

General Elections 2008

Policy Commitments of Political Parties

Consumer Protection

Consumer rights are a specific expression of fundamental human rights, and are associated with consumption of various products and services, whether paid or unpaid. These include the right to basic needs, right to safety, right to information, right to choice, right to representation, right to redress, right to consumer education and right to healthy environment. Consumers in Pakistan have long been facing many problems, as no specific legal and institutional framework was available for the protection of these rights. Artificial shortage of essential commodities, arbitrary price hikes, poor quality of products and services, unchecked sale of hazardous products, and misleading advertisements are some illustrative examples of such problems.

Over the past 12 years, initial steps have been taken to put in place a legislative framework for protection of consumer rights. The first step was the enactment of Islamabad Consumer Protection Act in 1995. In 1997, the NWFP enacted a similar Consumer Protection law. These two laws, however, remained dormant because neither the rules of procedure were framed nor any Consumer Protection Council was established, as was required under these laws. Meanwhile, consumer protection organizations launched campaigns for enactment and implementation of consumer protection laws in all the provinces. Consumer Rights Commission of Pakistan (CRCP) developed a Model Consumer Protection Act in 2001 taking into account the best practices from many countries, and urged the Government to benefit from it while framing the laws. The following years were very crucial, as Balochistan and Punjab enacted their own Consumer Protection Acts in 2003 and 2005 in the context of devolution system. The Government of NWFP also amended the 1997 law to give powers to the District Coordination Officer (DCO). In Sindh, the Governor Sindh promulgated a Consumer Protection Ordinance in 2004, but it was allowed to lapse, as it could not be enacted by the Provincial Assembly. The Ordinance was re-promulgated in February 2007. Until now, no significant progress has been made for implementation of these laws, except in Punjab.

The table provided below identifies some of the major challenges in consumer protection; policy actions needed to address these challenge, and commitment of political parties whether they will implement the policy actions, if voted to power, after forthcoming general elections.

	Challenge	Policy Actions Needed	Political Party's Response
1	Consumer protection laws exist in Islamabad and all provinces, except Sindh. The Governor Sindh promulgated a Consumer Protection Ordinance in 2004, but it was allowed to lapse, and could not be enacted by the Provincial Assembly. The Ordinance was re-promulgated in February 2007. Attempts to enact a provincial consumer protection law have been unsuccessful in Sindh.	Will your political party ensure that the Sindh Assembly enacts a comprehensive consumer protection law for Sindh?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____
2	Although the existing consumer protection laws are enforced, but elaborate rules and procedures are not available.	Will your political party ensure that rules and procedures of all existing consumer protection laws are notified and publicized?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____
3	The existing consumer protection laws are not fully operational, as the institutional forums envisaged in these laws have not been established. Only Punjab has established Consumer Protection Councils and Consumer Courts only in 11 districts.	Will your political party ensure that: Consumer Protection Councils in, <i>at least</i> , all major cities of the provinces are established Consumer Courts, <i>at least</i> , in all major cities of the provinces are established Adequate budgetary allocations for functioning of the Councils and the Courts are made	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

	Challenge	Policy Actions Needed	Political Party's Response
			Other response: _____ _____ _____
4	There is no national or provincial consumer protection policy in Pakistan. A comprehensive policy is needed to provide a guiding framework and to ensure coordination among various government agencies involved in protection of consumer rights.	Will your political party formulate and implement a comprehensive Consumer Protection Policy?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____
5	The existing consumer protection laws remain under-utilized due to lack of consumer awareness and education. Majority of the consumers do not know even about the very existence of Consumer Courts in Punjab, for example.	Will your political party implement a nation-wide public campaign for consumer education and awareness on print and electronic media?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____
6	Presently, there is a serious deficit of laboratories and technical staff for testing of food items and manufacturing products such as home appliances. This deficiency tends to impede the implementation of consumer protection laws, as Courts may require laboratory tests as evidentiary requirement.	Will your political party ensure that at least, 10 (or _____) new well-equipped laboratories are established in major districts for testing of food items and manufacturing products?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____