



World Consumer Rights Day

Unity Park Stage, Luganville Town, Santo, Vanuatu

13th March 2020



Theme: *"Sustainable Consumer"*

1. INTRODUCTION

Annually, on the 15th of March, Consumers International, the committed and recognised body of 240 members across 120 countries in the world amongst member countries, celebrates this event to promote the rights of Consumers.

For its 2020 edition, the declared theme is “**Sustainable Consumer**” and the aim of sustainable consumption is to increase resource efficiency and fair trade while helping to reduce poverty and enable everyone to enjoy a good quality of living with access to food, water, energy, medicine and more. This year’s theme is in line with the National Sustainable Development Goal (NSDP) priority under Economy pillar 1. An economy based on equitable Sustainable growth under Policy Object ECO 1.9 which says “Promote financial literacy and consumer empowerment”

The program was designed to facilitate the delivery of basic knowledge and advice about consumers’ rights, and the procedures or mechanism in place that consumers can and should use whenever they feel their rights as a consumer is not being respected. This was in a strive to promote a safe environment, fair treatment and transparency when dealing with consumer rights.

TRBR has been taking lead on this event since 2015 to help promote the rights and interests of the general consumers within the country. This year, a task force was set up consisting of various institutions including the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu (RBV) , the Utility Regulatory Authority (URA) , the Vanuatu Bureau of Standard (VBS), the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OGCIO), and the Crime Prevention Unit under the Vanuatu Police Force. The role of the task force was to plan this event in a way that would empower the consumers by providing them with the necessary information they need to understand their rights and responsibilities as well as promoting sustainable consumer behaviours.

This year’s event was hosted in Luganville town for the first time, to give a fair opportunity to the people in the northern part of the country to have access the World Consumer Rights Day programme and its benefits.

There were over 400 people present throughout the day at the Luganville Unity Park including students from several secondary schools in Sanma Province and members of the public.

Promotional Activities for the Event

As host of the 2020 Consumer Rights Day celebrations, TRBR has taken a proactive approach to promote the event some weeks prior to the event. As such the task force went live on various radio stations and secured promotional material for the event as follows;

- FM107 Talk back Show on 26/02/2020;
- FM98 Live interview on 26/02/2020;
- An advertising short promotional messages on TBV about the event in Santo from 09th – 12th March 2020; and
- A3 size coloured poster put around Luganville, Town and nearby local communities.

2. OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOME OF THE ACTIVITY

The main aim of this year's event is to raise awareness to the general consumers in the northern town of Vanuatu or Luganville on their rights. The awareness also targeted service providers and retailers to put more emphasis on sustainable quality of the products and services that they provide or manufacture, and the efforts they are putting in to ensure consumer rights are respected and empowered. The task force of the event arranged for public institutions, associations, non-government organizations and business houses to come together and work towards a common goal which is to promote Consumer Rights.

The event was a success through the commitment of stakeholders from different institutions and departments who work collaboratively to promote the theme and provide information to the consumers on how best to achieve sustainable consumer behaviors. It was highlighted in the event that through sustainable consumer campaigns, we can help improve the livelihood of our societies now and in the future. The participation and presence of invited guests representing institutions, private sectors and NGOs reflect a positive sign that Consumer Rights is important to all walks of life and must be addressed at all levels of the community. It is everyone's business to build or consolidate consumer understanding about their rights and responsibilities providing them with information to make better-informed decisions in choosing the right products and services to best serve their needs.

In addition, there were topics discussions that involved public participation and debate on sustainable consumer behaviors including;

- Promotion and protection of the economic interests of consumers;
- Standards for the safety and quality of consumer goods and services;
- Distribution facilities for essential consumer goods and services;
- Dispute resolution and redress;
- Education and information programmes;
- Electronic commerce;
- Financial service; and
- Measures relating to specific areas- water, utility, Food, Energy, Tourism, Telecommunication and Pharmaceuticals.

