

Evaluation Report
on
Impact and Effectiveness
of
Consumer Protection Act, 1986

Executive Summary

Project Directors

**Prof. Suresh Misra
Dr. Sapna Chadah
Dr. Mamta Pathania**

Project Team

**Dr. Amit Kr. Singh
Shri Virendra Nath Mishra
Shri Pankaj Kr. Singh
Shri Ashutosh Dixit
Dr. Yatish Mishra**

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PREFACE

The Consumer Protection Act was enacted in 1986 for better protection of the consumers. The Act provides for the redressal of grievances and also the relief that the consumers are entitled to, apart from setting up councils to promote consumer welfare. The Act has been in operation for the last twenty five years and it was expected to provide relief to consumers and give a boost to the consumer movement in the country.

An assessment of the working of the Act reveals a number of loopholes in its implementation. Even though the redressal mechanism has been established yet the justice delivery mechanism has not been able to provide relief to the much exploited consumers. Large numbers of complaints are pending in the three tier mechanism and the pendency is only growing. The complaints are not redressed within the stipulated time as a result the consumers are not approaching the forums to file complaints. Moreover, the capacity of the forums to deliver justice itself needs to be upgraded. Another major reason relates to the level of consumer awareness in the country about the existence of such legislation. As a result consumers are unaware of their rights. Perhaps this is one of the major drawbacks.

After twenty five years of the Act being in operation, it is time to evaluate and assess its impact and effectiveness. The Department of Consumer Affairs, Gol has initiated this study on "Evaluation of the Impact and Effectiveness of Consumer Protection Act, 1986". The Study has been entrusted to the Centre for Consumer Studies, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi. The Study covered 5 states 10 districts and 50 villages. To widen the scope of the study and also to get a true perspective more than 310 District Forums and 60 villages were covered. Apart from this large number of consumers from cross section of the society as well as complainants formed the bulk of the sample size.

The Report presents a detailed analysis of the state of consumer protection and the effectiveness of the Consumer Protection Act. Various parameters have been used to get a clear picture of the existing ground realities and what ails the consumer movement in the country. It also presents a detailed analysis of the role of various stakeholders in promoting consumer welfare and the lacuna that exists in the policy and practice which needs to be filled up. We are confident that the analysis, findings and the recommendations of the study will go a long way in reframing consumer policies, programmes and strategies to provide better protection to the consumers and take the consumer movement forward.

We will be happy to receive valuable comments about the report.

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*Prof. Suresh Misra
Dr. Sapna Chadah
Dr. Mamta Pathania
Project Directors, IIPA*

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We have no words to express our gratitude to various institutions, organisations, consumer activist, consumer experts, legal experts and the consumers of the five states who helped us and provided support in various forms to complete the study. But for their help and support the study would have not seen the light of the day.

Apart from the field data, data, information, literature and useful material has been collected from various sources, we are thankful to all of them for their help.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 Background

Confident, informed and empowered consumers are the backbone of a vibrant economy. The business of any manufacturer, service provider, trader or retailer depends on and flourishes with consumers' demand. In fact, business starts with consumer and ends with consumer satisfaction. In spite of this, consumers are a vulnerable lot and are being exploited in various forms like overcharging, black-marketing, adulteration, short weights and measures, misleading advertisements, poor quality of services, dubious sale purchase agreements and other deceptive practices. In a country like India, where a substantial number of the people are living below the poverty line, having high level of unemployment and poor literacy level; most of them do not have adequate information about goods and services they are using. They are exposed to unfair, unethical market practices of some dishonest businesses. A combination of new technologies and globalization of the world economy has further aggravated the problem. The revolution in electronic media in 21st century along with globalisation and liberalisation has transformed market practices. It has led to vast expansion of business with a variety of goods and services to cater to the needs of the consumers which have left the consumers further confused and bewildered. In such a scenario consumer protection is a socio- economic programme to be pursued by the government as well as the business as the satisfaction of the consumers is in the interest of both. In this context, the government, however, has a primary responsibility to protect the consumers' interests and rights through appropriate policy measures, legal structures and administrative framework.

Consumer protection ensures that consumers receive information that will allow them to make informed decisions and are not subject to unfair and deceptive practices, have access to recourse mechanisms to resolve disputes when transactions go awry, and are able to maintain privacy of their personal information. At its heart, the need for consumer protection arises from an imbalance of power, information and resources between consumers and their service providers, placing consumers at a disadvantage. Consumer protection aims to address these market failures and imbalances. In fact, Government of India has enacted different legislations to safeguard consumers' interests from time to time. However, except for the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act, 1969, all the other Acts were mainly punitive and preventive in nature. In spite of these Acts the

consumers did not have an effective mechanism or institutional arrangement for speedy and inexpensive redressal of their grievances. Moreover, lack of an effective popular consumer movement isolated the consumer and his plight only increased. Hence recognizing the need for equipping a consumer, to be vigilant and empowered with respect to his rights, the Indian Parliament enacted the Consumer Protection Act in 1986.

The Consumer Protection Act is a very unique and highly progressive piece of social welfare legislation and the provisions are intended to provide effective and efficient safeguards to the consumers against various forms of exploitations and unfair dealings. It is a handy weapon for consumers to ensure accountability of producers of goods and providers of services. It provides for setting up a three tier redressal mechanism and disposal of complaints in a time frame. However, the success of the consumer movement depends upon the level of awareness among the consumers at large about their rights and remedies available to them and also the effectiveness of the redress mechanism in providing quick and inexpensive justice to the consumers. The law can only give certain rights to the consumers, but its functioning and implementation largely depends on the awareness and efforts of the consumers and other stakeholders.

The Act has been in operation for the last 25 years, but there are deficiencies and shortcoming in respect of its effective implementation and operation. The purpose of the three tier quasi-judicial structure was to give quick and inexpensive justice to the consumers; however, the machinery is riddled with many problems making it difficult for the complainant to get justice in the prescribed time. The problem is further aggravated by the low level of awareness among the consumers. Even after 25 years of the consumer movement, concerns are being raised regarding the level of awareness of the consumers' inspite of many steps taken at the central and state government level to generate awareness among the masses. It's time to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the Consumer Protection Act and take remedial measure aimed at strengthening the consumer movement.

