

REPORT ON THE LAUNCH OF THE CUTS/MUVI TV CAMPAIGN ON CONSUMER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE HEALTH SECTOR IN ZAMBIA

ON 31ST MAY, 2013.

Background

The health sector is one of the most crucial sectors in any given country as it hinges on human life and human welfare. However with the complexity of evolving market trends and the need for players on the market to attract as many customers as possible, it has become apparent that this desire to create the appearance of vigorous market power and also considering the fact that each player is competing for the same consumers, leads market players to engage in uncompetitive and unfair trading practices. It is for this reason that not a day would pass without there being news regarding defective, substandard and poor services which consumers in Zambia are being subjected to. Consumer abuses in the health care sector have also become prevalent in the recent past. Further, it is well known that access to affordable and quality health care services are part of the inherent human rights which every human being is entitled to. Often in cases where there could be access to quality, affordable health care, the services tend to be compromised as the recipients get entangled in a vicious cycle involving anti-competitive and unfair trading practices of some commercially motivated health practitioners, who compromise medical treatment to maximize personal gains. On the other hand, irresponsible consumption of medical products and services has the potential to undermine governments' efforts aimed at having efficient health outcomes in Zambia. This therefore brings out the need to have well tailored awareness generation interventions to build an informed citizenry on their consumer rights and responsibilities on health issues in Zambia.

From this context, Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) International and Muvi Television have partnered on a rigorous awareness generation campaign on consumer rights and responsibilities on health care products and services. The campaign will mainly compliment governments efforts envisaged to deliver an efficient health care system in Zambia through addressing day to day practical challenges which consumers face when consuming health related products and services. The campaign was launched on 31st of May, 2013, Fresh view Cinemas, Levy Junction in Lusaka, Zambia. Some of the major participants included the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC), the World Health Organization (WHO), Medicines Transparency Alliance (MeTA), the Health Professions Council and various media houses.

Key Note Address, Mr Chilufya Sampa Executive Director, Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC)

In giving a key note speech, Mr Sampa, started by expressing how delighted he was to note that civil society and private sector were partnering in advancing consumer rights and responsibilities issues. He said raising awareness on consumer rights and responsibility in Zambia had been a struggle for the commission as this responsibility was mainly left to the commission alone, a situation which he said was changing. "This has always been a challenge for the commission and this was why in the commission's strategic plan for 2011-2016, the need to work with non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations such as CUTS International was identified as key. He therefore commended CUTS and Muvi TV for its initiative and also urged other CSO's, NGO's and other private sector actors to emulate what CUTS international and Muvi TV have done. And speaking specifically on the health sector, Mr Sampa noted that the sector was one of the sectors which were faced with a number of consumer violations mainly necessitated by consumer ignorance and abuse by the medical professionals. He also expressed his gladness with the provision in the draft Constitution which imposes a duty of care on any

medical centre to treat any person who is in a critical condition. In closing, he thanked CUTS for being a faithful partner to the commission in enhancing consumer protection in Zambia and also Muvi TV for realising such a need.

CUTS/Muvi TV Joint presentation on the campaign, Mr Tommy Singongi, Programmes Officer CUTS International Lusaka and Mr Costa Mwansa, General Manager, Muvi Television

The presentation mainly involved a power point presentation and showcasing some of the video and pop up messages prepared by CUTS and Muvi TV. In delivering part of his presentation, Mr Singongi indicated that promotion of Consumer rights and responsibility was critical for every sector. . He stated that if consumers were not responsible in their consumption patterns, they would put themselves to risks of loss of life or defections. Therefore, he indicated that checking for expiration dates, asking for additional information, following prescriptions and shopping for best services available at given costs were important and thus this campaign will aim to address that. He further informed the guests that one factor that was particular in health care delivery system was the information asymmetry between health care consumers and providers thus opening doors to manipulation and exploitation.

Speaking on behalf of Muvi TV, Mr Mwansa pointed out that consumers need to become knowledgeable about existing policy, legal and regulatory frameworks, their rights and methods of recourse, in order to participate effectively in the implementation of consumer laws and become self-confident during their interaction with service providers. He disclosed to the guests that not a day would pass without aggrieved consumers of health services and products would storm Muvi TV newsroom for coverage over a service they would have consumed during their interaction with medical products and service providers. According to Mr Mwansa, a number of these complaints hinged on lack of information on consumer rights and responsibilities. It was therefore Muvi TV's view that information on consumer rights and responsibilities in health care in Zambia should be disseminated widely so as to improve health care consumption outcomes and improve awareness through such a campaign CUTS and Muvi TV were launching.

Closing remarks by Dr Olusegun Babaniyi Country Representative, World Health Organisation (WHO)

Dr Babaniyi was represented by Mr Billy Mweetwa, National Profession Officer – Essential Drugs and Medicines Policy Advisor, WHO. He started by applauding CUTS and MUVI Television on the campaign that was being launched and stressed that the campaign was timely. He cited WHO constitution which states that “The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of Health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, belief, economic or social condition” and indicated that the campaign launched by CUTS and Muvi falls within the spirit of WHO constitution. He indicated that WHO therefore supported the campaign because it would not only help to educate the Zambian people about their right to access of available health care services, but also about their responsibilities in order to ensure better health outcomes. He also indicated that assuring that the rights of citizens were protected required more than educating policy makers and health providers but also educating citizens about what they should expect from their governments and their health care providers. He added that citizens, then, can have an important part to play in elevating the standard of care when their own expectations of that care are raised. In conclusion, he commended CUTS and MUVI TV for coming on board to support government's efforts targeted at improving access and the delivery of health care services. He said such initiatives would go a long way in promoting good health in the country.

Conclusion

Most stakeholders present found the initiative to be one that was timely and will compliment government's efforts in its r quest provide affordable, effective and efficient health care system in Zambia. Various stakeholders such as the WHO, Health Professions Council expressed their interest to give full support to the project and work hand in hand with CUTS and Muvi TV in ensuring that the project meets its required objectives and outcomes, which in this case would result in better informed consumers on their rights and responsibilities.