

CONSUMER PROTECTIONS

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THE REGULATORS ROLE IN PROVIDING CONSUMER PROTECTION

Background Information

- Public monopolies slow in responding to the need to improve quality of service.
- Gross disregard for consumer interest and calls for measures which protect consumers against such abuses.
- Most consumers frequently fail to pursue their legal rights because they do not know let alone take advantage of them.
- Ghanaian consumers refuse to pay amounts which they do not believe are due.
- The result is low revenues for the utility sector.
- The major burden of consumer advise and assistance falls on the regulator and “media action line”.



PURC's Role in Consumer protection

- PURC protects the consumer from the utility companies with substantial market power. The Commission carries out this statutory function by;
- Applying the concept of 2 – tier inclining tariff structure with the “lifeline” tariff specially aimed at providing subsidies for the poor.
- Regulations on “Termination of Service” and “Complaints Procedure”.
- Receiving and resolving complaints from consumers.
- Establishing Water Quality Unit.
- Regular consumer education on their rights and responsibilities.
- Monitoring compliance with regulatory decisions.
- Assisting utilities to prepare customer charters.
- Institutional design.



Consumer Advocacy

In our interactions with the utility service providers, the Commission has been advocating the following changes in delivering improvements in the following specific areas:

- Providing better information and services for prepaid consumers.
- Providing more energy efficiency advice, in particular for consumers on low incomes or those with payment difficulties.
- Improved provision of services and adhering to regulations on special protection for vulnerable consumers such as the elderly, chronically ill or disabled.



Tracking Consumer Data

- Consumer records
- Research gathers many types of data
- Consumer meetings and fora
- Intelligence gathering
- Development of consumer information system (CIS)



Complaint Filing

Filing of complaints with PURC is governed by the following rules:

- A complaint to the Commission may be oral or written
- A written complaint must be addressed to the Commission
- Where an oral complaint is made or where the complainant cannot read or write, the complaint will be put into writing by an officer of the Commission designated to receive complaints. The complainant may also select a person of his choice to write down the complaint.
- Where a complaint is written down by a person other than the complainant, it will be read over and explained to the complainant in the language he understands and there will be a declaration to that effect on the complaint.
- The complainant must indicate that he understands what has been read over to him before appending his signature or the thumbprint to the complaint.



Information Required

- Your full name, address, and the account number on your bill.
- Which company you are complaining against– ECG, GWCL or VRA/NED.
- Whether you have already contacted the company.
- Details of your complaint and documents or records you wish to refer to.
- Whether you have suffered any harm due to the company's action.
- The relief being sought by you.




Dispute resolution

- Investigation by the BCS to examine the merit of the complaint.
- The utility is asked to investigate and respond within 5 days.
- Further inquiry and mediation.
- The Commission conducts formal hearing where the parties involved will be given the opportunity to state their cases to a panel of at least 3 and not more than 5 persons representing the Commission.
- Recommendations are made to the Commission
- Parties informed about the decision of the Commission.



Consulting Consumers

- Dialogue is part of the relationship between the Commission and stakeholders, especially consumers.
- Based on the fact that consumers participate in things they understand.
- A lot of investment is made in getting the messages to the consumers.
- The medium used is carefully selected.
- By dividing consumers into groups we are able to tailor our messages and receive appropriate responses.



PURC alone cannot effectively superintend the operations of the utilities without the participation of consumers and therefore:

- Solicit the assistance of the identifiable consumer groups and associations by asking them to register with the Commission and submit memoranda on issues.
- Quarterly meetings
- Field visits
- Public hearings
- Complaints, enquiries and feedbacks
- Public fora



THANK YOU