. The more care taken over the presentation of a press release, the more chance of it being used with little alteration.

Writing a Press Release

A press release is essentially a news story. Whether a two-line announcement about a new appointment or a ten-page account of a complicated report, the press release should obey the basic rules of news writing. The first rule learnt by every trainee journalist is to concentrate on the 'five Ws', What, Who, Where, When, Why.

Every press release should begin by answering the 'four Ws'.

- What is happening?
- Who is doing it?
- Where is it happening
- When is it happening?

What, who, where, when do not have to be in this order, but they should always be in the first sentence or two of your press release.

Here is an example first sentence of an imaginary press release to show how the 'four Ws' are worked in automatically.

Consumer Rights Commission of Pakistan	**Who**
Islamabad Office	**Where**
launched a campaign to ban	**What**
substandard *ghee* & cooking oils today	**When**

The fifth 'W' is 'Why' something is happening. It is necessary to explain the reasons behind, or causes of the situation that justify producing the press release. In this example, the second sentence answering the question 'Why' follows naturally.

Their action follows the increased heart problems in Pakistan. **Why**

The first sentence or two can be the key to the success or failure of the press release. The press release must catch the news editor's attention immediately, and the introduction should contain the most interesting fact about the issue or event.

Once you have presented who, what where, when and why in simple and direct form, you can get on with the rest of the press release.

Essentially, a story is being told much as you would give a factual report to a meeting.

- Concentrate on facts.
- Put the facts in descen
- ding order of importance.

The 'five Ws' do not belong only to the first two sentences, spell out the reasons why it is happening, what past or future action is involved, who else will be affected, what you hope to achieve and what other likely results will follow.

- Choose a simple headline for the press release. Use active verbs rather than passive.
- Use vigorous language and sentences, which suggest action.
- Express yourself positively.
- Avoid jargon and abbreviations.
- Use quotations: editors like them and they make a story come alive by personalizing a situation.

How to organize a news conference

Holding a news or press conference is a way of getting journalists from the different media to come to you.

Few press releases can contain everything you want to say. Besides, journalists will probably have questions to ask you on the basis of whatever statement or announcement you have made. Holding a news conference allows you and the journalists to get together in person. It also allows more than one person to speak and answer questions on behalf of the organization holding the news conference.

When announcing a news conference, follow the rules for press releases. You must tell the newsrooms where it will be, when it will take place, what it is about, who will be speaking and why you are calling it. Do tell them what is going to be said (but place an embargo on it until the time of the news conference): some newsrooms will unavoidably not be able to send a reporter along, and there is no reason why the main point of the news to be announced at the press conference should be kept secret.

When to hold a news conference

Sometimes press conferences can be organized very quickly. If you know there is to be a crucial meeting which will take an important decision, you can telephone key local media and say you will hold a press conference half an hour after the meeting is over, when you will announce the result and comment on it.

If you are involved in a major dispute which is attracting daily national news attention, you should try, as far as possible, to control the news approach by holding a daily news conference at a regular time. You may not be able to avert or correct inaccuracies, but at least the reporters covering the story will have no excuse for not knowing what your comments are on the developing situation.

- Plan and prepare well ahead of time.
- Set date, time and place. Make sure it does not clash with other important events or holidays.
- Choose a good venue one with prestige and easy access.
- Generally there are ‘good’ and ‘bad’ days and times for press conferences in each city. Find out what they are.
- Send invitations; telephone the day before to check if someone is coming.
- Choose the main speaker carefully, ideally this should be the chairperson or Executive Coordinator of your Organization.
- Select a small number of speakers, usually not more than three.
- Decide what each one will talk about. All should be knowledgeable about the whole subject.
- Decide exactly what you want to say.
- Have a press release ready, and hand it out at the beginning.
- Seat all speakers in good view and comfortably.
- Hang posters, banners, etc. behind rostrum. This is important for photos.
- Have available copies of background material or the new report if appropriate.
- Have leaflets on your group/organization available.
- Introduce all panel members. Give their names and titles in writing to journalists.
- Speak briefly and leave lots of time for questions.
- If your subject is health or environmental hazards or something similar, bring evidence (e.g. Victims of pesticide poisoning, effects of contaminated water, photos of victims of a disease, etc.)
- Visual messages have more impact and get more press coverage.
- Do not go into complicated scientific details unless asked by press.
- Get names and addresses of all journalists present.
- Give them a telephone number and address where they can get further information later.

