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TOPIC: ENHANCING CONSUMER RIGHTS IN RWANDA

**STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST: ORGANISED BY RWANDA INSPECTORATE
COMPETITION AND CONSUMER PROTECTION AUTHORITY (RICA)**

Introduction

Consumer rights may be defined as legally protected entitlements and privileges that individuals have when buying a product or engaging in any commercial transactions and interactions with businesses. These rights are designed to ensure fair and ethical practices, protect consumers from deceptive or harmful practices, and promote a balanced and transparent marketplace. Consumer protection can be traced back to various historical and societal developments that led to the recognition of the need to protect consumers from unfair practices and ensure their rights are upheld. Here are some key milestones in the origin of consumer protection.

In Rwanda consumers was recognised after enacting policy protecting consumers in 2010 followed by the law that was put in place in 2012. This was followed by establishing institutions that had mandate of protecting consumers.

Consumers have the right to seek redressal against restrictive trade practices, unfair trade practices or unscrupulous exploitation of consumers. It also includes the right to a fair resolution of a consumer's grievances. Consumers can file a complaint when they have a legitimate grievance.

Right of consumer are that flows as set by consumer protection law

Right to be protected against the marketing of goods and services, which are hazardous to life and property. The purchased goods and services availed of should not only meet their immediate needs, but also fulfil long term interests.

Right to Safety

Means right to be protected against the marketing of goods and services, which are hazardous to life and property. The purchased goods and services availed of should not only meet their immediate needs, but also fulfil long term interests. Before purchasing, consumers should insist on the quality of the products as well as on the guarantee of the products and services. They should preferably purchase quality marked products such as NIKE, ADIDAS.

Right to be informed

Means right to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods so as to protect the consumer against unfair trade practices. Consumer should insist on getting all the information about the product or service before making a choice or a decision. This will enable him to act wisely and responsibly and also enable him to desist from falling prey to high pressure selling techniques.

Right to choose

Means right to be assured, wherever possible of access to variety of goods and services at competitive price. In case of monopolies, it means right to be assured of satisfactory quality and service at a fair price. It also includes right to basic goods and services. This is because unrestricted right of the minority to choose can mean a denial for the majority of its fair share. This right can be better exercised in a competitive market where a variety of goods are available at competitive prices

Right to be Heard

Means that consumer's interests will receive due consideration at appropriate forums. It also includes right to be represented in various forums formed to consider the consumer's welfare. The Consumers should form non-political and non-commercial consumer organizations which can be given representation in various committees formed by the Government and other bodies in matters relating to consumers.

Right to Seeks redressal

Means right to seek redressal against unfair trade practices or unscrupulous exploitation of consumers. It also includes right to fair settlement of the genuine grievances of the consumer. Consumers must make complaint for their genuine grievances. Many a times their complaint may be of small value but its impact on the society as a whole may be very large. They can also take the help of consumer organization in seeking redressal of their grievances.

Right to Consumer Education

This means the right to acquire the knowledge and skill to be an informed consumer throughout life. Ignorance of consumers, particularly of rural consumers, is mainly responsible for their

exploitation. They should know their rights and must exercise them. Only then real consumer protection can be achieved with success.

Right to privacy

Seller should not display to everyone what other consumer bought means consumer should buy product safely without thinking that everyone will know what they bought this is also responsibility of the sellers. Again involves the handling and protection of the sensitive personal information provided by customers in the course of everyday transactions.

Right to bargain

This means that the consumer holds the right to express his or her affordable prices which is not too high or too low. For instance, the producer or wholesaler might charge maximum prices which is too high so here the consumer holds the right to bargain so that the seller can reduce price

Right to reject defective product

This right refers to when the consumer purchase or buy product and finally found that the product are damaged and does not satisfy the required characters. Here the consumer is allowed to refuse the receipt of delivered product so that they can be returned to the supplier.

INSTITUTIONS THAT HAVE MANDATE OF PROTECTING CONSUMER RIGHTS

There are several institutions that have mandate of protecting consumer rights and these include the following

- Rwanda Inspectorate Competition and Consumer Protection Authority (RICA). This has mandate of protecting consumers against excessive violation by traders. Consumers who have issues with traders can submit complaint to RICA and it is handled.
- National Bank of Rwanda (BNR). This has mandate of protecting consumers in finance sector
- Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority. This has mandate of protecting consumers in some of works that are in public interest e.g transport, energy etc.

Despite the fact that Consumer rights in Rwanda, majority Consumers have not yet recognized that they have rights entitled to them during commercial transactions.

Therefore, advancing consumer rights is a continuous process that involves various stakeholders working together to promote awareness.

Raising awareness about consumer rights is essential to ensure that individuals understand their entitlements and can protect themselves in the marketplace.

Sensitization Campaigns: Conduct public awareness campaigns that focus on consumer rights, their significance, and how individuals can exercise them. Develop clear and concise messaging that resonates with the target audience. Use a mix of mediums such as television, radio, print media, social media, and online platforms to reach a wide range of people.

Tight collaboration with Educational Institutions: Partner with schools, colleges, and universities to incorporate consumer rights education into the curriculum. Work with educators to develop age-appropriate materials and interactive activities that help students understand their rights and responsibilities as consumers.

Social Media Engagement: Utilize social media platforms to engage with consumers and raise awareness about their rights. Create dedicated social media accounts to share informative content, answer queries, and provide updates on consumer rights issues. Encourage users to share their experiences and concerns, and actively respond to their comments and messages.

CONCLUSION

In general, the consumers rights are vital to consumer's sovereignty. This is because it allows them to purchase their favorite product at their bargained prices, usually all people are consumers and needs to enjoy the right they posses as consumers and this makes the market structure flexible and this results in satisfaction of their needs and wants