Therefore, on the request of the Department of Consumer Affairs, Gol, the Centre for Consumer Studies, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi conducted an Evaluation study on "*Impact and Effectiveness of Consumer Protection Act, 1986*" to suggest policy guidelines to make the Act effective and beneficial to the consumers. The present study has been conducted in five states of India which are located in five different regions of India, i.e. Gujarat, Karnataka, Odisha, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh. The important features of the study are as follows:

2. Objectives of the Study

In view of the above, the objectives of the study were: -

- To assess the level of awareness among the consumers regarding their rights and remedies available to them under the CPA;
- To analyse and evaluate the working of the quasi-judicial machinery under the Act;
- To assess the effectiveness of the CP Act in redressal of consumer grievances;
- To study the functioning of the consumer councils established at the central, state and district levels; and
- To suggest appropriate measures to make the machinery under the Act more effective and efficient to achieve the purpose of the Act.

3. Methodology

The present study is an empirical research based on both primary and secondary data. It is a blend of both descriptive and analytical methods of study. For the purpose of the study primary data was collected through a set of questionnaires and by way of discussions with various stakeholders. Search conferences have also been organized to get information. The approach was to seek information from various stakeholders involved in the protection of consumer rights. The secondary data comprising of records of the DFs, SCDRCs, NCDRC, Department of Food, Civil Supply and Consumer Affairs in various states, various published and unpublished reports, books, articles, and journals etc. have also been used for the purpose of the study.

To assess the impact and the level of awareness of the consumers regarding the consumer rights and other aspects related to consumer protection a questionnaire was administered to the consumers. The information regarding level of awareness about the CP Act and its provisions has been gathered through primary surveys. To study the effectiveness of the CP Act and the working of the Dispute Redressal Machinery at the three levels, two set of questionnaires was prepared - one for the Presidents and Members of the National Commission, State Commissions and District Forums and another for the Complainant / appellant. Discussions were also held with the Presidents and the Members of the Consumer Forums/ Commissions to gather their views on the working of the Forums/ Commissions. To study the functioning of the Consumer Councils at State as well as District

level, CCS research team held discussion with the Secretary and Director of Food, Civil Supply and Consumer Welfare Department of the selective States and also with the District Collector/Magistrate, SDM and District Civil Supply Officers of the selected Districts. Discussions have also been held with state and district level officials to evaluate the role of the State Government in making the CP Act more effective.

4. Sampling Techniques

The survey methodology for this study was stratified random sampling. Since India is a very heterogeneous country and having diverse geographic, socio – cultural and economic characteristic, a stratified random sampling could reflect the characteristics of the population as a whole. Firstly, five states from six mentioned regions (as per ToR of this project) of India were selected for the study. These states were selected in a way that they can best represent the entire geographical regions of the country. The states were: **Uttar Pradesh** from North, **Gujarat** from West, **Karnataka** from South, **Odisha** from Central Region and **Tripura** from North East. From each state two districts were selected. Selection of Districts was mainly based upon the ratio of two variables - size of the population and the number of case filed in the respective DCDRF of that particular district.

Subsequently, within the states all the districts were ranked accordingly with their ratio value. After that one district with higher value and one district with lower value were selected for the study. While selecting the districts care was taken that these districts should not be adjoining and they must represent the tribal, mountainous and coastal regions of India as per the guidelines of the Department of Consumer Affairs.

After selecting the districts further stratification was made on the basis of rural and urban areas to address the fact that there is wide distribution of population in India. Still 70 percent of country's population is living in rural areas and 30 percent in urban areas. Hence to get the opinion of both rural and urban consumers; six villages spreading across the three Developmental Block/Taluk and three colonies of the District town were selected in the study. As far as Blocks/Taluks are concerned the selection criteria was as follows; (i) Block/Taluk with higher literacy level, (ii) Block/Taluk with lower literacy level, and (iii) Block/Taluk with high concentration of SC/ST population. The selection of two villages from each Block/Taluk and the respondents therein was done randomly.

The study tried to get the opinion of all the stakeholders involved in the consumer protection movement in India such as consumers, complainants, redressal agencies, VCOs/NGOs, legal experts, policy-making institutions, government officials, departments, social activists and others. Since their role, responsibilities and interests are different; therefore, this study adopted various methods for data collection. They were as follows:

1. **Interview Schedule** – Different structured questionnaires were developed for in-depth interview of the consumer, complainants/appellants, Presidents/Members of the Forums and Commissions. The questionnaires were subjected to reliability test by pre-testing the constructed tools by administering it to 10 % of the respondents in each category. The questionnaires were modified based on the responses received.
2. **Focus Group Discussion-** FGDs were organized with the NGOs/VCOs and Panchayat Level Officials to get their opinion.
3. **Formal Meetings-** Meeting with Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs in various states as well as officials at District level who are looking after the implementation of CP Act.

5. Sample Size

The sample size consists of 10 districts from 5 states (two from each state). From each district 200 person from different sections of the society and 25 complainants from the respective DCDRF were selected (total sample size of 2000 consumers and 175 complainants). Apart from these 10 District Forums, 5 State Commissions and National Commission have also been taken up for the study. For the purpose of study we proposed to interview 30 members from 10 District Forums, 15 members from 5 SCDRCs and 10 members of NCDRC, but to have a broader perspective, Questionnaire was administered to all the District Forums of the five selected states inviting their views and suggestions on the working of the quasi-judicial machinery. Out of total 162 District Forums in the five states we received responses from 112 Presidents and 193 Members of the District Forums, which covers 70 percent of the study area. Their opinions have been incorporated in this report. Apart from this the CCS research team also organised Search Conferences at district level. One Validation Seminar was also organised after the presentation of the report to Department to get suggestions and to validate the findings. The study was completed in six months.

6. Time Frame

Table 4

Phases	Work Plan	Months
I	Preliminary Work (Manpower Planning identification of Respondents & Developing Interview Schedule)	1
II	Collection of Primary and Secondary Data and Search Conferences	2
III	Data Compilation & Analysis	1
IV	Draft Report and Validation Seminar	1
V	Final Report	1

7. Limitations of the Study

1. The study began with the presumption that basic data of the NCDRC, SCDRCs and District Forums would be available through the CONFONET project, NCDRC, and DCA but not much was available and therefore, data had to be generated. Record compilation and management is poor.
2. There was limited cooperation from some of the organisations in terms of providing data, reports, literature and information about consumer activities.
3. The complainants and the lawyers were not very cooperative during the survey.
4. June and July happens to be vacation period for NCDRC and SCDRC and therefore, time taken to collect data was more than anticipated.
5. The Presidents and Members of the redressal agencies were hesitant to frankly give their views/opinions about the working of the three tier redressal mechanism.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8. Major Observations

1. The study reveals that the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 had limited impact on consumer empowerment mainly due to lack of awareness about the Act and its provisions. Comparatively the impact has been more on males than females. The urban consumers are much more aware about the Act than their rural counterparts. It is also evident that higher the age group more the awareness about the Act and its provisions. Similarly higher the education level and income level more the awareness about the Act.
2. The Act has much less impact on the marginalised sections of the society who lack education and are living in the rural areas with low level of income.
3. The awareness level about the Consumer Protection Act and Consumer Rights is higher in areas where consumer clubs have been set up in schools and colleges and are actively involved in consumer activities.
4. The limited impact and the ineffectiveness of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 to a large extent is not due to inadequacy of the law or its provisions but it is due to the poor implementation of the Act and the apathy of the governments and other stakeholders including the consumers.