- If It is customary, serve refreshments during or after the conference.

Dealing professionally with the media

There are some important points to remember when working with the press.

- Call on them for legitimate reasons. A dull or unwarranted press conference can make media coverage much more difficult to obtain in the future.
- Remember that a journalist's job is to be objective, so he or she will be interested in both sides of the story.
- Understand that the press has editorial privilege.

Developing a press list

One of the essential elements of an effective media relations programme is a comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date press list. Since media representatives tend to change jobs and assignments frequently, it takes special effort to keep track of those covering consumer-related issues.

As you identify other interested media representatives through either personal contact or monitoring of articles or programmes, add them to the press list. For key media outlets, it may be helpful to maintain a card file on each reporter, editor or producer, noting issues of particular interest and topics covered in the past, as well as deadlines, copy and photo specifications, and other requirements.

Responding to media requests for information

Media representatives may frequently call consumer organizations to seek background information, specific facts and data, a colorful quote to liven up a story, a different perspective or other information. The way that these requests are handled is a major determinant of whether the organization becomes known as a responsible, reliable source of information or as a last resort after other contacts have failed. The following are some suggestions for handling media request effectively.

- Determine whether the information requested is within your organization's area of expertise. If not, refer the journalist to appropriate sources.
- Respond to all media requests promptly and as accurately and completely as possible. Let reporters know if you cannot meet their deadlines or can provide only part of the information requested.

- Avoid off-the-cuff remarks of snap judgments. If you are asked to make a statement or corroborate some facts, state that you need some time to develop a response and will contact the reporter soon with a reply.
- Provide journalists only with information you wish to go on air or be printed. It is never advisable to provide “off the record” comments or confidential information. If journalists press for specific information, it is best to explain calmly that the information is “unavailable” or that it is against your organization’s policy to discuss internal matters.

Placing feature stories

Newspapers and magazines frequently publish articles that look beyond current events to larger social trends or new ideas. In addition to providing background information, these articles generally have a human-interest aspect to show how the larger trend affects individuals or how individuals have contributed to the trend. Consumer organizations can play an active role in suggesting topics for feature stories to editors and writers and helping to shape the article by:

- providing facts, research findings and other background information;
- suggesting experts to be interviewed;
- furnishing charts, graphs, photos and other illustrations:
- helping to locate other people to be interviewed;
- clarifying confusing or conflicting points of view; and
- spotting inaccuracies before publication.

Interviews on radio and television

Radio and television are often thought to be the ‘glamorous’ side of the media. News coverage on radio and television, however, is often more superficial and necessarily shorter than in newspapers and other print media.

If you are asked to do a radio or TV interview, there are several things you should be clear about in advance.

- Get information about the programme.
- Beware of trying to get too many facts and figures into an interview. Listeners can not take them all in and tend to recall only one thing you said.
- When being interviewed, you should not feel too restricted by the actual questions asked. Answer them, but make additional points and give examples where necessary or relevant.
- Similarly, if you are asked something you do not know, reply with something you know. This gives the impression that you know what you’re talking about.

- Be absolutely clear what the message is that you want to get across.
- Be properly briefed and prepared.

PUBLISHING A NEWSLETTER

A newsletter helps to strengthen membership, raise funds, give a sense of identity, keep members and other interested groups informed and serve as a channel for lobbying.

At some point, nearly every organization needs to produce a newsletter to communicate with members and the community. A newsletter can have several purposes. It can help to:

- educate and inform consumers
- record your progress and accomplishments
- report your findings or views, and
- inform and motivate your members.

In addition to these, newsletters are also good vehicles for meeting notices, background information and recognition of member service.

A newsletter should be published at reasonably regular intervals. It is better to publish ten or twelve short newsletters a year at regular intervals than one thick issue every six months.

Content

The precise mix of desirable ingredients in a newsletter will vary with each organization and each project, as the material presented should be tailored to the readers' interest.

