

NCT representing Consumers Internationally



ACP-EU Follow-up Committee Conference.

Mr Michael Gaweseb of Namibia Consumer Trust (NCT), has been appointed a member of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific – European Union (ACP-EU) Follow-up Committee of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Michael Gaweseb has been nominated by Consumers International for the period April 2013 to October 2015.

The follow-up committee is composed of 12 European and 12 ACP members, who represent a variety of civil society organisations. It meets twice a year on average. The first meeting for the new mandate took place in Brussels on 6 and 7 June 2013. The committee engages in such matters as highlighting challenges facing ACP countries in effectively integrating into the global economy, and calls for the appropriate economic development strategies as well as aid-for-trade schemes to be put in place.

It also calls for strengthening social protection schemes so that universal social systems are provided in all ACP countries. The committee's declaration further calls on the governments of the ACP countries to adopt legislation and strategies on the right to food at national level and establish the appropriate institutional mechanisms to ensure safe and nutritious food for their populations. The declaration also calls on the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the EU to ensure that during trade reforms and trade negotiations with ACP countries, proper account is taken of

the need to help these countries reduce food and nutrition insecurity, particularly as regards to women, young people and other population groups. The Committee is further asking that technical assistance and capacity building be provided to help developing countries comply with agricultural and food regulations and standards to be strengthened. This is particularly key in relation to NCT findings of poor food labelling in Namibia that raises food safety questions.

There were tests done in recent months on maize sold on Namibian shelves and this led to the discovery of mostly undeclared Genetically Modified Organism (GMO). Further tests were done on meat, which also revealed inadequate declaration on food labels with regard to content of processed meat products. These findings enabled calling on the Namibian authorities to increase protection of public interest with regard to nutritious and safe food to increase consumer protection.

Through his work as a member of the EES Committee Mr. Gaweseb has also been observing the plenary meeting of the Joint ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly. This was held in Brussels from 17 to 19 June 2013 where some Namibian Parliamentarians participated. At regular intervals the EESC also organises regional seminars in ACP countries.

He therefore also attended the regional seminar held in Senegal during 3-5 July 2013. Mr. Gaweseb has been an Economic and Social Justice activist for many years and has been attending the EES Committee meetings as an observer in the past, but attended this time as a Committee member.

The appointment could not have come at a better time as consumer protection activism in Namibia has reached unprecedented levels in Namibia. He hopes to be able to use these experiences to continue contributing positively towards national development goals and vision 2030.



ACP-EU Follow-up Committee Conference.

Namibia's Economic System contributing to nutrition related deaths

The former Prime Minister of Namibia, Hon Nahas Angula reportedly described the Namibian economic system as a scandal in 2007. He is further quoted to have called on the private sector to assist government with regard to income distribution, employment creation and improved living conditions. There is no doubt that he is certainly one of the front line campaigners in government on issues that affect the poor. He also called for a developmental state some years back.

It is not quite clear how much of influence he was able to exert on colleagues as the constitution mandates the Prime Minister to advise and assist the President in execution of government business. The Prime Minister somehow managed to make a u-turn when the Basic Income Grant (BIG) was up for government consideration when he reportedly mentioned something to the effect that BIG may be a "joke".

The current Prime Minister, Hon Hage Geingob on the other hand reportedly stated "If people remain hungry, there won't be any peace", while supporting BIG. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) also supported Hon. Geingob's view when they say "Volatility on food markets can quickly translate into volatility on the streets". The former PM Hon. Angula deserves credit for his largely consistent stance with regard to criticism aimed towards the system that perpetuates injustice against the vulnerable. It is however hoped that the new PM will be able to somewhat influence the system to include the less fortunate in accessing the wealth of the nation.

In the meantime, several Namibians reportedly died of hunger/malnutrition. The President, His Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba reportedly ordered "all stakeholders" to ensure that no Namibian dies from hunger as related by the current PM.

NCT is more than happy to embrace this order, not only because it is in line with the job description of a development professional organisation, but also for the same reasons advanced by the PM and WFP. It is worth mentioning that we did a quick google search with regard to what Namibian "Economists" offer as a solution and that is nowhere to be found. They are probably only waiting to "advise" against changes to the current system.