5. The effectiveness of the Consumer Protection Act is marginal as far as redressal of consumer complaints is concerned. The District Forums to a very large extent are not able to deliver justice quickly and in a cost effective manner as envisaged under the Act and therefore, consumers are losing faith in the redressal mechanism at the District level. Moreover, the compensation awarded is so small that there is apathy among the consumers to file complaints in the district forums as the time and cost factor does not favour the consumer. Timely complaint redressal is the key to success of the CP Act.
6. There is a broad consensus among the various stakeholders that the delay in disposal of cases is largely due to the involvement and appearance of lawyers in all cases. Because of this the proceedings have become too technical, cumbersome, and expensive as slowly the procedures of the civil court have crept in the proceedings of the District Forums.
7. The District Forums to a large extent lack the capacity to deliver speedy justice due to lack of adequate infrastructure, poor management of records, shortage of manpower and the required skill and knowledge of the members manning the District Forums.
8. The delay in filling up of the vacancies at all the three levels of the redressal mechanism has further added to the problem leading to large pendency of complaints.
9. Computerization of the redressal agencies/mechanism should have helped in better management of data and thereby bringing greater efficiency in the working of the redressal agencies. The impact of computerization has been lacklustre due to lack of computer skills among the members of the redressal agencies, shortage of technical manpower and consumer peripherals, inadequate bandwidth leading to poor internet connectivity and also irregular power supply. This has led to delay in disposal of complaints and the Consumer Protection Act has not been very effective in protecting consumer interests in the country.
10. Consumer welfare does not seem to be a priority area for the State Governments as there is no separate Department of Consumer Affairs in the states and it has been merged with Food and Civil Supplies Department. As a result of this the line department dealing exclusively with consumer affairs down to the village level does not exist. The Civil Supplies officers are too over worked with PDS.
11. No specific policies/ strategies have been framed by the state governments on consumer protection. No serious and meaningful effort is made by the state governments to educate the consumers. Enormous delay takes place in filling up the vacancies in the District Forums/State Commissions and also in providing infrastructure. State governments mainly depend on the grants from the central government. In a federal polity unless the state governments give importance to consumer welfare, not much can be achieved.
12. The Consumer Protection Councils at the District and the State level have largely not been constituted. Even where they have been constituted after a long delay, they have remained dysfunctional and purposeless and the meetings are just a formality and a ritual without any worthwhile agenda.
13. The Central Government has to play a much more proactive role as far as consumer welfare is concerned. In the present scenario central allocation to states and various other organizations has to be increased with timely release of funds to sustain the programmes. Specific programmes have limited impact. At

present there are no specific long term policies to strengthen the consumer movement. There is a need to reorient policies and strategies to make them much more effective.

14. The VCOs are major stakeholders in the consumer movement but they lack both capacity and credibility. The consumers to a large extent do not have faith in these organisations. In each State there are hundreds of such VCOs claiming to be representing consumer's interest. However, only a handful of these have emerged as competent professional bodies working for consumer welfare.
15. There is no incentive for VCOs to take up consumer complaints; therefore, very few cases are being filed by the VCOs on behalf of the consumers. Moreover, the compensation awarded to the consumers is so small that consumers are not encouraged to file cases. The time and cost factor dissuades the consumers from approaching the forums for redressal of their complaints.

9. Major Findings

Impact of Consumer Protection Act

1. The sample size of the consumer respondents is 2100 spread across ten districts in five states of U.P, Odisha, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tripura, 73.6 percent are males and 26.4 percent are female respondents. 35 percent of the consumers are less than 30 years of age, 26.1 percent are in the age group of 30-40 years, 20.5 percent between 40-50 years of age and 18.4 percent of the respondents are above 50 years of age.
2. 29.7 percent are associated with agriculture, 18.8 percent are traders/ manufacturers/ small businessmen, 15.8 percent are students, 12.7 percent are housewives and 11.5 percent are teachers. 60.2 percent of the respondents had an annual income of less than ₹ 50,000, 14.8 percent between ₹ 50,000- 1 lakh, 12.1 percent had income between ₹ 1-2 lakh, 10.2 percent of them had an annual income between ₹ 2-5 lakh and 2.3 percent were in above 5 lakh annual income category.
3. Only 25.2 percent of the consumers always enquire about the terms and conditions before making a purchase, 40.3 percent do it sometimes. 26.9 percent always enquire about the available choices, 31.8 percent always enquire about the contents of the product. However, 57.1 percent of the respondents always enquire about the price and 50.8 percent always see the expiry date.
4. Only 26.0 percent of the respondents always insist on the cash memo/ bill after making a purchase. 41.9 percent ask for it sometimes and 32.1 percent never ask for the purchase memo/ bill.
5. 70.6 percent of the respondents are aware about the MRP and 48.0 percent know that one can bargain on MRP and get the product for a lesser value.
6. 70.5 percent of the consumer respondents know about ISI mark, 41.3 percent are aware about AGMARK, 47.2 percent know Hallmark, only 16.0 percent can recognise FPO mark, 9.6 percent know about BEE logo, 7.1 percent about Eco-

mark, 32 percent know about ISO and 39.7 percent know about Veg. /Non Veg. marking.

