

Institute for Consumer Protection

**Capacity-building on Competition Policy in Select Countries of Eastern and
Southern Africa**

7 Up 3

**Second National Reference Group Meeting
Mauritius Report**

10th February 2006

**University of Mauritius,
Réduit.**

March 2006

Institute for Consumer Protection

Capacity Building Project on Competition Policy in Select countries of Eastern and Southern Africa.

Report of the Second National Reference Group Meeting – 10th February 2006

Opening Session



Minister Rajesh Jeetah, Researchers Mrs Reshma Peerun-Fatehmamode, Dr Chandan Jankee, Minister Indira Seebun, Researcher Sunil Bundoo and ICP Coordinator Mosadeq Sahebodin.

Mrs Reshma Peerun Fatehmamode made the welcoming address. She thanked Dr Rajesh Jeetah, minister of Industry, Commerce, Small and Medium Enterprises and Cooperatives, and Mrs Indira Seebun, minister of Women's Rights, Family Welfare, Child Development and Consumer Protection for their presence in the meeting. She welcomed participants from different sectors and explained why it was important to have this second NRG meeting. She thanked participants for their response to the survey carried out by the Research team, comprising of herself, Dr Chandan Jankee and Mrs Sunil Bundoo, of the University of Mauritius. Thereafter she invited Dr Jankee to take over the floor.

Dr Chandan Jankee, who is also a member of the research team presented the salient points of the research project and explained the objectives of the research exercise.

The audience was then addressed by Mr Mosadeq Sahebodin, the coordinator of the Institute for Consumer Protection, the advocacy partner in the project.

For his part, the **ICP Coordinator, Mosadeq Sahebodin** explained that consumer organizations have an important role to play in raising awareness and stimulating interest among consumers about what Competition Policy is for and how it can be used. However political support is crucial to the success of Competition law. The new Government's decision to place Consumer Protection portfolio under the ministry for Consumer Protection, while the Competition policy portfolio stays at the ministry for Commerce, may lead to a dispersion of responsibility, against consumers' interest, he said. He further pointed out the unwarrantable political interference into the functions of the Director of Fair Trading, as provided by the law. In the present political context where it has openly been acknowledged that it is normal for political parties, hence the Government of the day, to be funded by private firms, this provision for political interference in the affairs of the Competition Authority is a matter of concern to consumer organizations, he affirmed.

According to Mr Sahebodin, Governments' decision to review the Utility Regulatory Authority Act, the regulatory law for the electricity, water and sewerage sectors, and the Electricity Act before their implementation is a cause for concern for consumers. ICP fears that provisions which would enable consumer organizations to dispute wastewater and electricity tariffs may be removed. In the meantime, he stated, consumers continued to be fleeced by high electricity prices, attributed to acknowledged mismanagement and unjustifiably unfair wastewater tariffs.

Thereafter, Mr Sahebodin handed the floor back to the chairperson, who then invited Hon Mrs Seebun, minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection to address the floor.

Addressing the gathering, the **Minister for Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection, Mrs Indira Seebun** said that she was happy to be associated with such a laudable initiative. More competition means lower prices. This initiative is in line with Government's policy of putting people first, she said. "We want to remove the price burden from consumers' shoulders" She further affirmed that the Capacity Building project will benefit consumers as well as the business partners. She concluded by thanking the ICP coordinator for his commitment in fighting to safeguard consumers' interest.

She was succeeded by the **Hon Dr Rajesh Jeetah, minister of Industry, Commerce, Small and Medium Enterprises and Cooperatives**. The minister informed the gathering that the present Competition Act will be overhauled and a Competition Commission will be set up in the near future. Competition is high on the agenda of this Government, he said. Unfair competition impacts negatively on trade. Fair trade and fair competition go hand in hand with the interest of consumers. Mr Jeetah added that the first draft of the Competition Act will be circulated on the Ministry's website next March. Government will set up a Competition Commission on the British model.

He then declared the meeting open and wished participants to have fruitful deliberations.



Mrs Peerun-Fatehmamode, Dr Jankee and Mrs Seebun listening to Minister Jeetah.

Presentation of Survey Results

During the second part of the meeting, **Sunil Bundoo**, made a brief summary of the Country Paper presented at the launch meeting in March 2005.

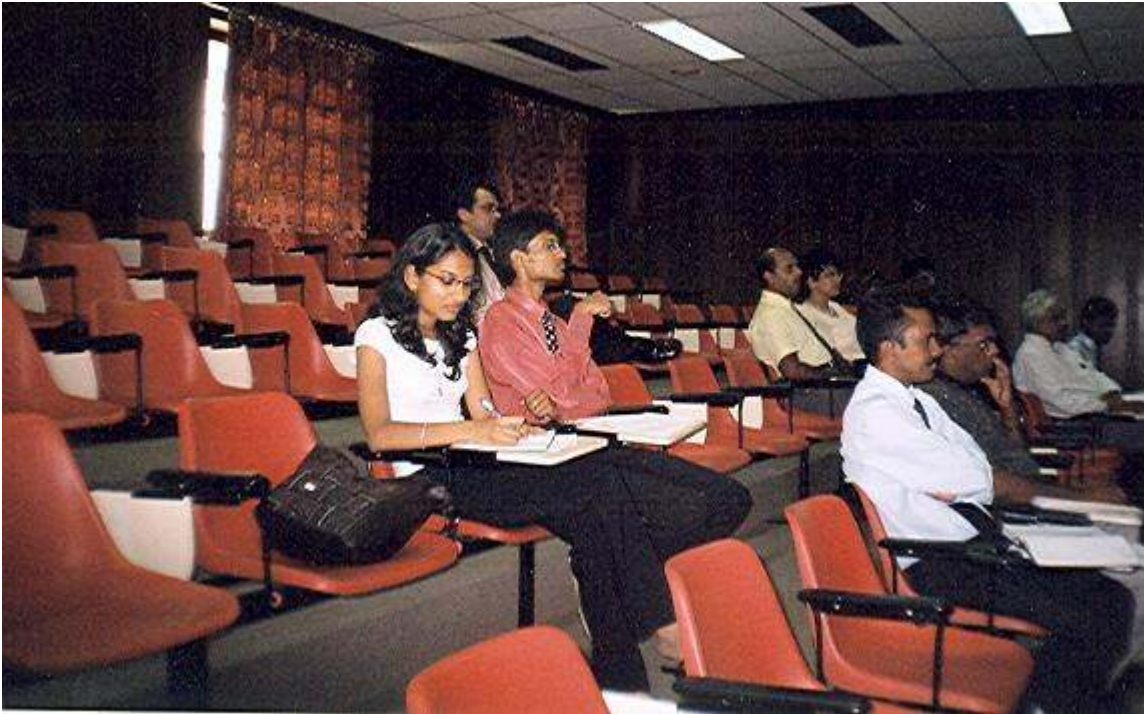
He then proceeded with an explanation of the methodology used to conduct the survey. He also went through the major findings of the survey. He underlined that survey had been conducted among 200 consumers, 50 private firms and 50 Government institutions. The survey pointed out that 92% of respondents believed that anti-competitive practices prevailed in the country. 78% think that the present laws are insufficient while 70% were in favour of a Competition Authority. He explained that these findings were not definite as the report had yet to be finalized.

