

COMMUNIQUE

National Dialogue on **Integration of the Consumers' Voice in Trade Policy Process in Nigeria**

**19-20 May, 2015
Abuja, Nigeria**

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Issued at the end of a two-day Public Policy Dialogue organised by CUTS International on 'Integrating the Consumer's Voice into the Trade Policy process in Nigeria' on 19-20, May 2015, at Chelsea Hotel Central Area in Abuja.

Introduction

The stakeholders of trade policy came together in a two-day public policy dialogue on ‘Integrating the Consumer’s Voice into the Trade Policy Process in Nigeria’. This dialogue was first-of-its-kind and was organised by CUTS International with the support of the European Union (EU) and Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). It brought together the Government, private sector and, for the first time, consumer organisations to explore various interests, needs and feasible methods of introducing the consumer voice into the trade policy debate and decision-making process in Nigeria.

A series of presentations were made from the experts on the specified issues as the impact of trade policy on consumer welfare and the scope for integrating the consumers’ voice in the trade policy process in Nigeria, consumer participation and interest in some major government policies, such as the Nigeria Industrial Revolution Plan, the draft Nigeria Trade Policy and Strategy, the Automobile Policy, Cement Policy, Textile Policy, Sugar Policy, Rice Policy etc. Besides, presentations were also made on the impact of regional integration processes, such as the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS), Common External Tariffs (CET) and the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (EPA) on consumer welfare and how Nigerian consumers can assert their interests in these processes. ECOWAS refers to the Economic Community of West African States.

The participants of event contributed beneficially in the brainstorming session held on the above-mentioned issues to charting a way forward. Furthermore, the dialogue was attended by consumer organisations and private sector organisations. Besides, the development Partners also made their noteworthy representation and contribution in the programme.

Participating Organisations

The organisations involved in the Public Policy Dialogue comprised:

- Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment (Minister being represented by the Director of Trade)
- National Planning Commission
- Federal Ministry of Finance
- Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC)
- Consumer Protection Council (CPC)
- Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON)
- Nigeria Customs Service
- Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN)
- Consumer Advocacy Forum of Nigeria (CAFON)
- ECOWAS Commission (Represented by its Director of Trade)
- Nigerian Economic Summit Group NESG (Represented by its Director General)
- Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth and Advocacy (YIAGA)
- Consumers Empowerment Organisation of Nigeria

- Consumers Parliament
- Civil Society Coalition for Poverty Eradication (CISCOPE)
- National Association of Nigerian Traders (NANTS)
- All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN)
- National Automotive Council (NAC)
- National Association of Chambers of Commerce Industry Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA)
- National Association of Small Scale Industrialists (NASSI)
- European Union or EU
- GIZ
- Department of International Development (DFID)
- DFID ENABLE2 (DFID funded Business Advocacy Programme) and
- USAID-NEXTT (United States Agency for International Development-Nigeria Expanded Trade and Transport)

Highlights of the Event

After extensive deliberations and brainstorming sessions, the participants noted the following aspects:

1. The consumers' voice was found to be is the missing link in the trade policy discourse in Nigeria.
2. A need was realised for more engagement of the consumers in trade policy processes in Nigeria, especially by making provisions for consumer representations in policy formulation and implementation of the defined processes and bodies.
3. The rationale behind trade is the exchange of goods and services for the purpose of maximising consumers' welfare in the form of better access, choice, quality goods, and affordable prices and this should be always pursued.
4. The trade policy is not just about protecting businesses, but also about consumer welfare as every stakeholder including the producers were first consumers before they became producers and thus the consumer welfare is paramount.
5. A need was realised to retain the required balance between consumer and producer welfare in the trade policy formulation process by making the consumers fully involved in the process.
6. The participants also pointed at the necessity for all stakeholders, especially the Government and the private sector to focus more on the issues directly affecting on the competitiveness of businesses, such as infrastructure, corruption, policy

inconsistency, etc., which would yield more benefits and have fewer expenses on the economy.

7. A provision to coalesce consumer voices by unifying consumer advocacy groups, under one umbrella was felt to provide them a stronger voice and a better coherence.
8. The prerequisite for funding to support the activities of consumer advocacy groups in the country was also proposed. To this end, the participants called on the in-coming Government to expedite action on the Competition and Consumer Protection Bill, which has provided that at least 1 percent of Value-Added Tax (VAT) revenues accruing to the Government should be utilised to fund consumer protection activities through the proposed Commission.
9. It was also recommended in the programme that consumer welfare is the primary concern and duty of the Government and even if the donor agencies intervene in the same it should only supplement the Government's ongoing tasks.
10. The workshop also endorsed the condition to ensure that the voice of the consumers is reflected in the Nigeria Trade Policy and National Trade Strategy and
11. The Government should refrain itself from the use of restrictive trade measures, which could impose indescribable costs on the consumers without offering any subsequent short-term or long-term benefits to the economy, as a whole. Lastly, appropriate monitoring and evaluative measures should be put in place to confirm that the policies followed should render the desirable outcomes.

(Prepared at Abuja on May 20, 2015)