7. Consumers are exploited in various forms in the market. 55.4 percent of the respondents have experienced adulteration, 47.4 percent short weighing, 50.1 percent have been victim of overcharging, 43.4 percent had received poor quality product, 35.3 percent had deficiency in services, 41.2 percent had an experience of defective goods and 36.8 percent of the respondents are victims of false information.
8. Out of those who had experienced some form of exploitation 43.7 percent of them ignored the problem and took no action, 41.7 percent tried to get the price/return the product or replace the product. Only 17.3 percent mobilised other consumers. 96 percent did not lodge a complaint in the District Forum and only 4 percent made a complaint to the dealer/manufacturer.
9. The awareness level about CP Act is low. 67.2 percent of the respondents do not know about the Consumer Protection Act. Only 10.2 percent know about it to a large extent and 22.6 percent to some extent.
10. 63.5 percent of the male and 71.0 percent of the female respondents are not aware about the Consumer Protection Act.
11. 70.2 percent of the respondents below 30 years of age are not aware about the Consumer Protection Act, while 61 percent above 50 years are not aware about the Act.
12. 74.9 percent of the rural consumers are not aware about the Consumer Protection Act, while it is 56.3 percent in case of urban consumers.
13. Higher the education levels higher the awareness about the Act. 53.1 percent of the post graduate respondents are not aware about the Act while it is 95.3 percent in the case of respondents who have no schooling.
14. Higher the income levels higher the awareness about the Consumer Protection Act. 81.6 percent of the respondents below income level of ₹ 50,000 are not aware about the Consumer Protection Act while 58.2 percent of those having an income of ₹ 5-10 lacs are not aware about the Consumer Protection Act.
15. Out of the respondents who know about the CP Act, 28.9 percent came to know about it for the last three years, 26.7 percent for the last six years, 14.1 percent know about the Act for the last 9 years, 13.1 percent know about the Act for last 15 years and 4.1 percent of the respondents know about the CP Act for more than 15 years.
16. For 41.9 percent of the respondents the source of information about the CP Act has been family and friends. Media as a source has been indicated by 71.5 percent, lawyers by 13.2 percent and for 29 percent respondents VCOs have been the source of information about the CP Act.
17. Out of the respondents who know about the Consumer Protection Act only 19.4 percent could correctly enumerate them which indicates the level of awareness about the Act.

18. 59.5 percent could not say whether consumers are well protected under the laws in the country. Only 26.1 percent said they were well protected. 55.7 percent could not say whether the CP Act has been implemented well. Only 21.4 percent were of the view that the Act was implemented well.
19. 60.4 percent of the respondents could not say whether the CP Act favours only consumers. Only 18.4 percent of the respondents said the Act favours only consumers.
20. 48.0 percent of the respondents are not aware about the District Forum. 18.9 percent are aware about the DF to a large extent and 33.1 percent to some extent.
21. 84.9 percent of the respondents knew that a consumer can file a complaint in the District Forum, 51.7 percent say VCOs can file, 31.3 percent say Government can file, 30.8 percent are of the opinion that one or more consumers can file a complaint. Only 33.5 percent of the respondents know that all of the mentioned categories can file a complaint in the District Forum.
22. Of all the respondents only 4 percent had filed a complaint in the District Forum. 26.6 percent of these had filed the complaint personally, 70.7 percent had engaged the services of a lawyer and 2.7 percent had filed a complaint through a VCO.
23. 32.4 percent of the respondents who did not file a complaint did so because they had no knowledge about the law, 33.3 percent felt the procedure was lengthy and caused delay and 8.0 percent said the forum was located at a far of place from their residence.
24. Among those who had filed a complaint in the District Forums, 77.6 percent said that the orders were implemented effectively, 65.9 percent said the District Forum are not consumer friendly and only 19.3 percent had taken the help of a VCO.
25. Given a choice 60 percent of the respondents said that they would prefer mediation rather than filing a complaint.
26. Only 12.8 percent of the respondents knew about the District Consumer Protection Council.
27. 16.4 percent have used the threat of CP Act to restrain the marketers from exploitation. Out of those who had threatened the business to use the CP Act, 29.2 percent of them said that unfair trade practices had stopped, 41.7 percent said it had stopped but started after sometimes. 29.2 percent said that business did not bother about the threat.
28. 75.4 percent of the respondents identified lack of education about consumer rights as the major reason for failure of consumer movement. 51.4 percent say that consumers attitude is casual, 68.1 percent blame the ineffective redressal mechanism. 62.3 percent blame the government for insufficient efforts, 62.0 percent feel the business is too powerful and 57.6 percent are of the opinion that nobody wants to take an initiative.
29. 88.0 percent of the respondents agree that there is a need for consumer awareness programmes to educate the consumers.

30. As far as the agency to carry out the programmes to create awareness is concerned the respondents preferred that the Government should be involved in creating awareness, next preference was to Schools/Colleges, next to Gram Panchayats, then to Electronic and Print Media and NGOs/VCOs was last in order of preference.
31. The medium first preferred by the respondents was electronic and print media, secondly they ranked that the important days relating to consumers should be celebrated, NGOs/VCOs were placed at third preference.
32. 80.2 percent of the respondents had heard/seen Jago Grahak Jago campaign. 90.3 percent said the TV was the major source of information, 67.2 percent said Radio, 65.3 percent came to know from newspapers/magazines, and 17.7 percent were informed by the VCOs.
33. 86.62 percent of the respondents find “Jago Grahak Jago” campaign very informative.
34. 87.2 percent and 87.5 percent of the respondents are not aware about the National Consumer Day and World Consumer Rights Day respectively. Of those who knew about these days only 41.8 percent of them could mention the correct dates.
35. 92.3 percent of the respondents are not aware about NCH/CORE helplines and only 6.4 percent had approached them for help.

Working of the Redressal Mechanism

1. 60.6 percent of the Members of the District Forums are in the age group of 35-50 years while 88.3 percent of the Presidents of the District Forums are above 60 years.
2. 38.0 percent of the Members of the District Forums are graduates with law degree while 14.1 percent of them are post graduates with law degree which constitutes more than half the Members (52.1 percent) with a law degree.
3. 44.3 percent of the members were lawyers before being selected to the District Forums and 11.5 percent of them were government employees. 14.2 percent of the lady members were housewives with no experience.
4. 69 percent of the members without a law degree did not experience any kind of problem while handling complaints, while 97.4 percent agreed that a thorough knowledge of the Consumer Protection Act and the procedures to be followed should be known by all.
5. The infrastructure requirement seems to be the major problem being faced by the District Forums in their functioning. 59.7 percent are of the view that the infrastructure is inadequate. 61.5 percent opined that there is shortage of supporting staff; funds are not available for day to day functioning and requirements (62.4 percent). Nearly 70 percent say that lab testing facilities are inadequate. 62 percent of the respondents blame the consumers for non-cooperation and nearly 80 percent say that there is shortage of stationary.

