

Presentation for: 3rd ITU Asia Pacific Regulators Roundtable,
14th – 15th October 2013 Republic of Korea

Broadband Access Services: Protecting Consumers in a Competitive Environment – A Vanuatu & SIDS Perspective

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About Vanuatu

- Vanuatu is made up of 83 islands and 63 islands are inhabited. (Located in South Pacific)
- 234,000 population in the 2009 census
- Total Land Area 4720 square metres
- 80% Living in Rural Areas, 20% in Urban Areas
- Has six provinces, and two municipal councils
- In terms of Telecommunications Network it currently has around 90% of population coverage mainly on voice (mobile)
- In terms of Internet, very few areas do have access – either through VSATs setting or 2.5G network (with smart phones)
- 3G & 3G+ available in 2 key cities



Vanuatu



Instruments & Resources in place

- Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulation Act 2009
 - Part 8 of the Act – Customer Relations & Protection
 - TRR Consumer Protection Guidelines – detail specific objectives that TRR sets for Service Providers as a guide to customer requirements that operators need to meet
 - TRR Advertising Guidelines – sets out basic guiding principles in relation to promotion of telecom services for industry to observe (on a voluntary basis)
 - TRR’s Complaint procedure Handlings
 - TRR’s Online Complaint form – to cater for those with internet access (acknowledging this is limited to approximately 10% of population)



Instruments & Resources in place

- ❑ Consumer Affairs Officer – Experienced officer recruited in mid 2013 – now we are moving forward
- ❑ Consumer Affairs Manager – One of TRR’s key Managers driving attitudinal change in Vanuatu
- ❑ TRR Consumer responsibilities:
 - Major role is take a leading role in promoting Consumer Protection & Awareness
- ❑ TRR Consumer awareness initiatives – see next slides



TRR's Current Consumer Initiatives

Business and Consumer Advisory Groups

- Established in 2012 and meets quarterly
- Provides direct feedback to TRR, and licensees and Vanuatu Government

School Series of Debates on ICT

- Initiative of TRR to create ICT awareness
- 3 rounds of debate on special topics
- Gives opportunity for participating schools to engage on creative views and concepts

Consumer Awareness Campaigns

- Tok Bak Show program – through National Radio
- Face to face awareness campaigns
- Brochures and Monthly columns
- FAQs in development
- School Debates
- Newspaper Articles
- Social Network Presence

National events

- Showcase of types of services and products – National ICT day in celebration of ITU's WTISD which have proven a great success.



What TRR is trying to achieve with it's Consumer Activities

- At a national level – an informed citizen of Vanuatu leading to Vanuatu's national vision **“a just healthy, educated and wealthy Ni-Vanuatu”** through positive use of ICT
- As a key element of TRR's implementation of one of the Vanuatu Government's top priorities of the National ICT policy – Building trust(mitigating risks & threats related to the ICT Development)
- Consumer awareness & protection is a key element of the ICT Policy
- Stimulation of a sustainable ICT/Telecommunications Market in Vanuatu and extension of these services in the rural areas: leading to bridging of Digital Divide



What TRR is trying to achieve with it's Consumer Activities

- An aware, active, and (respectfully) vocal citizen - in the Pacific way - to ensure consumer rights are recognized and protected
- TRR recognizes & must assist & will play an active role through it's education awareness campaigns; promoting Consumer empowerment, consumer safety, consumer enforcement procedures and appropriate redress
- High-level guest speaker coming. Strong Pacific consumer advocate will enhance awareness & measures we can consider
- Most importantly for youth in particular, to prevent “Consumer Digital shock” in a rapidly evolving Digital competitive market



