

Report of the workshop on Consumer Education & Protection for teachers organized by CREAT and Chair on Consumer Law and Practice, NLSIU, Bangalore on 27th June 2009

Introduction

The Consumer Rights, Education & Awareness Trust (CREAT) has been focusing on creating awareness among the students, particularly those studying in High Schools. CREAT was one of the first organisations to promote the concept of Consumer Clubs. Drawing inspiration from consumer clubs in Malaysia (established by the Consumer Association of Penang), CREAT has been concentrating teachers in order to strengthen the consumer clubs. Since 1994-95 CREAT has conducted several training programs for teachers and has trained so far over 300 teachers. CREAT has also established the Consumer Educators Network (CEN) similar to what the Consumers International did some years ago. A quarterly newsletter namely 'Consumer Education' is being published by CREAT with a view to educate students and teachers involved in consumer clubs. Some of the issues of Consumer Education can be viewed in www.creatindia.org

In the campaign to promote consumer education, CREAT has found that the success of consumer education depends on the availability of resource persons and training materials. Without sufficient number of teachers/resource persons who can organize events, conduct classes and motivate students, consumer education cannot reach a wider audience. CREAT has found that despite training 300 teachers only a handful has shown interest in taking forward consumer education. Repeatedly, CREAT has been visiting schools, interacting with teachers, writing to the heads of the institutions and prevailing upon them to promote consumer education. Continuing its efforts, CREAT in collaboration with the Chair on Consumer Law and Practice, National Law School of India University, Bangalore, had organized a one day training program for High School teachers of select schools of Bangalore. The workshop was held on 27th June 2009 at the NLSIU, Training Centre. The list of participants is in Annexure I

Objectives

- To inform, educate and build the capacity of the teachers on issues related to consumer protection
- To identify issues on which consumer education program could be built
- To build a pool of resources on consumer education
- To enlarge the reach of Consumer Educators' Network
- To identify activities that can be taken up by Consumer Clubs

The workshop commenced with a short welcome address by Dr.Ashok Patil, Associate Professor, NLSIU who is also in charge of the Chair on Consumer Law and Practice. He explained the objectives of the workshop and also about the Chair and its activities. The workshop was inaugurated by Ms.Geetha (in charge of Consumer Education in the Directorate of Public Instruction, Government of Karnataka). In her inaugural address

she highlighted the need in bringing awareness about consumer protection among the students. She said that the scheme of establishing consumer clubs will be extended to all schools in the State. She said, at present only 650 schools have constituted consumer clubs. The department will add 50 schools in a year. Mrs.Geetha said that the problem with consumer education is the non-availability of teachers/resource persons and the reluctance of the heads of the institutions. She said that there is a need to train teachers and provide sufficient materials to teach consumer protection related issues.

The first session of the workshop focused on some of the laws relating to consumer protection. It was chaired by Dr.Rekha Ganachari, professor of commerce, RC College and also a co-ordinator of CREAT. Dr.Ashok Patil made a presentation on the salient features of the Consumer Protection Act. He explained the various concepts used in the Act and also the grievance redressal mechanism under the Act. The presentation was supported with relevant case studies. Dr.Ashok Patil gave examples relating to defect in goods, deficiency service and explained the concept of consumer as used in the Act.

The second presentation was on Weights and Measures Act including the Standards of Packaged Commodity Rules. This was made by Mr.Mohamed Anwar, Assistant Controller, Department of Legal Metrology, Government of Karnataka, Hassan. He explained the role of the department in implementing the law. Mr.Anwar emphasized the importance of labeling requirements and the law relating to labeling. He explained how consumers are exploited while selling goods using conventional weighing instruments. He said even the packaged commodities are not foolproof and many unethical methods are used to cheat the consumers. Hence it wanted consumers to be cautious. Mr.Anwar gave the details of the consumer grievance redressal mechanism in the Department.

After the two presentations the floor was open for discussion. Dr.Rekha Ganachari invited the participants to raise questions and clear their doubts. Participants wanted more information about the various definitions used in the CPA. The concept of commercial purpose, livelihood, guarantee, warranty etc was explained by her. The participants were asked to identify some of the activities that they could organize in Consumer Clubs in relation to the two presentations. The following were some of the activities identified:

Asking students to collect cartoons/packages of various commodities and read the labels

Comparing the information given in the labels with the provisions of the Packaged Commodities Rules

Preparing a report on the observations

Visiting the Consumer Grievance Redressal Forums to observe the proceedings

Writing complaint letters to various authorities and the media

Collecting products which are spurious/duplicates and also those which are original and arranging an exhibition of these products and call it Asli-Nakli

Preparing Charts, crosswords, jumbles etc

The afternoon session commenced with a session on Food Safety. Shri.N.S.Ramamurthy, Senior Food Inspector, Public Health Institute, Government of Karnataka, Bangalore, made a presentation on food adulteration and the provisions of the newly enacted Food Safety and Standards Act. He explained the various provisions of the act, No. of Acts on Food Regulation, objectives and the role of consumers in promoting the concept of food safety. To a suggestion from one of the participant that street food should be banned, Shri.Ramamurthy said that according to World Health Organization 85% of the people in the developing countries depend on street food because of cheaper rates. At the same time people should not be fed with adulterated food. Hence, he said the WHO has recommended improving the quality of street food by educating the food sellers. Shri.Ramamurthy said that the Institute will be happy to collaborate with the consumer organisations and consumer clubs to promote awareness about good and healthy food.

The last session was on "Consumer Education & Running a Consumer Club" by Mr. Y.G. Muralidharan from CREAT, Bangalore. He briefly explained the concept of consumer education, its origin and its uses. He said that the success of consumer clubs depends on the knowledge, skill, involvement and dedication of the teachers. He said consumer clubs should be used as a forum for giving expression to the inherent talent among teachers and the students. He explained how one of the teachers from Bangalore, who ran the consumer club successfully, was awarded by the NCERT. Tracing the development of consumer clubs in Malaysia, New Zealand, UK and Nordic countries, he said the first consumer club in Karnataka was established by CREAT in Kendriya Vidyalaya, Malleswaram in 1996-97.

Mr.Muralidharan conducted a quiz program. A set of questions on various public services (Educational Institutions, Medical Grievances, Railways, Standards Of Weights & Measures, Drugs/Cosmetics) prepared by CREAT was distributed to the participants to assess the level of awareness. He said such materials are to be developed by teachers. Mr.Muralidharan asked the participants to join the CEN and strengthen consumer education. He gave a list of activities that can be taken up by consumer clubs. Some of the activities are:-

- Collection of paper clippings.
- Fixing a Notice Board to display consumer issues
- Debates and essay competitions
- Poster drawing
- Writing letters to the editor of newspapers

The major recommendations of the workshop are:-

- Consumer Clubs are to be established in all High Schools and even in Colleges
- The heads of the institutions should be made aware of consumer protection and its importance
- Consumer protection should be given importance as given to environment, civic issues, health etc

There is a need to develop a pool of resource persons
The Consumer Educators' Network of CREAT is to be widened and strengthened
Financial support from the Government should continue
Inter consumer clubs are to be held periodically

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