6. 72.3 percent of the respondents said that the complaints are not disposed of within 3-5 months as stipulated under the Consumer Protection Act. Only 27.7 percent of the respondents said that complaints are disposed within the time limit.
7. Only 10.2 percent of the complaints are disposed within a period of three months, 17.8 percent within 5 months, 18.8 percent takes between 5-9 months, 22.8 percent of the complaints are disposed within 9-12 months while 19.5 percent of the complaints take between 1-2 years to be disposed and 10.9 percent of the complaints take more than 2 years to be disposed. Thus only 28.0 percent of the complaints are disposed within a period of 5 months, 41.6 percent take more than 5 months and 30.4 percent of the complaints take more than one year to be disposed.
8. 64.0 percent blame the involvement of the lawyers in the District Forums for the delay. 63.4 percent say the lawyers do not cooperate in speedy disposal of complaints. 56.4 percent say undue adjournments are asked by them. 78.9 percent hold technical proceedings responsible for the delay. 79.2 percent feel the consumer is disinterested after filing the complaint and 79.5 percent say delay is also due to lack of product testing facilities.
9. 53.1 percent of the respondents say they face problems in the execution of the orders of the District Forums. 62.0 percent say the District Administration does not cooperate with the District Forums.
10. In case of product testing, 85.6 percent of the respondents are of the view that there is delay in sending the report and 97.1 percent of the respondents are of the view that it is difficult to interpret the report as it is too technical and scientific.
11. Delay in disposal of complaints is cited as a reason by 75.6 percent of the respondents for consumers not coming forward to file complaints. 84.6 percent say the compensation amount is too less and 85.0 percent held lack of awareness about their rights as a reason for consumers not filing complaints.
12. 91.1 percent of the respondents agreed that due to low honorarium, qualified people are not being attracted to the consumer forums. 95.6 say the honorarium should be increased. 52.1 percent of the Presidents agreed that it should be atleast ₹ 25000. 25.1 percent felt the honorarium should be between ₹ 25000-35000, 16.0 percent feel that it should be above ₹ 35000 while 6.8 percent said that it should be equal to the Presidents as they perform the same work.
13. Indiscipline is not a problem in the working of District Forums say 93.1 percent of the respondents. 98.3 percent said punctuality is adhered to. 76.9 percent opined that the functioning of the forums is good. There is a cordial relationship among the members said 71.3 percent of the respondents. 76.2 percent said members are involved in judgment writing and 69.3 percent agreed that forums try to mediate between the parties to solve the complaint.
14. 36.3 Percent of the respondents agreed that they apply CPC, CrPC and Evidence Act in the proceedings of the forums, 17.5 do so to some extent and 46.2 percent follow only simple procedures and refrain from using these provisions.

15. 63.7 percent of the respondents feel that the NGOs/VCOs should play an active role in filing complaints. 80.9 percent of them said the consumers are not aware about their rights.
16. 51.8 percent feel the involvement of the lawyers helps the consumers to a large extent, while 48.2 percent feel it does to some extent. 60.2 percent agreed that lawyers prolong the cases and 64.0 percent opined that they also make the proceedings technical and difficult for consumers to understand.
17. 74.8 percent of the members are not aware about the District Consumer Protection Council. 64.3 percent are unaware of DCPC being constituted in their District.
18. 90.2 percent opined that they do not have funds at their disposal to promote consumer education.
19. Only 26.7 percent of the respondents are aware about the CONFONET Project but 80.5 percent agreed that computerisation has helped in data management. Only 49.2 percent said that the data is uploaded on daily bases as there are no full time staff to upload the data, 77.2 percent identified it as the main problem.
20. 72.8 percent say there is no data entry operator, 53.9 percent held poor internet connectivity as the problem and 58.5 percent blame it on lack of proper infrastructure. 53.7 feel problems are due to lack of computer education among the members and the staff. 72.2 percent say that the computers are poorly maintained while lack of proper hardware and software has been cited as a problem in computerisation by 82.1 percent of the respondents.
21. 60.2 percent of the respondents have attended a training programmes and 63.2 percent found it to be very helpful in upgradation of their knowledge and skill. Among all those who have attended a training programme, 73.5 percent attended at IIPA.
22. As far as infrastructure is concerned 63.6 percent of the forums are situated in their own buildings and 22.7 percent in government building. Library facilities exist only in 64.5 percent of the forums.
23. 86.4 percent of the forums have computer hardware. 77.3 percent have internet connectivity of their own. 81.8 percent have fax machines and 83.6 percent have also acquired photocopiers. But internet connectivity is poor.
24. 64 percent cases filed in the District Forums are related to service sector. 55.1 percent of all the complaints filed in the District Forums related to electricity, insurance, banking and telecommunications.
25. In 40 percent of the District Forums less than 15 complaints are being filed every month. In 37.3 percent, between 15-30, and in 11.8 percent of the forums between 30-40 complaints and in 10.9 percent of the District Forums more than 45 complaints are being filed every month.
26. Less than 15 cases are disposed every month by 31.8 percent of the District Forums, between 15-30 complaints by 30 percent of the forums, 30-45 complaints by 20.9 percent of the forums while 17.3 percent of the forums dispose more than 45 complaints per month.

27. In the ten District Forums selected for study by the research team in 5 states, the disposal rate is 90.1 percent, 51.5 percent of the complainants belong to the urban areas while 48.5 are from the rural areas.
28. 46.2 percent of the pending complaints in the District Forums of Uttar Pradesh were filed before 2001. 18.2 percent of the complaints in the district forums in the five states were filed in 2010 and 20.0 percent of the pending cases were filed in 2011. 60.0 percent of the pending of the complaints were filed before 2010 and majority of them are in Uttar Pradesh.
29. 21.6 percent of the complaints are disposed within a period of 3-5 months, 20.8 percent between 5 months to 1 year, 29.1 percent between 1-2 years, 10.5 percent take more than three years to dispose the complaint in the ten select District Forums of five States.
30. 85.2 percent of the District Forums have awarded compensation to the consumers, 6.1 percent have directed to discontinue UTP/RTP. In 5.6 percent of the complaints, orders have been issued to withdraw hazardous goods and in 3.0 percent of the complaints orders have been passed to issue corrective advertisements.
31. 11.8 percent of the District Forums have less than 3 staff members to support their functioning, 74.5 of them have 4-5 supporting staff and 13.7 have supporting staff between 6-7.
32. 92.1 percent of the supporting staff consists of permanent employees mainly drawn from other departments on deputation, 5.4 percent of them are on contract and 2.5 percent of the supporting staffs are daily wage earners.
33. 80.66 percent of the respondents said that the staff strength is inadequate and affects the functioning of the District Forums.
34. 30.2 percent of the respondents were of the view that each District Forum should have minimum staff strength of 6. 47.9 percent said it should be between 6-9, and 21.9 percent felt the ideal staff strength size would be between 9-12 employees to carry out the activities of the forums.

Effectiveness of the Redressal Mechanism

1. 74.4 percent of the complainants are males and 25.6 percent are females, 75.2 are from urban areas and 24.8 percent from rural. 15.3 percent have studied up to intermediate class. 40.9 percent are graduates, 16.5 percent are post graduates.
2. 28.5 percent of the respondents are professionals, which include engineers, doctors, architects, lawyers, etc. 16.9 percent are government servants while 14.5 percent are traders/ manufacturers/ shopkeepers.
3. As far as the annual income of the complainants/ appellants is concerned 26.4 percent have an income of less than ₹ 50,000-1 lakh, 25.6 percent are in the income slab of ₹ 1-2 lakh, 15.3 percent have an income between ₹ 2-5 lakh and 7.5 percent have an annual income of more than ₹ 5 lakh.