Succeeding Mr Bundoo, **Reshma Peerun-Fatehmamode, the Project Coordinator** highlighted some of the main findings of the survey. She drew attention to the fact that most respondents stated that price fixing was the no.1 anti-competitive practice, followed by market sharing (17% and entry

barrier (16%) The majority of respondents believe that anticompetitive practices prevail mostly in the consumer goods sector, followed by the manufacturing sector and the agricultural sector. 63% believe that anticompetitive practices originate outside the country.

Asked how they would react to anticompetitive practices, 43 % said they would go to consumer forums, while 32% said they would seek help from legislation.

These findings, Mrs Peerun-Fatehmamode underlined, will be included in a proposed Country Research Paper, to be presented at the next Regional Conference in Addis Ababa in March. A synthesis of Country Papers of the six other countries of Eastern and Southern Africa concerned by the project will be compiled for reference.



Participants at the meeting.

Comments and Questions from the presentation:

Participants raised the following questions and comments:

Dr Ancharaz, senior lecture at the University of Mauritius expressed his astonishment with regard to some of the findings. He said perhaps we ought to question the sampling exercise, he was surprised, he said, that people would not know about the state monopoly company, the State Trading Corporation. Dr Jankee explained that these findings were a true picture of responses received, but he agreed that the number of respondents could have been insufficient. He underlined that the research team had to face constraints, pressed by time and by CUTS.

Mrs Veena Dabeesingh, representing the Financial Services Corporation, who is the regulator for the Insurance and Offshore Banking Sector raised the question about the extent to which competition was prevailing in the financial market. In his response, Dr Jankee said that changes were under way and these would be seen soon.

A participant, representing a Trade Union, expressed his doubts as to the implementation of a comprehensive competition policy in Mauritius.

Vote of Thanks

In her vote of thanks, Mrs. Peerun-Fatehmamode thanked the participants and informed them that more people will be brought on board. She explained that the Advocacy partner would take over the second stage of the project. She invited participants to keep contact with ICP. She specially thanked the two ministers who had taken of their precious time to inaugurate the event. She requested the participants to continue with the thinking process and come up with a policy which is just, fruitful and productive to all stakeholders

Appendices

Appendix 1

Address by Mosadeq Sahebodin, Coordinator, Institute for Consumer Protection.

Consumer organizations have an important role to play in raising awareness and stimulating interest among consumers about what Competition Policy is for and how it can be used. It is recognized that the introduction of a comprehensive competition policy can lead to significant advantages to business as well as consumers. It is consumers who have the most to gain from an effective Competition Policy through lower prices, more choice and higher quality in goods and services.

However political support is crucial to the success of Competition law. The new Government's decision to place Consumer Protection portfolio under the ministry for Consumer Protection, while the Competition policy portfolio stays at the ministry for Commerce, may lead to a dispersion of responsibility, against consumers' interest. Government should not undermine the convergence between the objectives of consumer protection policy and competition policy.

Almost a year after our last NRG meeting, things do not seem to have changed a lot. Government's decision to set the prices of milk powder under a maximum mark-up regime seems to have triggered the private sector operators to press for the implementation of the Competition Act.

ICP sees in the present unanimous agreement in favour of the implementation of the law an opportunity to press for certain clauses to be revised.

The unwarrantable political interference into the functions of the Director of Fair Trading, as provided by the law, needs to be pointed out. In the present political context where it has openly been acknowledged that it is normal for political parties, hence the Government of the day, to be funded by private firms, this provision for political interference in the affairs of the Competition Authority is a matter of concern to consumer organizations.

The imposition of the maximum mark-up on milk powder and Government's intervention, through the STC, has certainly enhanced competition, though to a slight extent, in this market. This initiative has, however, put an end to abuse of dominant position by one of the stakeholders.

Anti-competitive practices, such as the abuse of a dominant position to determine prices, possible collusive agreements, and below cost-price selling by large retailers are still prevailing. Recently, the entry in the beer market of a new producer brought an end to an age-old monopoly. However, there seem to be collusion on the price. Some retail outlets have also adopted the exclusive selling. The coming into operation of foreign multinationals in the food distribution sector has brought in other anti-competitive practices, considered illegal in developed countries. These practices include predatory pricing, and other back-door commercial practices aimed at pushing competitors out of the market.

In the services sector, Governments' decision to review the Utility Regulatory Authority Act, the regulatory law for the electricity, water and sewerage sectors, and the Electricity Act before their implementation is a cause for concern. ICP fears that provisions which would enable consumer organizations to dispute wastewater and electricity tariffs may be removed. In the meantime, consumers continue to be fleeced by high electricity prices, attributed to acknowledged

mismanagement and unjustifiably unfair wastewater tariffs. Sectoral regulatory policies which are integral parts of competition policy also play a major role in ensuring the right to basic needs and supplying services to the poor and disadvantaged consumers at a reasonable price.

Finally, it is acknowledged that the civil society, consumer organizations in particular, play an important role in the formulation and the implementation process for competition policy and law. Consumer organizations contribute in promoting a general competition culture through independent campaigns and advocacy activities. This is one of the aims of the 7 Up 3 project and where ICP will assume a significant role. We will endeavour to promote this competition culture through sensitization campaigns, training courses and workshops in the next stage of the project. To this end, we expect to enlist the support of all stakeholders. Thank you.

Appendix 2

Survey On State Of Competition In Mauritian Markets From Perceptions of Consumers, The Private Sector And The Government Sector.

I Main Objectives of the Survey

The survey has been conducted with the following main objectives:

- 1)to analyze the extent of anti-competitive practices prevalent in the country;
- 2)to determine the most common types of anti competitive practices;
- 3)to gauge the level of awareness regarding existing laws regulations and institutions to combat such practices and protect consumers;
- 4)to analyze the present inadequacies and assess the need for an independent Competition Authority.

