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Subject: Response to the Consultation paper on “Review of measures to protect interest of consumers in the telecom Sector” dated 2nd August, 2010

Dear Sir,

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's (TRAI) Consultation Paper on “**Review of measures to protect interest of consumers in the telecom Sector**”

Please find our response to the consultation paper.

We would like to participate in any further opportunity to discuss these issues and looking forward to the counter-comments on the same.

Yours Sincerely,

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--Disclaimer--

Please note that the views presented below are solely of the students and not of the Institute.

Issue 2.11

a) What should be the benchmark for the parameter —Provision of a landline Telephone after registration of demand?

Ans.

1. In this era of competitive market, it is dependent on the operator to provide connection as early as possible to increase its customer base
2. We can only set a particular benchmark so that their performance can be rated on the basis of provisioning.
3. Provision of landline telephone within 5 working days (subject to technical feasibility) from the date of registration of new connection.
4. In case of delay, specify the reason for delay to the customer beforehand.

b) Do you agree that parameter —Provision of a landline Telephone after registration of demand may be removed from the list of parameters requiring mandatory compliance to the Authority?

Ans.

1. No, it cannot be removed from the mandatory compliance of the authority because this may put a hurdle in rural tele-density. A connection which is far away from the nearest office will be ignored.
2. A customer can opt for private service provider depending on his tariff plans. And in case provisioning services are not up to the benchmark, he has the right to complain regarding the same.
3. In case of Authentication problem operators has to specify the same to the Authority.
4. He can also run away from the criterion of fulfillment.

Issue 2.16

a) Do you suggest any changes to the benchmark for the above parameter for landline fault repair, including rent rebate for delay in rectification of fault? If so, please provide details.

Ans.

1. Although today the telecom market is competitive enough to drive these issues so as to gain customer royalty, but still we require the benchmark to be set by the authority. Also it is not feasible for an operator to have same set of recovery time for rural as well as urban area, so different time period should be defined for both areas.
2. More than 90% of Complaint registered within the business hour should be recovered the next day in case of urban case and within next 3 working days in rural case.
3. 100% complaint should be recovered within 3 working days in urban area and 5 working days in rural area. In case of delay rebate should be paid to the customer.
4. Also a rating should be there by which operators can be rated on basis of services quality which can be audited by an auditing committee

b) What framework do you suggest to ensure payment/adjustment of rebate for prolonged landline phone fault as per QoS regulations?

Ans.

1. Urban

- Faults pending for ≥ 3 days and < 7 days: Rent rebate for 7 days.
- Faults pending for ≥ 7 days and < 15 days: Rent rebate for 15 days.
- Faults pending for ≥ 15 days: rent rebate for one month.

2. Rural

- Faults pending for ≥ 5 days and < 9 days: Rent rebate for 9 days.
- Faults pending for ≥ 9 days and < 17 days: Rent rebate for 17 days.
- Faults pending for > 17 days: rent rebate for one month.

3. All these should be subject to technical feasibility.

c) How do you propose to ensure its effectiveness?

Ans.

1. Operator should give the receipt copy to the customer after the fault is resolved specified the date of lodging the complaint and date of repairing signed by both the parties.
2. Operator should automatically deduct the specified amount from the next month bill, amount specified in the bill.
3. In case operator does not do it proactively, customer can approach the operators regional office with the receipt and copy of receipt which can be deposited with the operator and same amount will be deducted from the bill
4. In case operator refuses to deduct the amount, customer should ask the appropriate reason in written.
5. He can send the same to head of office and wait for response. Operator should respond within 2 working days failing to which customer can approach TRAI/Legal body.
6. In case of failure of above proper penalty should be put on operator/s from the regulatory body.

Issue 2.18

a) Do you propose any changes to the existing provisions relating to shift of a landline telephone connection?

Ans.

1. In Today's competitive market customer churn is the major factor and no operator wants to lose his customer. This service will give an operator competitive edge over other. Hence this should not be regulated by and governing body.
2. But as the customer shifts to new area he/she wants to retain the same number with him within same circle. Therefore this should be again judged based on benchmark set and not to be regulated.

3. Time period of 3 days defined by TRAI is appropriate time up to which 95% connectivity should be made and 100% in 5 days. Based on the service provided and benchmark set, operator's performance would be evaluated

b) Parameters applicable for both Basic Telephone Service and Cellular Mobile Telephone Service

Ans.

As the teledensity for landline and cellular mobile service is much different, therefore we cannot have same parameters for both. Hence

1. Basic Telephone Service:

- Authority should not make it mandatory for operators but can set the benchmarks on basis of which service of an operator can be evaluated.
- 95% shift within same circle should be made within 2 working days and in 4 working days in case of different circle. Request made after the business hours should be considered as next day's request.
- 100% shift within same circle in 3 working days and in different circle within 5 working day

2. Cellular mobile services

- Cellular market is facing tough competition today and customer churn is increasing at an alarming rate.
- But major constraint in cellular service is MNP which will be implemented as par TRAI after 31st Oct. once MNP is implemented, it will take maximum 4-5 hours after the submission of request for any operator to switch the number to different operator/location according to TRAI recommendations.

Issue 2.22

a) Do you suggest any change in existing provisions to ensure timely termination of service/closure? If so, please provide details.

Ans.