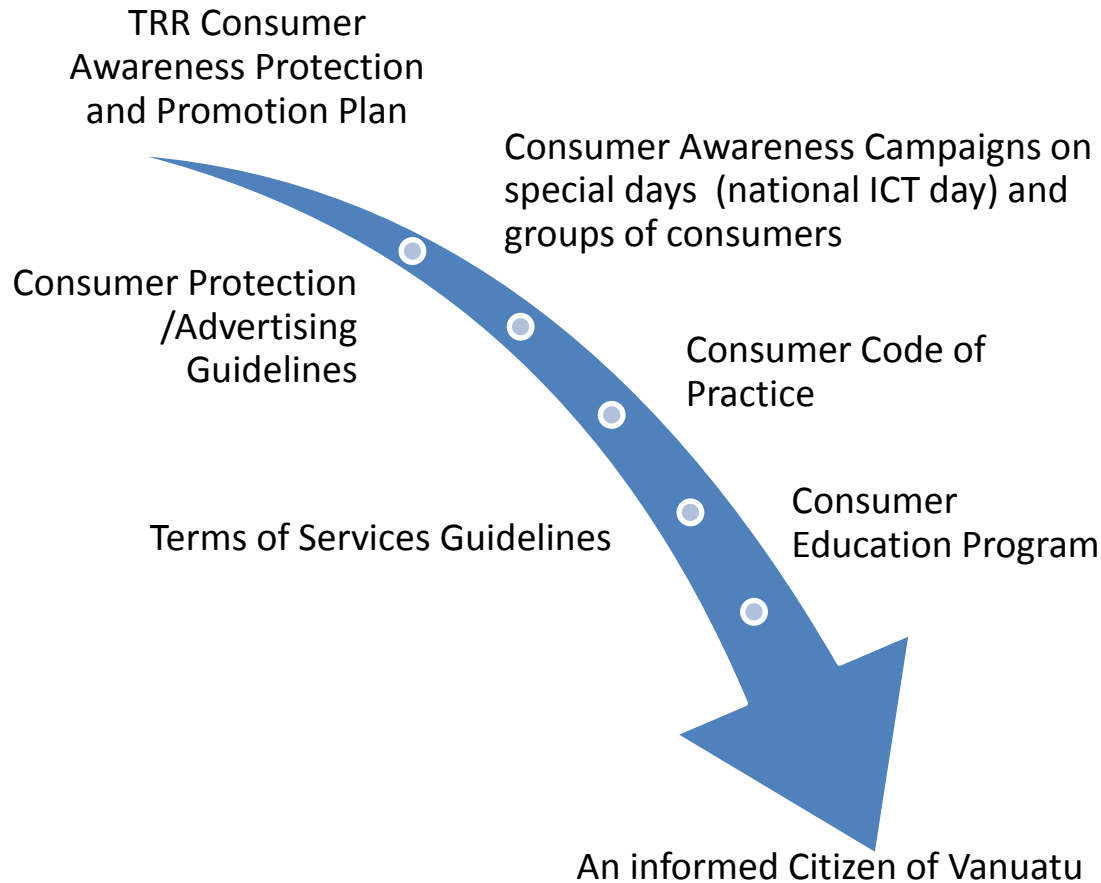
Challenges faced

- Vanuatu is a country with one of the highest rate of illiterate citizens
- It is hard for developed countries to adapt to new technology (some e.g. RoK, Australia are proven quick adapters)
- In developing countries, this difficulty is magnified. Thus, TRR has an enormous challenge as a Pacific SID
- Usage of ICT is centred in (basically 2) –Port Vila and Luganville urban areas – thus causing imbalance in consumer access to ICT's
- In terms of information dissemination primarily through internet & radio as Vanuatu 's population is made up of 75% living in the rural communities

Challenges faced

- In many cases in developing countries, there are challenges in utilizing new technology particularly in rural areas, & in utilizing products supplied in the market. (e.g, there are shops selling iPhone 5s in town, but there is no support provided for maintenance if the iPhone is damaged)
- The vast geographical and topography of Vanuatu (as you have seen in my first slide) makes it hard for provision of access to & utilization of ICT services; & thus for TRR, the (not) easy dissemination of information; especially for rural area development
- Quality of Service in many rural areas of Vanuatu is poor & insufficient for their needs, causing frustration & disappointment. This holds back ICT use & proliferation
- Limited human resources to provide technical support in rural communities; hence consumers are less encouraged to purchase ICT products for rural use

Planned Strategies to minimize the challenges



TRR's Consumer focused projects in its 2013 and onwards work plan:

- Vanuatu Online Child Protection Program
- Audit Mobile Signal Coverage
- Quality of Service Guidelines
- Customer Service Agreement
- Enhance Consumer awareness





But:

- We will face and meet our consumer challenges – & this Roundtable will assist us as will relationships & dialogue with fellow Regulators
- We are keen to learn of others' experiences