Methodology

Based on the questionnaires from CUTS, two sets of questionnaires were prepared; one in creole addressed to consumers and the other in English address to firms in the private sector and government institutions including parastatal bodies. Firms in the private sector and the government institutions were chosen so as to have a balance spread of entities in the following sectors: Agriculture, Manufacturing, Energy. It must also be pointed that the questionnaire from CUTS was modified to take into account the realities of the local context.

Sample

A purposive sampling method was adopted given the time constraint for conducting the survey. The questionnaires were addressed to 200 consumers, to 50 firms in the private sector and to 50 government institutions. The sample size for the private and government sectors are as suggested by CUTS. The response rates were as follows: 175 consumers, 39 firms in the private sector 43 government institutions.

IV Analysis Of Survey Results

Overall, around 92 per cent of the respondents considered that anti-competitive practices are quite prevalent in the Mauritian markets. At the dis-aggregated level, the results are quite similar with 92 percent of consumers, around 93 per cent of firms and 90 per cent of government institutions which participated in the survey agree that such practices are widespread in Mauritian markets. 94 percent of the respondents do agree that consumers are adversely affected by such practices.

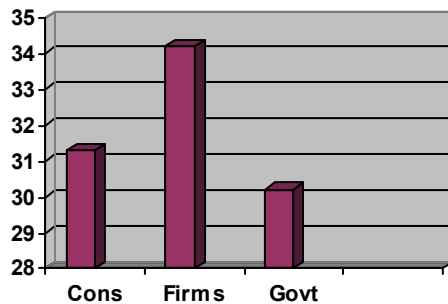
The participants were also given 11 categories of anti-competitive practices, namely:

- 1.)collective price fixing,
- 2.)market sharing,
- 3.)bid rigging,

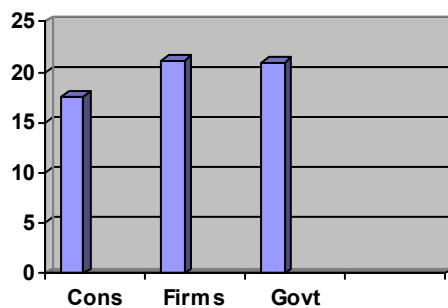
- 4.) tied selling,
- 5.) exclusive dealing,
- 6.) concerted refusal to deal,
- 7.) resale price maintenance,
- 8.) price discrimination,
- 9.) entry barrier,
- 10.) predatory pricing and
- 11.) any other.

They were required to list the most three important ones by order of importance.

31.6 percent of the total sample considered price fixing as the number one most prevalent anti-competitive practice in Mauritian markets. When the results are disaggregated by category, this view is shared by consumers, the private sector and the government, ranging from 30 to 34 percent as can be observed from the chart below.



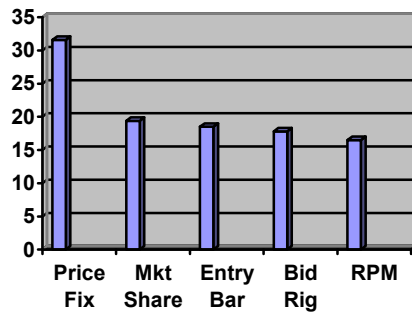
The second most prevalent anti-competitive practice is market sharing according to the respondents (17 percent). From the disaggregated results, the same response is observed for consumers (17.5 %) and the government sector (20.9 %). But according to the private sector, it is exclusive dealing (21.1 %).



Entry barrier is seen as the third most prevalent anti-competitive practice for the whole sample (18.5 %). The same response is given by firms and the government, 24.3 and 20.9 % respectively. However, according to consumers, it is resale price maintenance (19 %).

Overall, the survey results tend to confirm collective price fixing, market sharing and entry barriers as the most common factors affecting competition in the Mauritian markets. This is not

surprising given that many markets in Mauritius exhibit oligopolistic characteristics where entry barriers are high and with some form of collective price fixing through price leadership. However, from the survey we see that bid rigging, resale price maintenance and price discrimination are also important factors affecting competition.



At the local level the overall results show that collective price fixing (36.8 %) is the most prevalent anti-competitive practice. The same is observed for all three categories, ranging from 25 % to 39.7 %. The second most prevalent is resale price maintenance (20.7 %). This response is shared by consumers as well (24.7%). However, for the government and private sector, it is market sharing, 19 to 22.2 %. The third most widespread practice is price discrimination for the whole sample (15.5 %). This view is also shared by most consumers (21.9 %). However, for the private sector and the government, it is entry barrier (20 %) and resale price maintenance (20 %) respectively. The response by consumers that price discrimination is prevalent in different parts of the country is not surprising, given that there is significant market segmentation particularly in the retail sector.

At the national level, bid rigging is observed as the most prevalent anti-competitive practice (23 %). From the disaggregated results, the same response is given by consumers (25.3 %). However, for firms and the government sector, it is collective price fixing, 30.6 and 22 per cent respectively. The overall result here might have been influenced by the number of consumers participating in the sample. Taking this into account, the results confirmed the earlier results obtained that collective price fixing is most prevalent.

The second most important anti-competitive practice at the national level is market sharing (19.6 %). The same result is confirmed by all three categories. The third most important practice is entry barrier (14.8 %). The same response is given by the private sector and the government, 22.9 to 16.7 %. For consumers they consider exclusive dealing as the third most prevalent, 17.1%. Overall, we see that the survey confirms that in the Mauritian markets at both the local level and at the national level, the three most anti-competitive practices are collective price fixing, market sharing and entry barrier and to a marginally lesser extent bid rigging and price discrimination. We see that the results at the local and national level support the findings regarding anti-competitive practices in the Mauritian markets.

The first most important sector where such practices are prevalent is the consumer goods sector (35.2 %). This view is also shared by the consumers and the private sector, 38.7 and 42.9 % respectively. But according to the government sector it is the services sector which is most

affected. The second most important sector is manufacturing (22.4 %). This is confirmed by consumers and the government sector, 25.3 and 21.9 %. For the private sector, it is the construction industry, 28%. This is expected as views have been expressed that there is considerable bid rigging in this sector. The third sector where such practices are prevalent is the agricultural sector. This response is shared by consumers but not by the private sector and the government.

Around 63 per cent of the respondents agree that some of such practices originate outside the country. At the dis-aggregated, it is not surprising the the private sector and the government seem to apportion most of these practices to multinational corporations than to locally based firms with around 67 and 86 per cent respectively. On the other hand, consumers allocate the practices as 56 percent overseas and around 44 percent home-based. So for consumers, many of these practices originate from the local business environment.