A universally agreed model of the **'perfect'** consumer newsletter does not exist. It is important to keep in mind the main objective of your newsletter to update readers on your activities and to report progress on issues. Try to ensure a good balance of articles covering these aspects. The newsletter must contain relevant and accurate information that is of benefit to the reader. For example,

- price comparisons on basic goods
- price comparisons of commonly used service
- examples of complaints and how they have been successfully resolved
- product test results

- details of recently uncovered hazards
- educational articles
- exposure of practices of producers and traders who exploit consumers
- research and survey articles on socio-economic issues
- an editorial outlining the organization’s position on a ‘topical subject’

Keep in mind George Orwell’s Six Elementary Rules

(“Politics and the English Language”, 1946)

1) Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech, which you are used to seeing in print.
2) Never use a long word where a short will do.
3) If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.
4) Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6) Break any these rulers sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Reader surveys from large consumer organizations show that articles for existing members should be distinguished from articles that aim to attract new members. To engage new members effectively, membership staff should be involved in the content planning of the newsletter and articles meant for engaging more people should be evenly spaced in all issues.

An article that will attract and hold the readers offers great benefit: it answers an urgent question, tells how to save money or how to avoid making serious mistakes. An attractive article also promises a reward, telling the reader how to achieve something that is important to him/her (a healthier lifestyle, a sound used car, etc.) or how the reader can avoid something he/she dreads (losing a lot of money, acne, etc.) In every newsletter, however it is useful to include a number of regular features. Features that appear in each issue are valuable for sustaining interest, creating continuity, and in giving the newsletter a recognizable structure.

For additional ideas regarding consumer protection, have a look at various publications produced by CRCP or any other consumer organization.

Writing your articles

Articles should be written in simple language, avoiding jargon and complex phraseology. Neither the sentences nor the paragraphs should be very long Articles should be well structured, with clear chronology of events. Avoid unnecessary repetition. Try to make the reading as interesting as possible without resorting to gimmicks or sensationalism.

Some Guidelines

- Capture the reader's attention immediately with a carefully thought out first paragraph.
- Use lots of headings and make them catchy.
- Keep individual items and articles fairly short and lively.
- Include footnotes to tell the reader where to obtain further information (book reference, address of organizations, etc.) or to credit the source of information.
- Include names of people active in the organization. Others need to know what they are doing, and they like to see their own name in print.
- Try to avoid starting all paragraphs with "The". One way of breaking the monotony is to start the occasional paragraph with a question and then go on to answer it.
- Always check and double-check your facts.

Remember that an article is not a report. To avoid turning an article on a meeting into a summary report, focus on one particular theme discussed, and avoid the organization of ideas/news in the manner used in reports.

Design

Design is as much a part of the newsletter as writing, editing, proof-reading, or illustrating. Before reading a single word, you can already tell a lot about a newsletter, just by the way it looks. A publication full of illustrations, for example, is usually easier to read than one with lots of closely typed text.

Your newsletter should be able to attract the reader's attention even before he/she settles down to read it properly; use attractive design and layout, and eye catching headlines. Adding an illustration next to the headline attracts more readers.

Do not try to cream too much on to a page for the sake of economy. It is easier to read well-spaced out articles to long blocks of print. Break up your articles with lots of white space. Use short paragraphs, wide margins, subheadings and titles. Place pictures in the text instead of in a separate section.

Liberal use of white space will increase the size of your publication, but an airy, attractive newsletter is much more likely to be read than a gray mass of type.

Production

The normally separate functions of editor and production manager are, for a small scale publication, best combined in the same person. Ideally, this person should not only "be able to turn out readable matter", but should also be able and willing to type it out in a presentable form, and to produce the required number of copies.

If your organization includes a professional writer willing to organize the newsletter volunteers, so much the better. Non-professionals, especially those with an interest in writing, can also be very effective.

If there are additional members who volunteer to work on the publication, it is better to have one person in overall control, and for the other to give him or her their assistance.

After appointing an editor/production manager, the next step is to decide what kind of a publication you want to have and can afford. The group as a whole for (or the organizing committee administering your new consumer organization) should discuss and agree with the editor the frequency of the publication, its size (format, number of pages, etc.) the title, its general appearance, how it is to be distributed and to whom. The group should also agree on the budget for the newsletter.

Distributing your newsletter

While you are planning your newsletter, determine who will get copies and how. Make a distribution list in order to produce the right number of copies. Investigate the possibility of selling copies through local stores or encouraging local merchants to buy copies to distribute to their customers or to public libraries. When the publication goes to the printer, start working on arrangements for distribution. Work with your team to coordinate publicity, mailings, and other distribution. Print enough extra copies for reference and other uses.