3. HIGHT LIGHTS OF THE MAIN ACTIVITIES ON THE DAY

The Official Parade

The official parade started from LYC store opposite the Unity shell store to Unity Park stage. The parade was led by the Telecommunications Radiocommunications and Broadcasting Regulator accompanied by the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu, senior officers of various Government institutions, school students and teachers, and the general members of the public. The number of participants who took part in the parade was estimated at around 400+.

The Official Speeches

The Luganville Lord Mayor, Honourable Peter Patty delivered the welcome speech. Hon. Peter expressed his sincere joy that the event was hosted in his town to raise awareness and promote sustainable consumption in the northern district.

The opening speech was delivered by Mr. Alick Berry Thompson a Senior Executive Officer of the Ministry of Tourism, Trade, Commerce & Ni Vanuatu Business on behalf of the Director General of the respective Ministry.

Both speakers outlined a number of issues on the relevance of the theme of the event and opportunities to work together as a team to help educate our citizens. Further, such celebration provides a good avenue to discuss and address real issues that are faced by consumers, service providers and local and global manufacturers. It also highlighted that the consumer awareness is everyone's business and the national government should provide more awareness through the leading institutions that would be mandated to carry out the task progressively and consistently for the common good of citizens.

. In his closing remarks Mr. Brian Winji the Telecommunication, Radiocommunication and Broadcasting Regulator extended his gratitude to the taskforce for the tremendous work done towards the successful event, and the Luganville Municipality and Sanma Province for hosting the 2020 Consumer Rights Day Event. He also stressed that the National Government should set up a consumer and competition body as an umbrella body to cater for the issues generally faced by consumers in Vanuatu, and take lead on any future consumer rights day event, and support relevant stake holders to address consumer rights and information dissemination.

Open Forum Session

There were two different open forum session on that day. The first one took place in the morning and was comprised of public institutions while the second one took place in the afternoon comprising of service providers or business houses.

The main focus of these two forum sessions was to convey information to consumers in Luganville and across the country on their rights, responsibilities, the mechanisms available

that can be activated to protect those rights, and eventual evolutions of the consumer rights matter from the public sector perspective and from the private sector perspective.

Public and Government Institutions

The first discussion was moderated by Mr. Norman Warput, a Manager within the TRBR Office and there were three main questions discussed by the panellists:

- 1. Each panellist to explain briefly the theme and how it related to their respective functions of their institutions?*
- 2. The panellist to discuss briefly on the national vision of the government to adopt the national competition and consumer protection policy that encourage effective competition in the market*
- 3. Why it is very important to have a national standard policy and regulation on goods and service we manufacture and distributed within the country?*

Those three key questions were asked to stimulate interactive discussions, which then triggered other questions that the panellists had to elaborate on.

One of the important points raised by these institutions was the need for the National Government to establish a national consumer protection organization that will be responsible for protecting consumer rights across all sectors. This idea was raised 5 years ago because consumers have nowhere to run to in order to raise their concerns especially when they are dissatisfied with prices and services they receive from their suppliers.

The public institutions represented in this discussion including:

- The Telecommunications, Radiocommunications and Broadcasting Regulator (TRBR);
- The Utility Regulatory Authority (URA);
- The Reserve Bank of Vanuatu (RBV);
- The Vanuatu Bureau of standard (VBS);
- The Vanuatu Police Force, Crime Prevention Unit; and
- The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO).

Session for Private Sector

The afternoon session was more focused on complaint handling processes, dispute resolution and also how service providers help in positively influencing the buying choices of the consumer. This session was moderated by Mr. Keith Vusi, a senior officer of the URA.

A number of business houses were also invited but only few were present, including the Bank of the South Pacific (BSP), Digicel Vanuatu, and Telecom Vanuatu Limited. During the session, both Telecom Operators mentioned that consumer education is key to having a

positive impact on consumer choice of products or services that could determine their spending behaviour.