Surprisingly, only about 54 percent are aware that there are laws and regulations to check such practices. This result might be influenced by the consumers' group, where 52 percent said they are aware of such laws and regulations. For the private sector and government 74 and 61 percent are aware of such laws and regulations.

As far as actions taken when such laws are violated, around 67 percent of the total sample point out that actions to sanction such practices are taken sometimes only. The dis-aggregated results for the three groups confirm the same trend.

From the survey, it seems that consumers are aware of the most important legislations which exist to check such practices, namely the Consumer Protection Act (44.4 %), the Fair Trading Act (37.8 %) and the Hire Purchase Act (11.1%). Thus there could be practical difficulties for them to seek remedies as awareness of the legislation does not seem to be an issue. The present framework for consumers and other stakeholders to address their complaints/grievances most probably must be revisited.

Most consumers believe that it is the Ministry of Commerce which should provide redress (33 %) . But many also are aware of ICP (27.6 %), ACIM (25.2 %) and the consumer protection unit (11 %).

Certain competition aspects are currently covered by the 1980 Fair Trading Act (as amended in 1988), and the 1998 Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act, which replaced the 1991 Act. The Ministry of Industry, Commerce and International Trade is responsible for enforcement of the Acts. The Fair Trading Act aims at ensuring that trade practices do not mislead or confuse consumers, that they are not detrimental to consumer interests, and that fixed prices are not exceeded. The Act prohibits agreements, including exclusive sales arrangements or monopolies, likely to prevent or distort competition in the production and supply of goods (branded or not) and services. The 1998 Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act deals primarily with monitoring prices and supplies of goods. Administered by the Price Control Unit (PCU) within the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and International Trade, price controls in Mauritius still consist of a fixed maximum price system and a maximum percentage markup system. The markup system applies only to imports, and the fixed maximum price system applies both to imports and locally produced goods. The controlled prices are computed by the PCU and approved by the Minister of Industry, Commerce and International Trade; the Consumer Protection Unit within the Ministry ensures that traders comply with the pricing regulations. The survey reveals that 78% of the sample agree that existing rules , regulations and laws are not

sufficient to check anticompetitive practices prevalent in Mauritius. The table below shows the breakdown in response to question 13.

	SECTOR		
(%)	Consumer	Private	Government
Yes	15.5	23.1	44.2
No	84.5	76.9	55.8

(Source: Computed)

Moreover, above 85 % of the private and public sector and above 70 % of consumers are in favour of introducing a more comprehensive law on anticompetitive behaviour. Such a law, that is the Competition Act (2003) has already been drafted but has not yet come into force to date. The Competition Act provides for the establishment of the legal framework for the control of restrictive business practices with a view to enhancing competition in Mauritius through measures designed to promote efficiency, adaptability and competitiveness in the economy for the end purpose of widening the range of customer choice in obtaining goods and services at a fairer and more competitive prices. The Act identifies four categories of anticompetitive practices including, the abuse of monopoly power, collusive agreements, anti-competitive agreements and bid-rigging.

As suggested by journalist, *Shyma Soondur of L'Express Dimanche*, the business community has connived to cause the Competition Act to be destined to failure. However, following a recent government decision to subject milk powder to a maximum mark-up and its intention to include other basic products under the same regime has encouraged the private sector of the economy to give the go-ahead to the application of the Competition Act (ICP Policy Brief No.3, Aug 2005). According to the authorities, price controls are maintained because of lack of competition, and to protect consumers against unreasonable prices for strategic imports, staple commodities and other "essential" products. It is expected that the controls are to be abolished gradually as soon as the competition legislation is enacted and markets become effectively competitive.

According to the investigation carried out, about 79% think that the Competition Act should focus on economic efficiency and only 21% believe that the law should also consider other socio-economic issues as well. The survey also shows a divided opinion on whether there should be exemptions to the application of the Competition Act. Indeed 58% of the sample agree that the law should cover all enterprises and persons, that is, no company is to be exempted from the law. In case, there are exemptions, Small and Medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are the first to be given preference according to 52% of the sample. SMEs are followed by Public Utilities Companies (22%), State-Owned Enterprises (19%) and only 3% believe that Import/Export enterprises are to be exempted. As per the Competition Act 2003, no exemption to the law applies specifically to Small and Medium sized enterprises. However, certain goods and services are excluded from provisions of the law relating to monopoly situations. These include aviation and harbour services, broad casting services, electricity services, financial services, Freeport services, information and communication technologies, postal services other than courier, goods and services supplied by state enterprises and water other than for retail trade. In addition, agreements between members of a professional or trade association are excluded from the

provisions relating to collusive agreements. As regards to anticompetitive agreements, if the Minister is satisfied that such an agreement would be beneficial to consumers, it would be exempted from the provisions of the law. Lastly, concerning bid-rigging practices which are considered to be the fourth type restrictive business practices in the Act, exception is made to agreements where parties are interconnected bodies corporate as well cases where the agreement whose terms are made known to the person making the invitation for bids or tenders at or before the time the bid or tender is made by a party to the agreement.

The survey also reveals that 48.6% of the sample prefer an autonomous competition authority whereas 46.7% prefer a competition authority that is an agency under the relevant Ministry. The preference for an autonomous competition authority is clear from the private sector and government institutions as well. In fact, 68% of the private firms and 74% of government institutions interviewed prefer an autonomous competition authority. On the other hand, about 60% of consumers prefer a competition authority that falls under the Ministry as opposed to 38% who prefer an autonomous CA. This may reflect the fact that consumers view government as an authority who protect their interest vis a vis private profit-making enterprises especially given the existing Price Control Unit of the Ministry of Commerce. The table below shows the response regarding the kind of competition authority should have.

(%)	SECTOR		
	Consumer	Private	Government
Autonomous	37.9	68.4	74.4
Under Ministry	56.9	28.9	20.9
Other	5.2	2.6	4.7

As regards to the kind of power that the Competition Authority should have, 34 % believe that it should have both investigative and adjudicative powers against 64% who believe that the Competition Authority should be empowered to carry out investigations only leaving the power to judge to either a separate authority (43%) or to courts (21%). In Mauritius, the Competition Act (2003) establishes an Office of Fair Trading as the competition authority which, would be a public office that shall establish its own procedures. The Director will be responsible for the day-to-day control, operation and management of the Office. The duties of the Director include the investigation of any allegation or suspicion of restrictive business practices, gather, process and evaluate information which give rise to such suspicion and take measures to prevent or terminate any restrictive business practices including issuing directives and proposals for remedial action. This includes the acceptance an undertaking¹ from the person he considers appropriate to prevent or terminate such restrictive business practice. However, the Director must apprise the Minister, in writing, before starting an investigation. If the Director finds that no undertaking has been made, or that the latter is unacceptable for some reasons or that the undertaking has not been complied with, he shall refer the matter to the Competition Tribunal, which will issue direction to resolve the matter. The Director is responsible for the monitoring of compliance with any