Evaluation and follow up

- Get feedback to find out what your readers think about your newsletter and what topics they would like to see read, include coupons or response cards regularly into your newsletter.
- Do not be afraid to make improvements while publishing the next issue. Good writers almost always find weaknesses in their earlier work.
- Do not take criticism personally. Work to improve your publications. Someone will always complain, so do not take an isolated complaint too seriously.
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- Note: If some consumer organizations wants to expand or convert its Newsletter into a

magazine CRCP can provide material for further guidance

ORGANIZING A MEETING

Success of a meeting depends on preliminary organization and sufficient time for its planning.

There are two types of meetings: public meetings and planning meetings. The difference between a public meeting and a planning meeting is that the former is open to the public and usually held for public relation purposes, whereas a planning meeting is for a particular group of people, e.g. members, sub-committees, working groups, etc. and convened for discussion and decision-making. At a public meeting the public comes to listen and does not expect to do more than ask a brief question, but those attending a planning meeting expect to have the opportunity to put forward their own views, and to contribute to the decision making process.

1. How to organize a public meeting

Public meetings are difficult to organize. The impact of television and people's fear of going out at night makes it more difficult to get people to come to public meetings. They will only come in large numbers if there is a really well known speaker, or the meeting is about something happening locally, which is important to them.

A public meeting can, however, be very useful if you can get:

- committed people together to plan the next stage;
- publicity for your cause; and
- the opportunity to hand out leaflets and talk to people about your campaign.

The aims of the meeting may be:

- to provide education especially on controversial issue;
- to expose participants to new ideas;
- to rally public support; and
- to inform and update participants.

Timing the meeting

- Check before setting the date of the meeting that there is not another meeting that will attract the same people going on at the same time or any television programme that people would want to watch. The meeting should not be too long, otherwise people will start to drift away.

Booking a meeting place

- Regarding the booking of a meeting place, it is important to think:
- How many people do you expect?
- How much can you afford to pay?
- What time do you want the meeting to begin and end?
- Where are you expecting people to come from?
- Will the place easily accessible to people?

Speakers

Do not have too many speakers. People get bored easily, and they want to put their own point of view, therefore, more time should be given to questions and discussion. If you want more speakers, cut down on the time allowed to each of them. If you think someone needs more than 15 minutes, have fewer speakers. If you are inviting a 'big name' put him or her on last, so people who have come especially for this reason, will listen to the others as well. Give your speakers full details of the time and place of the meeting, how long they are expected to speak, whether there will be questions, and who else is speaking.

Chairperson

Organize your chairperson well in advance, at the same time as the speakers, and remind him/her in the same way as the speakers. Make sure s/he knows all the plans. Arrange for the organizer, the chair, and the speakers to meet for quarter of an hour before the meeting starts. If the arrangements are at all complicated, write out a timetable for the chairperson.

Setting up the hall

Sorting out the chairs may be done by the caretaker, or you may have to do it, check when you first book the hall. Decide in advance how you want it arranged, and whether you want people to sign a list, or charge them for entry.

Afterwards

If the meeting has gone well, you will feel very happy: if badly, fed up. Either way, try and go over it afterwards as a group: decide what went well and where you made mistakes, and learn from it. Also think was the whole venture worthwhile? What are the pluses and minuses ? And what is your next step?

Remember also to:

- write thank you letters;
- pay your bills;
- follow up useful contacts you made.

2. How to organize a planning meeting

A good organizing meeting is one of the essential first steps in the successful launching of an action project. At this meeting, many important preliminary steps are taken, including setting goals, deciding whether or not to proceed, selecting leaders, and making commitments and plans for the future.

As with the public meeting it is necessary to first define the purpose of the meeting. Possible aims include:

- to decide whether or not to proceed with a project, what strategies and tactics to use, and what allies to involve;
- to obtain commitments for participation in a project;
- to initiate network action;
- to bring together people who have expressed an interest in working in a certain area or on a certain programme.

In planning your meeting, there are some rules to follow which will guide you to successful events.

Time is everyone’s most valuable commodity

- always ask yourself; Should this meeting be held? Is it necessary?

The reason to hold a meeting is to get things done

- The programme of your organization should consist of action, not meetings. It is very easy to slip into the opposite, a programme of meetings, not action. Thus, identify a problem or issue in which you think there is sufficient interest to organize a project.
- Next step is to identify the people who are concerned or have an interest or stake in the solution of the problem or issue. Ask other branch members, community leaders, social activists, journalists, friends, and other organizations for suggestions, and start contacting the suggested people to determine the extent and nature of their interest.

