

EACO GUIDELINES ON CONSUMER EDUCATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The National Regulatory Authorities are mandated to position the consumer to make informed decisions through the implementation of effective Consumer Education approaches.

EACO recognizes the ubiquity and similarity in consumer behavior across the region and hence the need for a harmonized approach to Consumer Education.

These Consumer Education Guidelines are an outline of tools and procedures that National Regulatory Authorities in the region are encouraged to adopt to ensure effective Consumer Education.

2. ACRONYMS

EACO: East African Communications Organizations
NRA: National Regulatory Authorities
ICT: Information Communications and Technology

3. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Consumer –An individual or organization who purchases ICT products or services for final use.

Consumer Education – An initiative undertaken to equip the consumer with knowledge, skills and information to enable informed decision making in the purchase, use and disposal of ICT products and services

Consumer Organization – An entity whose main focus is to advocate and address consumer issues and undertake consumer education

National Regulatory Authority – the entity established by law to regulate the information and communications sector in a country.

Service Provider – an entity licensed by the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) to offer ICT goods and services.

4. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

4.1. Scope

These guidelines outline the methodologies for identifying consumer education needs, packaging the appropriate message, and strategies for delivering consumer education in the EACO member states. The Guidelines shall be applicable to all EACO members and sectors regulated by the National Regulatory Authorities.

4.2. Objectives

- To encourage EACO Member states to prioritize Consumer Education.
- To harmonize consumers education policies and approaches in the EACO member states.
- To enhance cross-border collaboration and partnership on consumer education.
- To adapt international best practice in Consumer education across the region.
- To enable EACO Member States develop appropriate frameworks to effectively engage consumer organizations and groups.

5. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The guiding principles for the Consumer Education guidelines include:

- Value for money principle
- Consumer rights and responsibilities
- Education as a prerequisite to Consumer protection
- Best practices in consumer protection.

6. PROCEDURE FOR CONSUMER EDUCATION

6.1. Development of a Consumer Education Policy

The National Regulatory Authorities shall develop a consumer education policy that seeks to establish a framework through which consumer education initiatives in the ICT sector shall be developed and implemented.

6.2. Identification of Consumer Education Needs

Consumer Education needs may be identified through but not limited to;

- Customer Satisfaction and Perception Surveys
- Consumer Trends and Behavior Surveys
- Consumer complaints reports:
- Inspection reports and Compliance returns.
- Reports from engagement with Consumer Associations and Civil society.
- Consumer issues due to evolving technologies and regulatory environments
- Emerging consumer issues

6.3. Development of a Consumer Education Strategy

The consumer education initiative shall follow unique strategies to ensure its effectiveness. The Consumer Education Strategy shall seek to;

- Focus on the issues identified in Consumer education needs analysis.
- Identify target audiences
- Identify appropriate knowledge transfer mechanisms

6.4. Developing Consumer Education Information

Consumer education information shall be developed to address gaps identified. This information shall then, based on the target audience and education strategy be developed and packaged in an appropriate form e.g. information packs, informative advertisement content, consumer engagement agenda e.t.c.

The NRA shall develop consumer education information independently or jointly with stakeholders. The NRA should however develop a mechanism to verify that the information developed is factual.

6.5. Procedure to Implement Consumer Education Initiatives

Consumer Education initiatives shall be implemented in line with the consumer education strategy. This may be done through outdoor advertising, mass media communication, workshops, consumer forums, distribution of consumer education material e.t.c.

6.6. Partnerships in Consumer Education

National Regulatory Authorities may undertake collaborations and partnerships in implementing consumer education initiatives.

Partnerships may be between two or more stakeholders.

The nature of involvement of the relevant stakeholders should be defined in the strategy.

6.7. Monitoring and Evaluation of Consumer Education Initiatives

The NRA's shall develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to assess the effectiveness of Consumer Education Initiatives. While monitoring will enable continuous assessment of the initiatives and shall provide an opportunity for improvement, evaluation shall determine the impact of each program and thereby guide future initiatives.

Monitoring and evaluation may be undertaken by the NRA or an independent entity.

7. IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE GUIDELINES

The National Regulatory Authorities shall ensure implementation of these guidelines within their jurisdictions.

8. REVIEW OF THESE GUIDELINES

To ensure their relevance, these guidelines may be reviewed from time to time or at least once in 3 years.