Quiz Session Quiz questions were part of the days' celebrations where more than 50 questions relating to the consumer rights day theme and objectives were answered with give-away gifts from the event sponsors like data storage drives and T-shirts.

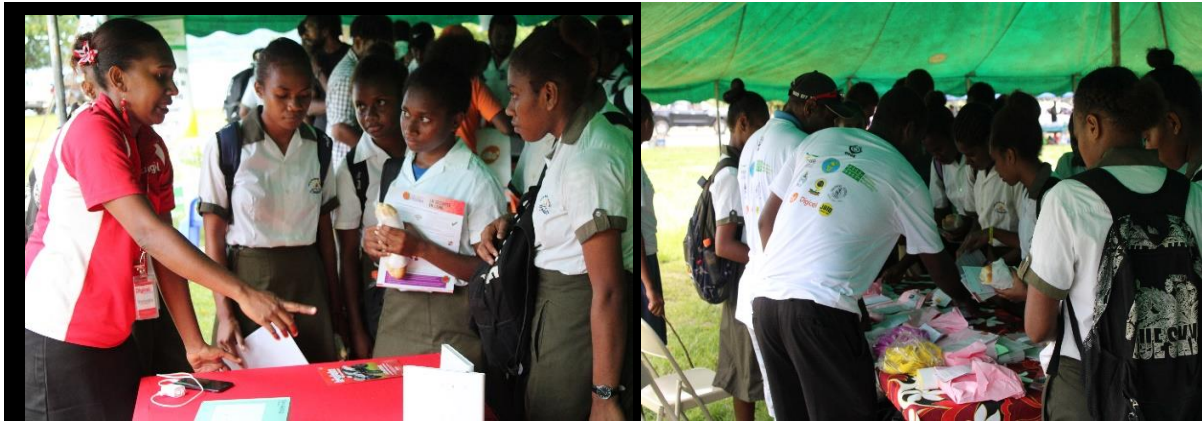
Recommendations

A number of important actions were highlighted during the day with regards to the issues that consumers and manufacturers or operators are facing in Vanuatu and what needs to be done at the national level. Below are recommended actions and responsibilities that can be taken to address such issues.

	Recommendations	Action	Responsibility
1	Set up of the Vanuatu Consumer and Competition Commission	Since the Council of Ministers (COM) already approved the Consumer and Competition Policy paper last year 2019. The Government agency responsible is to work collaboratively with other agencies to implement the COM decision in order to empower the people of Vanuatu as consumers, by protecting them against harmful business practices.	Vanuatu Government and stakeholders
2	Consumer Affairs matters in Vanuatu and legal framework	The Government to take Lead in setting up a legal frame to outline roles and responsibilities of consumer matters in Vanuatu.	Collaboration of various Vanuatu Government departments.
3	Multiple Consumer Rights Day Celebrations	The Ministry concern to take the lead on the celebrations of the Consumer Rights Day across the country, including all the six provinces, including consumer awareness and education.	Vanuatu Government and other stakeholders

4. PICTURES





More Pictures at [www.facebook.com/TRBR Vanuatu](https://www.facebook.com/TRBR-Vanuatu)

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the event was very successful with much information disseminated to the public through booth awareness, speeches and discussions on important consumer issues, rights and needs. It was also very encouraging to see good participation and feedbacks from the audience especially students from various secondary schools in the Sanma Province.

This year's World Consumer Rights Day was hosted in Luganville Santo by TRBR and it revealed the importance to continue to educate consumers about their rights and responsibilities and the need for the establishment of the Consumer and competition Council or Competition Commission to deal with all the general issues and complaints faced by consumers of goods and services in Vanuatu, and support the stakeholders in the dissemination of information and promote consumer awareness and education.

TRBR has been hosting the event for the last five years as part of its responsibility under the TRBR Consumer Protection Regulation and TRBR will continue to support such initiative in the future.