It is also not surprising that most of these GDP Activists also known as Economists are employed in the biggest beneficiaries of the current system such as banks, mining, etc. By the way there is a new book written referring to GDP as "Gross Domestic Problem" contrary to the usual usage as "Gross Domestic Product". An article in which words are limited cannot provide an instant solution to a significant problem, but could contribute to the debate. The constitution provides for a "mixed economy", however the system is managed as a "free market".

When the Deputy Minister of Environment and Tourism stated publicly that service in Namibia is poor, this was cited in a complaint lodged with the Namibia Tourism Board. The official from the latter state owned body responded "we in Namibia have adopted free market policy". Even the President of the Bankers Association made a similar statement some years back with regard to the existence of a "free market system" in Namibia. This notion is incorrect, but is widespread and can be seen being implemented in the whole economy, knowingly or unknowingly. Staple food, maize is declared a controlled crop enabling manipulation of supply and price, mostly to protect producers and millers at the expense of consumers.

The maize industry has the audacity to justify this arrangement by comparing it with subsidies offered to farmers in industrialised countries. This kind of careless attitude is also displayed by "scientist" in Namibia when asked about potential risk to consumers when consuming certain food stuff. Apparently fried chicken, etc, poses equal or more adverse health risks than say disease infected food.

There is currently talk that Namibian Dairy producers and sellers demand protection against "foreign imports" through restrictions and perhaps similar arrangements as maize. They request this after they repeatedly enjoyed infant industry protection over many years. Well this argument of food security is understandable from a food sovereignty point of view. However, if Namibians are about 2 million compared to about 4 million cattle, there is food security with regard to protein (meat).

However the national meat corporation not only prefers to rather export their "free range beef", but recently referred to attempts by government to allocate 30% stake towards public interest as "open guerrilla warfare". Even the poultry farmers want protection against consumers, but consumers are left to the vices of the imagined "free market". Namibians seemingly would rather succumb to malnutrition than going on the street as is feared by WFP and top politicians.

Research has shown that food prices in Namibia are rapidly increasing. Maize has very little if any nutritional value, thus need to be fortified with vitamins, etc. However other vital nutritional complement such as protein evades consumers through constantly demanded sustained protection without intervention to enable consumers. Many "free market" enthusiasts forget that authorities can intervene in the management of prices. There is a price control act (25 of 1964), but it is unknown if it is being used.

Price control is also done in such sectors as electricity, fuel and taxi fare, although the latter are largely in private hands. Telecommunications in Namibia is also almost wholly owned by Namibians, but this too does not translate into reduced charges, despite declared commitment to universal access to all Namibians. Profits in this sector are by far one of the most lucrative. Thus if Namibian ownership translate into enhanced quality of life for Namibians it is a difficult argument to make.

When attempts are made to enable public interest, strong language such as “guerrilla warfare” is used and politicians are threatened with job losses and or capital flight. Equally importantly the private sector should also be reminded that they failed to create jobs.

Even if Namibians would rather prefer to succumb to hunger than speak up, the state is held liable for consumers’ right to food and nutrition. It can be argued that such deaths are nature’s way of assessing leadership. In that regard the President’s order is in line with the state’s role as duty bearer.

It is important that we realise as a nation that throwing most money into education and health will not reap much benefits if our priorities in the agricultural sector in terms of household food security is not balanced. For a start the above can aid “freedom from hunger”. However, for meaningful change, this must be accompanied by intensive public interest favouring state intervention in all sectors of the economy, especially the mining and financial sectors. The current arrangements are causing more problems for Namibia through concentration of wealth while the majority is being excluded from meaningful participation in the economy.



NCT grassroots public lecture in Oshakati.



Namibia Consumer Trust | registration number T382/12

Contact Details

Tel: +264 61 402 498 | Fax: +264 61 402 479 | Mobile: +264 85 620 5453
P. O. Box 11376, Klein Windhoek, Namibia | Email: namibianconsumer@iway.na
Website: www.namibianconsumer.org

Donate to the Namibia Consumer Trust for the enhancement of consumer rights:
Bank Account: Bank Windhoek | Branch: Maerua Mall | Acc. No.: 8003178548