¹ The Competition Act defines an “undertaking” as an obligation or commitment given in writing by an enterprise to and which has been accepted by the director of the Office of Fair trading to prevent or terminate a restrictive business practice.

undertaking and direction given by the tribunal. In addition, when the director is satisfied that there has been a material change in circumstances subsequent to an undertaking, he may accept to vary the undertaking conditions or even release a person from the undertaking. He may also refer to the Competition tribunal to vary or terminate directions issued. The Competition Tribunal has the power to give such directions it deems fit for the purpose of preventing or terminating an anticompetitive practice. This includes a direction that any line of business or area of activity of any person engaging in anticompetitive practices be separated and carried out by another person. The majority of consumers (80%) believe that the Competition Authority should also deal with unfair trade practices and consumer protection issues. All the more, about 68% of the sample think that the competition Authority should involve different stakeholder groups in its functioning especially advocacy/publicity people. In addition, 60% prefer that such member views be heard through a structured consultative committee against 40% who prefer the views to be heard through occasional hearings. As per the Competition Act, the Office of fair Trading comprises of public officers. However the Act , establishes a third agency namely a Competition Advisory Council. The Council would have the function of advising the Minister on matters relating to restrictive business practices with emphasis on consumer protection, promote activities o raise awareness of the business community and consumers on competition and related matters, maintain communication with the business community and consumer associations and promote research in emerging trends in the field of fair competition and best business practices. The Council will comprise of members with different backgrounds including a chairperson, the director of the competition authority, representatives of the Ministry, Attorney-General Office , the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Joint Economic Council, 2 representatives of Consumer organizations and five members knowledgeable in consumer affairs, business, finance, law, public affairs or economics. The Council shall meet at least four times in a year .

Concerning sectoral regulators for electricity, telecommunication etc, about 70% concur with the view that sectoral regulators are needed in certain sectors only with the CA either having power over them(43%) or coordinating with them (27%). The remaining 30% prefer many sectoral regulators with the CA controlling or coordinating with them.

The table below shows the answer to need for specialized sectoral regulators and interaction between the competition authority and those regulators.

	(%)
Yes for some sectors with CA having power over them	43.5
Yes for some sectors with CA coordinating with them	26.9
Yes for many sectors with CA having power over them	17.4
Yes for many sectors with CA coordinating with them	11.5

One of the issues which has caused problems in implementing the law in some countries is the inter-relationship between the competition authority and sectoral regulators .By looking at the first schedule of the Competition Act, it seems that such disputes might not arise in Mauritius as it is stated that the law will not apply to “any practice or agreement expressly required or authorized by an enactment or by some scheme or instrument made under an enactment”. This will imply that regulatory regimes established by statute and administered by regulatory bodies are outside the scope of the law. Besides, the second schedule of the Act excludes certain goods and services excluded from provisions relating to monopoly situations include aviation and harbour services,

broadcasting services, electricity services, financial services, freeport services, information and communication technologies , postal services other than courier, goods and services supplied by state enterprises and water other than for retail trade.

Above 90% of the sample are of the opinion that there should be criminalization prescribed in case the law is violated including about 30% who specify that it should be in some cases only. Regarding the question of exemption from criminalisation, 67% share the view that some should be exempted on public interest grounds, that is when it comes to objectives such as technological advancement, protection of SMEs or socially disadvantaged groups and employment. However a breakdown of the table shows that 51% of the private sector and 62% of government bodies want equal treatment to all, that is, no exemption as regards to criminalization penalty if the law is violated.

	SECTOR		
(%)	Consumer	Private	Government
Yes	78.5	48.6	38.1
No	21.5	51.4	61.9

(Source: Computed)

In case there is a provision for exemption given to criminalization penalty, about 70% believe that well-defined guidelines would be needed to protect against the misuse of such provisions .The remaining chose to solve the issue through judicial scrutiny.

According to the Competition Act, any person engaging in bid-rigging (excluding exemption cases) is liable to a fine not exceeding Rs 500,000 or to imprisonment not exceeding 5 years. All the more, any person who fails to comply without any reasonable excuse to the Act, or gives false information, or destroys information, obstructs to the execution of a warrant, refuse to take oath, fails to answer satisfactorily to the Director or the Tribunal or insults / commits any contempt to the tribunal shall commit an offence and be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs 500,000 or to imprisonment not exceeding 2 years or both. As indicated in Section 16 of the Competition Act, the Director of the competition authority as well as the competition tribunal should have regard to certain aspects in controlling restrictive business practices. Indeed, they should pay attention to the desirability of maintaining and encouraging competition and the benefits to be gained in respect of price, quantity, variety and quality of goods and services. In addition, they should consider the positive effects of absence or preventing competition which might arise including benefits in terms of safety of goods and services, efficiency in production supply and distribution as well as development and use of new and improved goods and services and means of production and distribution. In addition, the sharing of benefits between consumers and business sector has to be considered.

As per the survey, 74 % agree that the law should have provisions for the right to private action. An person can make a complaint about restrictive business practices to the Office of Fair Trading which will investigate the allegation or suspicion. Furthermore, any person aggrieved by the Director 's decision regarding measures taken to prevent or terminate any restrictive business practices including issuing directives for remedial action, can appeal to the Competition tribunal within 30 days. Moreover, any party dissatisfied with the determination of the Competition

tribunal may appeal to the Supreme Court within 21 days of the date of determination informing both the Tribunal and the other party, in writing, the grounds on which appeal is being made.

