

Consumer Power

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About Consumers International (CI)

- Global federation of consumer rights organisations
- 240 member organisations in 120 countries
- Independent and not-for-profit
- Global research and campaigns through and for our members

..some history

1960's International Org. of Consumer Unions founded (now CI)

Observer status at UN

1970's Gains General Consultative Status at the UN

Action Coordinates the set up of the International Baby Food
Network (IBFAN)

1980's Coordinates the set up of the Pesticide Action Network (PAN)

UN adopts *Guidelines on Consumer Protection*

Model Law for consumer protection in Latin America

1990's Model law for consumer protection in Africa

Achieves extension of UN consumer guidelines to include
sustainable consumption

2000's ISO 26000 standard on social responsibility

Consumer power

“Consumers are angrier and more willing to punish corporate behaviour if they perceive the behaviour as intentional, unfair and motivated by greed”

Maruice E Stucke


Understanding consumers



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CI, CSR and food supply chains

Context: raising public awareness of working conditions in supermarket food supply chains

- Consumer survey
- Survey of supermarket policies
- Case study of pineapple supply chain Costa Rica  Europe

CI and the pineapple supply chain

- Aim: to make the links between labour rights abuses & responsibility up the supply chain
- Facts – commission research
- Get the message to consumers – (in print and film) via consumer organisations and the media
- Mobilise consumer action

Results

- Over 3 million consumers reached across Europe (excluding radio/TV)
- Lobbying meetings with major companies
- National coverage in Costa Rica
- Industry awareness of the potential impact of consumer power
- Maintained pressure for meaningful change for workers and communities in Costa Rica

Challenges

1. Lack of transparency limited the links to specific practices and companies
2. Lack of engagement by companies
3. How to translate greater awareness into positive action?
4. How to maintain pressure from consumers long enough to achieve change?

Expectations of consumer power

Authorities: 'Consumers can demand change/higher standards from companies – regulation is not needed'

Activists: 'If only consumers would vote with their wallet, companies would take notice'

Companies: 'Consumers won't pay for it'.

The role of consumer organisations

Upstream:

Lobbying companies/authorities

E.g. ISO 26000

Work with ISEAL on minimum standards for ethical claims

Downstream:

Filtering information and guiding consumers and therefore influence their choices

Understanding consumers



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