4. 88.8 percent of the cases filed in the three tier redressal mechanism relate to service sector and only 11.2 percent relate to products. The same is true at all three levels.
5. Before filing a complaint in the District Forum 39.6 percent of the respondents had tried other methods to redress their problems.
6. 29.6 percent of the complainants came to know about the District Forum from the lawyers, in case of 27.3 percent the source of information was print and electronic media and in the case of 21.2 percent of the complainants the family members and friends were the source of information. 18.2 percent of the respondents acquired information from VCOs.
7. 77.7 percent of the respondents filed the complaints through the lawyers. It is 92.3 percent in NCDRC, 81.5 percent in SCDRCs and 75.0 percent in the District Forums. 14.9 percent filed personally and 4.1 percent did through the VCOs.
8. Of all the complaints/ appeals filed 47.7 percent are pending, 38.6 percent have been resolved, 12.0 percent have been admitted and 1.7 percent have been dismissed.
9. Only 28.1 percent of the complainants/ appellants are satisfied with the functioning of the three tier redressal mechanism. Highest level of satisfaction is with the NCDRC accounting to 38.1 percent of the respondents.
10. 44.1 percent of the respondents are dissatisfied with the redressal mechanism on account of delay in disposal of the complaints. 18.6 percent were awarded less compensation, 16.9 percent said the complaint was not heard properly.
11. 30.8 percent of the respondents of the District Forums were dissatisfied due to delay, 18.6 percent due to award of less compensation. 20.5 percent of them felt the complaint was not heard properly, 10.3 percent said the order was not executed, 7.7 percent opined that the forum was biased in favour of the opponent and 12.8 percent were dissatisfied due to time and money involved in litigation.
12. Overall only 33.1 percent of the respondents are satisfied with the procedures adopted by the three tier redressal mechanism. 76.9 percent however, are satisfied with the procedure of the NCDRC.
13. Only 15.7 percent of the complainants of the District Forums say that time limit is adhered to in the admission of complaints, 34.8 percent say in the issue of notice, 29.1 percent in the commencement of hearing. 34.1 percent of the respondents say that the time limit is adhered in disposal of complaint and 7.3 percent agree that it is done in case of compliance of orders.
14. Only 29.8 percent of the respondents are satisfied with the progress of the complaint. Among those who are satisfied, 43.0 percent are fully satisfied and 57.0 percent are satisfied only to some extent.
15. Of all the complaints disposed by the District Forums only 9.8 percent filed an appeal against the order in the State Commission, while only 6.1 percent filed an appeal in the National Commission against the order of the State Commission.

16. Of all the orders of the District Forums only 6.71 percent of the respondents had filed an application under section 25 for execution of the orders or section 27 for non-compliance.
17. 57.0 percent of the respondents say that the staff of the Forums/ Commissions is supportive and helpful. It's as high as 76.9 percent for the NCDRC. 74.3 percent said that no staff member suggested engaging a lawyer and 65.8 percent did not find any difficulty in filing the complaint. It is only 61.6 percent for the District Forums.
18. 77.7 percent of the complainants/appellants engaged a lawyer to contest the complaint. This was because 57.9 percent did not know about the law, 50.8 percent were not aware about the procedure to be followed. Nearly 40 percent had time constraint to attend the proceedings and 27.3 engaged lawyers because of distance from the residence.
19. 73.4 percent of the complainants/ appellants are satisfied with the services of the lawyers, 61.1 percent are largely satisfied, only 24.4 percent held the lawyer responsible for the delay in disposal of the complaint.
20. 29.6 percent of the respondents visited the forums/commissions 1-4 times to pursue their complaint. 5-8 visits were made by 30.4 percent of them, 9-12 by 16.7 percent, and more than 12 visits were made by 13.3 percent of the complainants/ appellants to pursue their complaint. The visits are higher at the level of the District Forums. 60.4 percent of the respondents made more than 5 visits to the District Forums to pursue their complaints.
21. Only 50.8 percent of all the complainants /appellants said their complaint was heard properly. It is 44.4 percent in the District Forums, 61.5 percent at the State Commissions and as high as 76.9 percent at the NCDRC.
22. 55.8 percent of the respondents say the President and Members of the redressal mechanism are punctual in attending the work of the Forums/ Commissions. It is 84.6 percent in case of NCDRC. 63.1 percent for SCDRCs and only 50.6 percent of the complainants of the District Forums said that the President and Members are punctual in attending the Forums.
23. 79.8 percent of the respondents are not aware that the VCOs can file a complaint on behalf of the consumers. Only 5.7 percent had taken the help of the VCOs in filing the complaint.
24. 60.7 percent of the respondents want free Consumer Guidance Cells to be set up at all the three tiers of the redressal mechanism.
25. 71.3 percent of the respondents did not face any harassment in the District Forums, while 28.7 percent faced harassment in varying degree. Only 48.3 percent of them did not face any harassment in the District Forums of U.P. while 51.7 percent faced varying degree of harassment.
26. 61.4 percent of the respondents would again file a complaint if the need be.
27. 55.8 percent of the respondents believe that the Forums/ Commissions decide the cases only on merit. Among those who said yes, 18.5 percent say largely and 57.9

percent to some extent it is based on merit.