Pre-plan the meeting carefully

- Remind people to come. Don't rely on mailings or a telephone call a week or two before. Call all active members starting three nights before the meeting. Have as many people as possible make the calls (they will convince themselves to come). Remind each member of the date, time and place. Tell them why the meeting is important in terms of the issue the group is working on and mention the main decision, which will have to be made at the meeting.
- Consult as many participants as possible beforehand. Find out their concerns. Let them know what fits or does not fit into the purpose of the meeting. Prepare them. Organize them and get feedback.
- Delegate meeting tasks beforehand. This includes everything from making reports to making tea. This helps to guarantee the attendance of the people with assignments and makes you, the organizer, seem less central.
- Have assignments in mind to give to specific participants at the meeting. Ask them beforehand if they will accept.

Have a printed agenda

- Limit the number of items to four or five.
- Limit the total length of the meeting to two hours.
- Put a suggested time limit on the agenda for each item.
- Decide beforehand what agenda item will be the "up" part of the meeting where enthusiasm is created.
- Have proposals for each part of the meeting thought out in advance. (Never pose a question to the group if you have no idea what the answer is)
- Have a period for open discussion at the end of the meeting. This is the time for announcements and items, which are not central to the point of the meeting. Limit this time so that the meeting does not dribble away at the end. After the discussion period the chair should review everything that was decided at the meeting and then formally close the meeting.

Have a chairperson

- The chair is the leader for the meeting. More than just a moderator, the chair has the responsibility for moving the meeting ahead, encouraging participation and getting the agenda accomplished.
- The chair should be briefed on each agenda item, how to handle it and what kind of

decision needs to be made.

- background, goals and expectations of participants;
- aspects of the problem on which the group would like to focus.
- general goals and an overall outline; have a proposal for discussion ready in draft from;
- amount of time each person can and will commit;
- organization, including leadership (temporary or permanent);
- a short-term activity with a high probability of success should be undertaken first to demonstrate that the organizing meeting accomplished something and to give participants a compelling reason to attend the next meeting.

Conducting the meeting

- Introduce and welcome new people.
- Review the purpose of the meeting. Remind the members what has happened since the last meeting and what decisions have to be considered at this one. This short unifying keynote can be made by the chair or another officer.
- Distribute the agenda and ask for suggestion for changes.
- Where there are different points of view on what the group should be doing, set aside five or ten minutes or open discussion during which no motions are made and no votes taken.
- Keep the tone positive, If difference can not be settled in a positive way, put off the decision and work things out later.
- Thank everyone who worked for the organization since the last meeting.
- Everyone should leave the meeting with something to do, even if it is only a leaflet to give out.
- At the end of meeting the chair summarizes the major points and reviews the assignments, which have been made.

After the meeting

- The officers and staff should follow up on all assignments prior to the next meeting. At the next meeting a report should be made on the outcome of the decisions and assignments of the previous meeting.
- Call active members who missed the meeting and fill them in.
- Call the chair and other people who played a major role and thank them.

Consumer Rights Commission of Pakistan

Consumer Rights Commission of Pakistan, established in 1998, is an independent, non-profit, non-political and non-governmental organization, which is not supported by any industry or commercial sector. CRCP is the first comprehensive consumer rights protection body in Pakistan approaching the issue in holistic terms.

MISSION STATEMENT

To articulate and promote the interests and rights of consumers at all socio-economic levels, and facilitate the emergence of an organized consumer movement in Pakistan.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To encourage and support the formation of consumer groups and organizations at all socio-economic levels of society.
- To create awareness among different categories of consumers, especially the marginalized groups about their roles, rights and responsibilities.
- To undertake advocacy and lobbying activities for the enactment and implementation of improved legislation on consumer protection.
- To intervene on behalf of consumers, while seeking active support and participation of existing consumer groups, where a regulatory or redress framework is available.
- To encourage greater coordination among civil society initiatives and individual efforts for consumer protection.
- To improve understanding of existing and emerging issues concerning the consumer protection at the grass roots and policy-making levels.
- To take appropriate measures to check unfair trade practices including misleading product information, and supply of substandard goods and services.

HOW CRCP CAN HELP

CRCP is not a funding agency, however it extends guidance and support to emerging consumer groups in Pakistan. It is generally achieved by organizing training workshops, providing legal aid and helping in formulation of advocacy and lobbying material. It supports all civil society initiatives, particularly those working for the furtherance of the cause of CRCP, and trying to build an equitable society.