One of the main concerns of the Authority is to know whether other stakeholders should take part in the consultation decision process. This will normally enhance the process and provide fair and adequate remedies. Advocacy and publicity are the main ways through which different stakeholder groups can participate in the functioning of the Competition Authority. There were in fact 226 responses to this question, showing the enthusiasm that people had in the decision making process of the Authority. 92 participants are of the view that the Competition Authority should involve different stakeholders in its functioning by occasional hearing, 132 are for structured consultative committee while 2 participants are for some other ways. It is found that more people prefer a structured consultative committee so that more people are in the decision making process of the Competition Authority. Out of these, 40.7 % of the total numbers prefer occasional hearing of the Authority. Structured consultative committee represents 58.4 % while those who prefer other ways are only 9 % of the total sample. These results are also categorized between the consumer sector, the private sector and the government sector. Based on the results, we find that in all the sectors, those who prefer structured consultative committee represent a higher percentage of the sub-sample. For example, in the consumer sector, 43.0 % are for occasional hearing while 55.7% are for structured consultative committee. In the private sector, 30.6 % prefer occasional hearing while 69.4 % are for structured consultative committee. The latter method is also preferred in the government sector with 58.5 % in contrast with only 41.5 % for occasional hearing. Only 2 participants are for other reasons in the consumer sector while no participant in the other sectors is for other reasons. Therefore, we can conclude that in all the three sectors, most participants prefer that the Competition Authority should involve with different stakeholders through structured consultative committee. The latter method basically involves the participation of the various stakeholders in the decision making process. The same idea generates the result that participants have a fear for the Authority and they like decisions to be taken by a consultative committee. This should be taken into account so as to reorganize the management of the institution. The following table gives the survey results for this question:

A 27		SECTOR		
		Consumer (%)	Private (%)	Government (%)
	Occasional hearing	43.0	30.6	41.5
	Structured Consultative Committee	55.7	69.4	58.5
	Other	1.3		
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

State-Owned monopolies are basically firms, which are owned by the state in which the latter are the sole supplier of the good or service. Economic theories would define a monopoly market as a

firm in which there is a single producer or supplier of the good. State owned means that the government owns it. This created a barrier to competition in the market because there are barriers to entry for other firms, such as private ones to enter the market. Monopolies have always been regarded as bad with high prices, low innovation, high level of economic efficiency and low output level. The survey also asked participants of whether there are state owned monopolies in Mauritius or not. Out of a total of 252 answers, 192 (76.2 %) answered ‘yes’ while only 60 participants were not aware of any state owned monopolies in Mauritius, representing 23.8% of the total population. Thus, more people are aware of state-owned monopolies in Mauritius. There are in fact vivid facts are in terms of the Central Water Authority (CWA) in which the government is the sole distributor of water supplies in Mauritius, the State Trading Corporation (STC) and others. We analyse the same results in the consumer sector, the private sector and the government sector. There were 172 responses in the consumer sector. 80.8 % opted for ‘yes’ while only 19.2 % opted for ‘no’. Out of a total of 38 responses in the private sector, 26 answered ‘yes’ and 12 answered ‘no’. With a total of 27 answers in the government sector, 64.3 % opted for ‘yes’ while 35.7 % opted for ‘no’. We conclude that in all the sectors, more than 50 percent of the sub-sample was aware of state owned monopolies in Mauritius.

An important aspect of competition in the market is to produce efficiency in terms of prices. A competitive market would normally results to lower prices and optimum quality. Firms in a competitive market cannot set a higher price because other firms would then enter the market to take away the excess profit. A monopoly, however, can charge higher prices as there is a lack of competition in the market. The question that arises in terms of competition policy is to look as whether these state monopolies indulge in any anti-competitive practice or not. In fact, one question in the questionnaire dealt with this issue. There were 247 responses to this question, of which questionnaires were distributed to the consumer sector, the private sector and the government sector. 133 participants answered ‘yes’ and 123 answered ‘no’, making a difference of only about 7 % of those who said no and those who said yes. In both the consumer and producer sector, there are more positive results, representing 56.1% and 62.9% respectively. However, in the government sector, there were more negative results than positive ones, with 62.5 % answering no out of a total of 40 participants. Thus, we observe that fewer firms in the government sector believe that state-owned monopolies indulge in anti-competitive practice. Those in the private sector experience these anti-competitive practices in the market. The survey results for such behaviour are shown in the following table:

A 29	SECTOR		
	Consumer (%)	Private (%)	Government (%)
Yes	56.1	62.9	37.5
No	43.9	37.1	62.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Over the years, there have been various laws regarding competition and consumer protection that have been passed in order to regulate competition and protect the consumer. These have already been discussed in the paragraphs above. As the laws mentions, whenever the consumer is affected, the latter can always approach the former for remedies. Moreover, these laws are meant to regulate competition in the market place. They are in terms of competition policies set out by

the regulatory authority to maintain ‘order’ in the market. Now, there are various reactions of consumers following any anti-competitive practices. Question 30 of the survey asked for this with the different stakeholders. They can in fact seek the help of the legislation, from the judiciary, from consumer forums or from other sources. There were a total of 250 responses to this question. 80 preferred to seek help from legislation, 54 from the judiciary, 108 from consumer forums and 8 from other sources thereby representing 32.0 %, 21.6 %, 43.2 % and 3.2% respectively. In the consumer sector, there were 171 responses, 39 in the private sector and 40 in the government sector. In the consumer sector, 50.3 % opted for consumer forums, help from the legislation ranking second with 30.4 %. 16.4% would seek help from the judiciary and 5% will to other places for remedy. In the private sector, the vast majority will go to the judiciary with 35.9 % while 33.3 % will go to the legislation to report their cases. Only 10 participants argued that they would go to consumer forums, that is, 25.6 %. 5.1 % of the private sectors would however go to some other sources for help. In the government sector, the majority would seek the help of the legislation with 37.5 % while 30% will go for the judiciary and another 30% for consumer forums. 2.5 % will go to other sources. It is therefore observed that the preferred place to seek help in all the sectors has been mainly legislation and judiciary. Consumer forums and other places have been less popular. The different reaction of the various stakeholders are summarized in the following table:

A 30		SECTOR		
		Consumer (%)	Private (%)	Government (%)
	Legislation	30.4	33.3	37.5
	Judiciary	16.4	35.9	30.0
	Consumer forums	50.3	25.6	30.0
	Other	2.9	5.1	2.5
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

An important aspect of government policy is meant to attract foreign direct investment in the country. Foreign firms are willing to invest in the country that is competitive and free from any barrier to entry. Here, the Competition Authority has a vital role to play in not only over viewing the whole market but also to be designed in such a way to attract foreign Direct investment in the country. There are various competition policies that have been passed over the years. For instance, we have the Ombudsman office, which regulates the commercial banks in the country. These foreign firms can either accept or reject the law. An important part of the survey has been to determine the extent to which these government policies are anti-competitive. Participants had to respond as to whether they regard the policy to be insignificant, moderate, significant or huge. There were 82 responses to this question out of which 17 responded ‘insignificantly’, 52 of them moderately agreed with the question, 12 were significantly for pro-competitively behaviour while only 1 participant was hugely with the view that government policy towards foreign direct investment was to be pro-competitive. Thus it is found that the most majority of the sample moderately agreed with the question. They seem to be rather not clear with whether they know the answer or not. When the analysis is categorized between the private sector and the

government sector, it is observed that most of the participants in the private sector responded as ‘moderately agreed with’ with 69.2 % in contrast to 10.3 % who responded insignificantly, 17.9 % as ‘significantly’ and 2.6 % as hugely agreed with. The latter response was not found in the sample of the government sector. Even then we observe a majority of those responding as ‘moderately agreed’ with the question, 11.6 % significantly agreed with and 30.2 % insignificantly. Therefore, in all the sectors analysed, it is observed that most of the participants are only moderately with the view that government policy towards FDI is pro-competitive. The following table lists the results of the survey for this view:

		SECTOR	
		Private (%)	Government (%)
A 31	Insignificantly	10.3	30.2
	Moderately	69.2	58.1
	Significantly	17.9	11.6
	Hugely	2.6	
Total		100.0	100.0

In Mauritius, the law has been recently tailored to cater for various aspects that were previously neglected. These include consumer protection laws via, say, the Competition Authority. Not only those domestic firms are affected by these policies but foreign firms in the region willing to invest and contribute in the economic development of the country. During the recent years, Mauritius has been participating in international trading blocks such as the COMESA, SADC and so on. These institutions are meant to bring international consensus on various issues such as tariffs rates, quotas, economic policies as well as competition policy. When these are taken into account, the Competition Authority can then function not only for the domestic firms but also at a regional level. In fact, question 32 asked participants for their views on a regional approach towards competition policy. Out of a total response of 82, there were 53 (65.4%) positive results and 29 negative results amounting to 23 % of the sample. Thus, more participants in the different sectors are for a regional approach for competition policy. On a sector-wise basis, we observe that 61.5 % of the sub-sample of the private sector gave positive results in relation to negative one amounting to 38.5%. This is also the case in the government sector with a higher percentage (67.4%) of the sample preferring a regional approach to competition policy. The majority of stakeholders therefore desire the latter.

The next part of the survey asked participants any policy in their sector, which they considered anti-competitive. There were 77 responses to this question with 27 people were aware of any such policy while 50 were not. Thus, the majority (64.9 %) of the sample was not aware of any policy in their sectors that they considered anti-competitive. When these results are categorized in terms of the private and government sector, we observe that in the private sector, less people are aware of such policy with 15 of them answering ‘yes’ and 21 of them are not aware of any such policy. In the government sector also, most of them are not aware of any anti-competitive behaviour with awareness to the percentage of 29.3 only (70.7 % were not aware.) They seem to be unaffected by any anti-competitive behaviour. Most of them mentioned that anti-competitive behaviour should be removed in the system. 50 participants (61.7%) answered ‘yes’ and the other 31 participants (38.3) answered ‘no’. Therefore, most of them are for government intervention in the system whenever there is a lack of competition. Such is the case in all the sectors. In fact, 60.5 % of the sub-sample of the private sector are for government intervention while 39.5 % are

against intervention in the market place. In the government sector, 62.8 % are for government intervention while 37.2 % of them are not. Therefore, the majority of them are for government intervention whenever there is a lack of competition. The survey result for this is illustrated in the following table.

		SECTOR	
		Private (%)	Government (%)
A 33	No	58.3	70.7
	Yes	41.7	29.3
Total		100.0	100.0

The government seldom introduces price controls in various forms in order to regulate the market. Economic theories postulate that price controls should be good in cases where it is meant to avoid excess prices in the market. Yet, it is bad when the government introduces it due to monopolistic situations so as to raise the maximum amount of competition. There were a total of 81 responses to the question of whether the government should occasionally introduce price controls. The last part of the survey asked participants of whether the government should occasionally introduce price controls on commodities where there is a lack of competition. The last question asked the participants of whether the price controls that prevent competition should be removed. Out of a total of 46 responses to this question, 17 of them were of the opinion that these price controls should be removed while 29 believed that they should not be removed. Those in the private sector are more willing that price controls be removed than those in the government sector. For instance, 55 % of the sub-sample of private sector answered that price controls should be removed while 45% believed that it should not be removed. The latter view amounts to 76.9 % in the government sector only with only 23.1 % of them for price controls to be removed. Therefore, we observe that those in the private sector are more willing to remove price controls in the market than those in the government sector. The survey result for this is shown in the following table:

		SECTOR	
		Private (%)	Government (%)
A 35	Yes	60.5	62.8
	No	39.5	37.2
Total		100.0	100.0

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Organisations Contacted

1. Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry
2. Ministry of Commerce and Cooperatives
3. Institute of Consumer Protection

Appendix 3

List of Participants

	Name	Organisations	Telephone	Email Address
1.	Mrs Veena Dabeesingh	Financial Services Corporation	203 7000	
2.	Prof Indur Fagoonee	Vice-Chancellor, University of Mauritius	454 5401	
3.	Dr V. Ancharaz	Senior Lecturer, UoM	454 5401	v.ancharaz@uom.ac.mu
4.	Dr C. Jankee.	Senior Lecturer, UoM	454 5401	k.jankee@uom.ac.mu
5.	Reshma Peerun-Fatehmamode	Lecturer, UoM	454 5401	r.peerun@uom.ac.mu
6.	Sunil Bundoo	Lecturer, UoM	454 5401	s.bundoo@uom.ac.mu
7.	Krishna Nair	Institute for Consumer Portection	210 4433	palvi_n@yahoo.com
8.	Mosadeq Sahebodin	ICP	210 4433	mosadeq53@intnet.mu
9.	Charuduth Sooknah	ICP	210 4433	c.sooknah@yahoo.co.uk
10.	P. Radha	Min. of Commerce		
11.	K Srinivavsan	Min. of Commerce		r.srinivasan@servihoo.com
12.	Fazal Ebrahim Dawood	Manager, Shoprite		
13.		Assn of Advertising Agencies		
14.	S. Boyjonauth	Reporter, Le Matinal		
15.	Ashok Beeharry	Reporter, MBC-TV	602 1200	ashokb@intnet.mu
16.		Federation of Civil Service Unions		
17.		Federation des Syndicats des Corps Constitués		
18.		Federation of Progressive Unions		
19.		Central Statistics Office		
20.		Central Electricity Board		
21.	P. Nair	NGO Trust Fund		
22.		National Women's Council		
23.	UoM students			

Mauritius Competition Policy National Reference Group Meeting

Friday 10th February 2006

University of Mauritius, Reduit

Session Chairperson: Mrs Reshma Peerun-Fatehmamode

14.00-14.30 Registration

14.30 – 15.00 Opening Session

Welcome address – Reshma Peerun -Fatehmamode.

Address by Dr Chandan Jankee.

Address by Mosadeq Sahebodin, Coordinator, ICP.

Address by Minister I. Seebun.

Address by Minister R. Jeetah.