28. In the District Forums 28.7 percent of the respondents said that after filing the complaint the first hearing commenced after one month, 27.2 percent said after 2 months, 22.3 percent said after 3 months, 11.7 percent say after 4 months and 10.2 percent said the hearing commenced after 5 months or more after filing the complaints.
29. In the SCDRCs and the NCDRC 23.4 percent of the respondents who filed a complaint said that the first hearing started after one month, 28.2 percent said after 2 months. 20.2 percent said after 3 months, 9.7 percent said it commenced after 4 months and 18.5 percent said the first hearing commenced after more than 5 months.
30. 33.2 percent of the complainants of the District Forums said the complaint was disposed within 1-3 hearings, 27.4 percent opined that it took between 4-6 hearings, 21.2 percent said it was between 7-10 hearings; while 18.2 percent said more than 10 hearings were conducted to dispose of the complaint.
31. In the SCDRCs 14.3 percent of the complaints were disposed within 1-3 hearings, 24.7 percent of the complaint took 4-6 hearing, 41.2 percent took between 7-10 hearings and 19.8 percent of the complaints were disposed after conducting more than 10 hearings.
32. In the District Forums 21.5 percent of the complaints were disposed without any adjournment being granted. 30.8 percent of the complaints had 1-2 adjournments, 24 percent between 3-4 and 15.6 percent between 4-6 adjournments while in 8 percent of the complaints more than 6 adjournments were granted.
33. In the District Forums 24.6 percent of the complaints were disposed within 3 months, 26.8 percent within 4-6 months, 16.4 percent within a period of 7-9 months, 10.4 percent within a period of 10-12 months and 21.9 percent of the complaints took more than a year to be disposed.
34. More adjournments are granted in the SCDRCs. 18.3 percent of the complaints were disposed without any adjournment, 15.4 percent with 1-2 adjournments, 27.8 percent with 3-4 adjournments, 28.8 percent of the complaints had 4-6 adjournments and 9.7 percent of the complaints were disposed with more than 6 adjournments.
35. In the SCDRCs 24.1 percent of the complaints are disposed within 3 months, 23.8 percent within 4-6 months, 15.9 percent within 7-9 months, 11.0 percent within a period of 10-12 months and 25.2 percent of the complaints take more than a year to be disposed.

10. Recommendations

1. To strengthen the consumer movement in the country the State Governments should set up a separate Department of Consumer Affairs or atleast a Directorate of Consumer Affairs with adequate budget and manpower to begin with. However, in the long term a full-fledged Department of Consumer Affairs needs to be set up. The

West Bengal and Kerala model would give a boost to the consumer movement in the country. (**Annexure II**)

2. The Consumer Protection Councils envisaged under the Consumer Protection Act can play a meaningful role in promoting consumer welfare. Particularly at the district level these bodies can also provide a forum for various stakeholders to meet and share their problems. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen these councils and ensure that they are constituted and meet regularly.
3. At the District level the President and the Lady Member may be nominated as members of the Council. Similarly at the State level the President and the lady member of the State Commission must be nominated as the members of the State Council. At present in most of the states the members of the redressal agencies are not members of these bodies.
4. There is an urgent need to strengthen the CONFONET project. At present hardly 15-20 percent of all the data of the redressal agencies is being uploaded. As a result there is no mechanism through which an all India data of the redressal agencies can be retrieved. Unless data and record management improves it would be very difficult to enhance the efficiency of the redressal agencies. TSP may be provided for another five years to support the redressal agencies.
5. A large number of service providing departments and organizations have consumer interface but there is no mechanism to address consumer issues. It would be appropriate that a middle level officer in each department is designated as Consumer Welfare Officer both in the central and the state governments.
6. All Government Departments as well as Public and Private Sector Enterprises having public interface must have a Consumers Complaint Redressal Cell and run it impartially.
7. The District Forums are the first point of contact for the aggrieved consumers. But these bodies themselves are not consumer friendly as in none of these three tier redressal bodies there is a desk to help or guide the consumers. Therefore a "MAY I HELP YOU DESK" needs to be set up in each of these Forums/Commissions to help and guide the consumers.
8. The members being appointed to the District Forums by and large lack knowledge and skill to function effectively. It is time to introduce an objective type written test (MCQ) for the aspirants of the District Forums to screen them. Only those who qualify the written test should be called for the interview. This will go a long way in bringing competent and qualified people as members of the District Forums. (*It is already being done in Andhra Pradesh.*)
9. Delay in filling up the vacancies is hampering the working of the three tier redressal agencies leading to pendency of complaints. Moreover, the State government keeps the recommendations made by the selection committee for appointment of President and Members pending for a very long time leading to unnecessary delay and pendency of cases. The process of filling up of the vacancies of the members of the District Forums, State Commissions and National Commission must begin atleast 6-8 months before the vacancy actually takes place and the selections finalized at the earliest.

10. To fill up the post of Presidents and Members in the District Forums and the State Commissions, the State Government may make a 'Standing Panel'. The Presidents and Members of the District Forums, who have very good record, should be considered for re-appointment. Further, if there is vacancy in a particular District Forum, that Forum should be temporarily clubbed with the neighbouring District Forum, so that consumer does not suffer for want of action on the part of the authority.
11. With a view to attract better talent, a reasonable uniform pay scale of all the members of the State Commissions and District Forums should be fixed. The recommendations of the Shenoy Committee (**Annexure VI**) can be taken into account.
12. With a view to empower the Presidents of the State Commissions and the District Forums, to discharge their administrative duties in a proper manner and to exercise the financial powers and also to enhance their functionality there is a need to declare the President of State Commission as "Head of Department" and President of the District Forum as "Head of Office".
13. The pendency in the State Commissions is increasing, therefore, there is a need to constitute adequate number of additional Benches considering that, on an average, a Bench of a State Commission consisting of two Members could not be expected to dispose of more than 1000 cases in a full year.
14. The State Commissions are not able to exercise effective supervisory control over the District Forums. As a result they lack accountability and indiscipline is becoming a major problem. In many of the states even the working hours are not adhered to and absenteeism has become a major problem. The working of the District Forums needs to be properly monitored and accountability fixed. Mere disposal of a specified number of complaints in a month is not an effective measure of the performance of the District Forums. At present the State Commissions do not have any mechanism to monitor or supervise the working of the District Forums and the President of the Commission does not have adequate time to do this. Therefore, the State Commission may set up a separate Monitoring Cell under a Joint Registrar (Monitoring) to effectively supervise and monitor the activities of the District Forums and report to the President of the State Commission periodically.
15. With the increasing workload of the redressal agencies there is a need to have adequate manpower to man the work of the redressal agencies. At present there is no uniform staffing pattern. There is no doubt that the current staff strength is inadequate. The Bagla Committee recommendations on staffing pattern (**Annexure V**) may be implemented, with variations depending on the size of the district and the number of complaints being filed. Similar is in the case of NCDRC/SCDRC.
16. There is a need to have a separate cadre of staff for the redressal agencies as the staff on deputation has not been able to function effectively due to lack of administrative control. Judicial work needs permanent trained staff to handle the task which the staff on deputation is not able to handle. Moreover, by the time they are acquainted with the work they are transferred.

