

GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT RETREAT NOW ON ITS COMPETITION AGENDA

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“Ghana is in the process of developing a competition policy, which would set the stage for the subsequent adoption of the Competition Law”, observed Kwame Fosu, Director (Legal) at Ministry of Trade and Industry – who was speaking on behalf of the Hon’ble Minister of Trade and Industry Mrs. Hannah Tetteh, at the third round of the national reference group (NRG) meeting organised as part of the 7Up4 project here in Accra, today.

This meeting was jointly organised by the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER, Ghana) and CUTS International to discuss the findings from the 7Up4 project – and trace the path forward for competition reforms in Ghana.

Dr. Charles Ackah, Senior Research Scholar at ISSER and the coordinator of the 7Up4 project in Ghana observed that it would be disappointing if the present draft (2008) Competition Bill ended up the same way as the two earlier Bills (of 1993 and 2004). There was a consensus in the meeting that the discourse on competition reforms initiated in the country through the NRG meetings should continue beyond the period of the 7Up4 project – and act as a catalyst to ultimately enable the adoption of the competition law in Ghana. Consumer are having to pay a high price on account of the absence of a competition agency in the country, given that anti-competitive practices are proliferating unabated in various sectors of the economy.

It was also agreed that efforts would be made through a communiqué to urge the Hon’ble Minister of Trade and Industry to establish a working group on competition policy and law – and induct core members of the NRG into this working group.

An important observation was that it is critical for a country like Ghana to identify priority sectors, wherein the government should promote competition to derive benefits for maximum number of (poor) consumers. It was therefore imperative that the competition policy of Ghana is developed taking into consideration the developmental goals of the national government. However, the fact that Ghana did not have a proper national development plan might make this endeavour a bit complicated.

A fundamental point that policymakers lack proper appreciation of the benefits from pursuing competition reforms was raised and discussed at length. Rijit Sengupta representing CUTS informed the meeting that an effort is being made under the project to engage with a group of key Parliamentarians and to brief them about the benefits from an effective competition regime. Members of the NRG echoed the fact that this was a very critical activity, and would help in fast-tracking adoption of the competition policy and law in the country. Such advocacy efforts would help maintain pressure on the government and ensure that it does not retreat on its agenda for competition reforms.

There was agreement across the table that role of the media would be extremely critical in this entire process, and that there is a need to design advocacy efforts having the media as one of the key drivers of the process.

ISSER announced that it was contemplating development of a short course on competition policy and law for young professionals at the University of Ghana. They were also hopeful of establishing a Centre for Trade Policy and Competition Analysis at the University of Ghana with assistance from CUTS, in the near future.