



DEVELOPING A COMPETITION CULTURE IN CARICOM

The Role of the CARICOM Competition Commission

Economists and legal scholars around the world have long recognised the benefits of competition to consumers and to the economy in general. However, it is also acknowledged that in order for effective competition to take place, an environment that supports rivalry among firms must first be created.

Many perceive competition culture to be closely related to the age of the market economy and subsequently the experience of the competition authority. The CARICOM Competition Commission (CCC) on the other hand takes a wider view of what competition culture entails. For this agency, competition culture relates to the manner in which firms, consumers and the public sector act in given market situations. Based on this broader idea of competition culture, the CCC sees competition enforcement as only part of a larger set of components that collectively determine individual or group behaviour in product markets. The full set of components comprising competition culture is illustrated in the diagram below.



Since its establishment in 2008, the CCC has sought to take a leading role in the development of CARICOM's competition culture by dealing with each of the abovementioned components.

In the area of competition law, the CCC continued to encourage Member States to enact the necessary legislation and to establish national competition authorities in accordance with Article 170 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. To date, the agency has provided technical support to the countries of Suriname and Belize. For Suriname, support came in the form of assisting the country in drafting its national competition legislation. This legislation is expected to be presented to the country's parliament in 2014. Regarding Belize, technical assistance was provided in finalising the documents needed to access funding under the 10th European Development Funds that the country could soon establish its national competition authority.

Given that competition culture also involves developing the public's awareness of the advantages of implementing competition rules, the CCC has made this activity an annual component in its work plan. Over the years, the CCC has carried out educational activities, utilised printed and visual media channels, and published pamphlets in relation to the potential benefits of competition law and policy in the region. In the upcoming months the CCC will add to its information sharing platform by establishing its own website. In this way, general information and regional developments on competition policy and consumer protection will be readily available to the public.

Moreover, the CCC will engage the competition agencies in CARICOM in establishing a regional advocacy programme. This advocacy programme would seek to develop work products that illustrate the benefits of competitive product markets to specific target groups such as the media, consumers, businesses and government agencies. Also planned will be the drafting of a document highlighting the experiences of competition agencies in the region in the area advocacy.

The CCC also notes that preserving competitive markets in CARICOM is also largely dependent on the availability of skilled economists and legal professionals who are familiar with the intricacies of competition law and policy. In this regard, the agency has committed itself to ensuring that modules on competition law and the economics of competition are included in the curricula of the universities located in the region. In the interim, however, over the past 5 years the CCC has held several workshops for the judiciary, government officials, and businesses aimed at enhancing the knowledge on competition law of these respective groups. The workshops conducted for the judiciary in 2010 were especially recognised by the ACP/EU Trade.Com facility as a "best practice" and as a model for other African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions to follow.

This year the CCC intends to resume its work in capacity building. Several workshops are already planned for the promotion of the CCC's Rules of Procedure in the countries of Jamaica, Belize and Trinidad and Tobago. At these workshops other presentations will be made to sensitize various interest groups about competition law and Chapter VIII of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.

For any more information about the work of the CCC please feel free to direct your queries to admin@ccc.sr.