17. Capacity building is a major exercise. The Presidents and Members of the District Forums may undergo 2-3 weeks induction training soon after being selected. The State ATIs (Administrative Training Institutes) can organize such programmes. If such programmes are organized by Judicial Academies the members will imbibe judicial work culture and inculcate judicial mind set, therefore, to avoid this, it is important to involve the ATIs.
18. The District Forums must be encouraged to organize Lok Adalats to dispose of pending cases. The help of the District / Taluka Legal Services Authority may be taken to organize such adalats. At present very few cases are disposed of through the lok adalats.
19. The three tier redressal mechanism has virtually been hijacked by the lawyers. As a result undue adjournments are granted leading to delay in disposal of the complaints. Moreover, at the District Forum due to the involvement of lawyers the proceedings have become too technical and cumbersome. It may be a good idea to ban the appearance of advocates in small cases involving less than one lakh rupees. This will provide great relief to small consumers and also quicken the pace of justice delivery. It will also encourage more consumers to seek redressal of their complaints. It is to be noted that lawyers are barred from appearance under the Banking Ombudsman scheme and family courts.
20. In a recent judgment the Supreme Court has held that it is not necessary to engage a lawyer but any one with basic knowledge can appear on behalf of a consumer. The National Commission has been asked to frame the regulations. Such people should be asked to take up such cases. As a result of this the consumers will benefit a lot both in terms of quick delivery of justice and it will also be inexpensive. For both the district forums and the consumers it will be a win-win situation.
21. Except for the National Commission, none of the State Commissions and the District Forums have their websites with full and updated information for the consumers. Even the State Commissions which have a website of their own, the information is out-dated and no regular updating is taking place. Moreover information from a consumer's perspective is not available. Therefore efforts must be made to ensure that every redressal agency whether at the state level or the district level must have its own operational website with standards for its regular updating.
22. At present no power is vested in the State Commissions and the District Forums to review or recall the order of dismissal in default of the cases, and the cases dismissed for want of prosecution. Similarly, no power of review/recall is vested in the State Commissions and District Forums, for setting aside the *ex parte* proceedings orders. So far the review/recall of such like orders, one has to go to the National Commission, which results into unnecessary litigation, leading to delay in disposal of cases. It is recommended that not only the power of restoration of matters dismissed in default needs to be vested in the State Commission, but also they need to be conferred the power of reviewing their orders atleast in cases, where there is apparent error on the face of record. At times lack of power of review results in miscarriage of justice. However, this power may not be vested in the District Forums as chances of misusing such powers are high due to local influence.
23. In cases where statutory bodies are complained against, protection is claimed by such statutory bodies, under the provisions of the Statutes creating them. For

example, Section 6 of the Indian Post Office Act, 1898, provides protection to the statutory bodies and their functionaries. The provision was made when the country was under colonial rule and the post office did not make profit, out of the services provided by them. Keeping in view the interest of the consumers such protection provided under various laws needs to be reviewed and such protection should not be available to any statutory body in respect of the activities, which are commercial in nature.

24. Although at present the provisions of this Act are in addition to and not in derogation of the provisions of any other law for the time being in force, giving consumers an additional forum for redressal of their grievances in addition to existing avenues for the same; the Supreme Court judgement dated 1.9.2009 in C. A. No. 7687 of 2004 of G. M. Telecom Vs M. Krishnan and another, has completely changed the situation. The dispute in this case was regarding disconnection of telephone connection for non – payment of telephone bill. The Supreme Court in its judgement held that when there is a special remedy provided in Section 7-B of the Indian Telegraph Act regarding disputes in respect of telephone bills, then the remedy under the Consumer Protection Act is by implication barred. It also held that it is well settled that the special law overrides the general law. This needs to be reviewed.
25. On the lines of the Conference of the Presidents of the State Commission and the Secretaries in-charge of the Consumer Affairs in the States being organised by the NCDRC and DCA annually, the State Commissions and the State Department of Consumer Affairs may organise a conference of the Presidents of District Forums and District Collectors who head the District Consumer Councils on annual basis.
26. In order to strengthen the consumer movement in the country the major focus has be to on consumer education and awareness about consumer rights and responsibilities. An educated consumer is an empowered consumer. Therefore, vigorous awareness campaign has to be launched using both electronic and print media. The campaign must have visibility and should not be an occasional affair as it is at present.
27. The Consumer clubs in schools and colleges are very good institutional mechanism to involve the youth in the consumer movement. This is very important as children are the best messengers. The consumer clubs need to be strengthened and empowered with adequate funds to generate activities. The recommendations of the study on consumer Clubs conducted by IIPA may be considered to strengthen the Consumer Clubs. **(Annexure VII)**
28. There is a greater need to involve educational institutions in the consumer movement. As a first step the State School Boards may be requested to incorporate consumer protection in the school curriculum. The UGC may also initiate similar steps to start courses on consumer protection in the institutions of higher learning.
29. VCOs can play a major role in educating the consumers' at the local level. They have the reach as many of them work in the rural areas. But the need is to build the capacity of the VCOs to work as an effective organization. There are thousands of VCOs but the need is to have some standards of performance for these VCOs to be recognized and funded. BIS could formulate some standards for the VCOs. Subsequently they could register themselves with the State Government

Departments. Only such VCOs which have been accredited by BIS should be funded to organize awareness programmes.

30. Capacity building programmes must be organized by the ATIs to orient the officers/officials of various service providing departments about consumer protection. The SIRD (State Institute of Rural Development) may also be involved in training the elected representatives of the panchayat and the cutting edge bureaucracy. A capsule on consumer protection can be introduced in all the programmes being organized by the SIRDs. DCA may think of funding such training programmes to the ATIs and the SIRDs.
31. To educate the consumers at the District and the Taluka level the help of the District Legal Services Authority and the Taluka Legal Services Committee constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 may be taken. The objective is to take the help of the existing legal and institutional mechanism to educate the consumers and create awareness at the local level rather than setting up new institutions.
32. The National Consumer Day needs to be celebrated in a befitting manner. This should be a day of celebration with various activities being planned down to the Panchayat level. The Consumer Clubs can be roped in to organize various activities like rallies, nukkad natak, painting competition, debates etc. to create awareness on consumer issues.
33. There is a need and demand for good quality publicity material relating to consumer issues. The Department of Consumer Affairs, Gol, may print suitable and innovative posters, pamphlets, booklets and publicity material on large scale and send it to various State Commissions, District Forums and other organisations for their use. It can be both in English and Hindi languages. The same may also be translated in regional languages by the State Governments for the benefit of general public.
34. Steps are required for Setting up Mediation Centers to try and resolve Consumer Grievances through Conciliation and Mediation prior to filing of complaints in Consumer Fora. These Centres should be part of the District Forums and be located in the Consumer Fora building itself and under the administrative control of the President of the concerned forum for better monitoring and to reduce overhead expenditure. Such Mediation Centers for dealing with consumer complaints will help in reducing the burden on the Consumer Foras.
35. Apart from the Mediation Centres, the Consumer Helplines and CAC scheme needs to be strengthened. The state governments may be requested to set up the helplines at the earliest.