**Consumer advocacy at Pema Gatshel & Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhags**

**Introduction**

Most Bhutanese consumers remain unaware of their rights and laws that give them the right and protect them from unethical business practices; despite so much news about consumer protection issues in the television and print media. Likewise, businesses particularly the small ones in the remoter parts of the country are not aware of their duties and responsibilities as per consumer laws.

Therefore, educating both consumers and businesses about the rights and responsibilities, important governing rules and regulations, emerging consumer issues and how to protect their rights and get redressal support will continue to be an important program for the Competition & Consumer Affairs Authority (CCAA) into the near future.

**Educating consumers and businesses**

As part of this goal, the recently concluded advocacy program successfully reached a total of 363 business firms and 1,705 consumers at various localities in Pema Gatshel and Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhags (Fig. I).

*Fig. I: Number of consumers and businesses reached in the two Dzongkhags*

**Coverage and topics covered**

The program introduced participants to their core rights, responsibilities and what comprises unethical business practices. The program highlighted important provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, 2012 and the Consumer Protection Rules and Regulations 2015.

Additionally, the sessions delved on common anti-competitive behaviors deployed by businesses which are unethical and detrimental to consumers and the general economy. Further, with growing use of internet for business, the participants were made aware of existing e-commerce guidelines, sharing the importance and urging consumers to do business with only registered e-commerce firms or those they can trust.

Along with e-commerce, there is a concurrent rise of online scams including pyramid and Ponzi schemes which is a cause for concern. Participants were taught how to recognize them and where to report if they suspected scams occur.

Animated videos on various consumer related subjects were screened. The videos were produced by the CCAA to improve the efficiency of information dissemination to the public.

Finally, the program also provided step-by-step guidance on how to file consumer complaints to the CCAA to seek redressal or to complain about a prevailing market practice that appears in violation of existing business and consumer laws.

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