15.00- 15.30 Tea Break

15.30 - 15.50 Presentation of survey findings by Sunil Bundoo.

15.50 – 16.20 Presentation of survey findings –part II by Reshma Peerun-Fatehmamode.

16.20-17.00 Open Discussion

17.00 Vote of Thanks

Appendix 5

The NRG Meeting in the local press.



News on Sunday 03 February – 09 February 2006

Competition

Lancement d'un projet de recherche sur la concurrence.

Le Département d'économie et des statistiques, de l'Université de Maurice et l'Institut pour la protection des consommateurs (ICP) ont donné le coup d'envoi, ce matin, d'un projet de recherche en vue de l'élaboration d'une politique de la concurrence à Maurice.

Ce projet, intitulé, *Capacity Building on Competition Policy in Select Eastern and Southern African Countries*, est effectué par le *Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS)*, une organisation internationale basée en Inde, dans sept pays africains, notamment le Botswana, l'Éthiopie, le Malawi, Maurice, le Mozambique, la Namibie et l'Ouganda. C'est le Département de l'économie et des statistiques de l'Université de Maurice qui agira en tant que *Research Partner*, alors que l'ICP sera l'*advocacy partner*. Le rôle du Research Partner sera de mener, par le biais de questionnaires, d'évaluer la perception des consommateurs sur la concurrence à Maurice. Cette recherche débouchera sur la rédaction d'un *Country Paper* qui sera soumis aux différents *stakeholders* pour leurs commentaires.

Au cours d'une conférence de presse à l'Université de Maurice, Mme Reshma Peerun-Fatehmamode, Project Coordinator a expliqué l'importance de ce projet pour Maurice. Comme d'autres pays africains, Maurice a adopté une Competition Act, mais la mise en application de cette loi est en veilleuse. C'est pour cela, a-t-elle souligné qu'il faudra conscientiser les différents *stakeholders* sur la nécessité d'une politique de concurrence forte. Le projet, plus connu sous le nom de code 7Up3, la troisième d'une série qui a couvert deux autres groupes de sept pays, vise à renforcer les connaissances sur la politique de la concurrence.

M. Sunil Bundoo, autre chargé de cours qui sera engagé dans la recherche a expliqué la méthodologie que compte adopter les chercheurs pour ce projet. Pour sa part, Le Dr Chandan Jankee, aussi chargé de cours à l'Université et qui fait aussi partie de l'équipe de recherche, s'est appesanti sur la portée d'une telle recherche. Il a précisé que le *Country Paper* qui émergera permettra de faire une comparaison avec les autres pays africains participant au projet, et ainsi établir une synergie entre les différents pays.

Pour sa part, Mosadeq Sahebodin, coordinateur de l'ICP, a expliqué l'intérêt de l'ICP dans ce projet. Selon lui, une politique de concurrence devra promouvoir une compétition plus saine, et par conséquent des meilleurs prix pour les consommateurs, une amélioration de la qualité des produits et des services, ainsi qu'une diversité des produits et services. Il a souligné que le retard apporté dans la mise en application du Competition Act permet encore des pratiques commerciales anti-compétitives, telle que la vente en dessous du prix coûtant de certains produits, ou l'imposition d'un prix par un opérateur en situation de position dominante, et cela à l'encontre de l'intérêt des consommateurs.

En tant *qu'advocacy partner*, l'ICP aura la tâche de réunir une *National Reference Group* (NRG), comprenant différents *stakeholders*, dont le gouvernement, le secteur privé, les syndicats, les organisations gouvernementales, ainsi que les autorités régulatrices, comme l'ICTA et l'IBA. La première réunion du NRG est prévue pour le 25 mai prochain. Elle permettra aux participants de donner leur point de vue sur une ébauche du Country Paper qui avait déjà été présenté à la réunion de lancement du 7Up3 à Entebbe en mars dernier. Après l'adoption de la forme finale du *Country Paper*, en décembre 2006, l'ICP réalisera, avec la collaboration du *research partner* et de CUTS des programmes de formation en vue de renforcer les connaissances des participants sur une politique de concurrence.

Le Défi-Plus Saturday 4th February.

BRIEFING

FINANCIAL
NEWS February

The present Competition Act will be overhauled and a Competition Commission will be set up in the near future, says Minister of Industry, Commerce and Cooperatives, Dr Rajesh Jeetah.

Govt moots law to check unfair trading

“Competition is high on the agenda of this Government. Unfair competition impacts negatively on trade. Fair trade and fair competition go hand in hand with the interest of consumers,” Minister Jeetah says.

These were the reassuring words of Minister Jeetah to some forty participants at a meeting called to debate the findings of a survey conducted by the research partners.

He however assures the first draft of the Competition Act will be circulated on the Ministry's website next March. Government will set up a Competition Commission on the British model.

The Minister for Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection, Mrs Indira Seebun, says she is happy to be associated with such a laudable initiative.

“More competition means lower prices. This initiative is in line with Government's policy of putting people first,” she said.

“We want to remove the price burden from consumers' shoulders” She further affirmed that the Capacity Building project will benefit consumers as well as the business partners. She concluded by thanking the ICP coordinator for his commitment in fighting to



Minister Jeetah

safeguard consumers' interests. ICP Coordinator, Mosadeq Sahebodin explains that consumer organizations have an important role to play in raising awareness and stimulating interest among consumers about what competition policy is for and how it can be used.

However political support is crucial to the success of competi-

tion law. The new Government's decision to place consumer protection portfolio under the Ministry for Consumer Protection, while the competition policy portfolio stays with the Ministry for Commerce, may lead to a dispersion of responsibility, against consumers' interest, he adds.

A survey conducted by Reshma Peerun-Fatchmamode, Chandan Jankee and Sunil Bundoo among 200 consumers, 50 private firms and 50 Government institutions, points out that 92% of respondents believe that anti-competitive practices prevail in the country. 78% think that the present laws are insufficient while 70% are in favour of a Competition Authority.

Most respondents state that price fixing was the no1 anti-competitive practice, followed by market sharing (17% and entry barrier (16%) The majority of respondents believe that anti-competitive practices prevail mostly in the consumer goods sector, followed by the manufacturing sector and the agricultural sector. 63% believe that anticompetitive practices originate outside the country.

Asked how they would react to anticompetitive practices, 43 % say they would go to consumer forums, while 32% say they would seek help from legislation. These findings will be included in a proposed Country Research Paper, to be presented at the next Regional Conference in Addis Ababa in March.

A synthesis of Country Papers of the six other countries of Eastern and Southern Africa concerned by the project will be compiled for reference.

News on Sunday 17 February – 23 February.