1. Customer can make a written request or request through call/verbal communication for termination of connection. As it is difficult for a operator to disconnect on basis of verbal communication, he can authenticate the user by asking the relevant details.
2. Time period of 7 days should be reduced to 5 days, in which an operator can verify his billing and other details.
3. After 5 days customer should not be charged for any call/services
4. Company should refund back the deposits within 15 days of request for termination. Also if the last bill is yet to be paid, operator should deduct the deposited amount and ask/refund depending on deposits.

- b) **Do you agree with the suggestions for seeking explicit consent of the customer, in writing or SMS or e-mail or FAX, to continue with the service, once a request has been made for termination of service?**

Ans.

1. Written or SMS or e-mail or FAX request can be accepted after it has been authenticated by customer. In this case customer should be allowed to take decision within 2 days of request made for termination.
2. In case customer asks for continuing the services after 2 days he/she should be charged appropriate amount for continuing the services. And if the request is made after 5 days then the request should be considered as a request for new connection.
3. In case customer repeats the same for second time then he/she should be charged certain amount for continuing the service and this should increase depending on the time he makes the same request.

Issue 2.25

- a) **Do you agree with the time period of four weeks provided for resolution of billing/charging complaints? If not, please suggest alternatives.**

Ans.

1. Four weeks period for resolution of billing/charging complaints is sufficient time for an operator after which a customer can lodge a complaint for the delay caused. Also as the subscriber base is increasing an operator requires some time period to audit the billing detail.
2. Also this service should be operator specific. If an operator is capable of solving the issue before 4 weeks he will gain more customer loyalty and will help him in CRM. These kind of services provide an edge to an operator over other operators.

Issue 2.28

- a) **Do you agree with present provisions regarding period of one week for applying credit/waiver/adjustment to customer's account upon resolution of billing complaint?**

Ans. These should be different for postpaid and prepaid customer

1. Postpaid customer
 - Customer should be informed via SMS or Call or IVR service as the resolution takes place. Within 24 hours operator should ask the customer about the application of credit. In case customer wants his outstanding bill payment to be done from that amount, it should be done within 2 days of resolution.
 - If customer wants his amount to be adjusted in next bill. Operator can do so.
 - 2 days time period is sufficient for any operator as customer already waits for 4 weeks for resolution.

2. Prepaid customer

- This segment comprises of 95% of cellular subscriber, therefore operator should concentrate in satisfying them. He/she should be informed from the operator with SMS/Call/IVR service.
- 2 days is sufficient time period for any operator. Within 2 days amount should be added back to customers balance.
- Also it depends on operator if they want to solve this issue faster than 2 days which may again help them in gaining customer loyalty.

Issue 2.32

a) What should be the time period and terms and conditions for refund of deposits after closure/termination of service?

Ans.

1. First of all it depends on an operator to allow the customer to make out going call after he has registered for termination. In case he is allowed to make outgoing calls then this process should be given 60 days time period.
2. 60 days time period is too much for a service provider to refund the amount if the services are limited to incoming only. It may be the case that a customer is migrating from one place to another. Hence 30 (4 weeks+2 days for refunding) days after lodging the request is sufficient time period. Failing to which an operator should 12% per annum (1% per month).
3. In case a customer is roaming customer he/she should be given prior notification of termination of services and then within 30 days amount should be refunded to him.
4. In case of by-monthly billing Cycle, Company should refund the amount within one month depending on the completion of billing period. If request for termination is made after one month then service should be terminated the next month and refund should be after one month of termination

b) What steps do you suggest for timely refund of deposits after closure/ termination of service?

Ans.

1. As the request for termination is made, update the customer regarding the billing details and refund amount.
2. At the end of month customer should be forwarded full details of the bill and in case amount is deducted from refund then left over amounts details.
3. In case amount is left yet to paid after deducting it from last bill, company should pay back the same within 2 weeks time period.

Issue 2.34

a) Do you suggest any changes to the present benchmark of 15 days for the parameter —Service provisioning/ Activation Time?

Ans.

1. No, service provisioning/ Activation Time have to be different either on basis of rural and urban or Metros and different circles.
2. For Urban, 7 working days of time period for service provisioning is sufficient time period.
3. For Rural, 15 days is sufficient time for any operator.
4. Again these services are operator dependent where a particular benchmark has been set by the authority and if any operator provides service provisioning before 7 or 15 days depending on the area then he gains customer loyalty.
5. In case Payment towards installation charge & security deposits is taken broadband connection is not provided within specific time period a penalty of Rs.20 per day should be put on the operator which has to be deducted from the first bill of customer.
6. Also in these types of cases where payment is made and connection is yet to be established proper guidelines should be set up by the authority in which customer can demand full amount back and is free to switch to new service provider

b) How the present provisions can be effectively implemented?

Ans.

1. Increase the penalty amount by Rs.10 per day for first 3 days and then by Rs.30, so that a service provider provides connectivity within 15 days after the made is made.
2. Prior to the payment operator should find out location details and should work accordingly. In case connectivity is not possible within 15 days, Customer should be asked to make half payment at the time of registration and left over amount after connectivity. In this case penalty period can be increased to 18 days.

Issue 2.36

a) Do you suggest any changes to present benchmark for the parameter —Fault Repair/ Restoration Time and provision for rebates?

Ans.

No changes, this have been properly provisioned which is minimum time period any service provider will require for fault repair and is sufficient from customers perspective also. Only the implementation part should be checked properly by the authority whether 99% of cases fall under 3 days or not.

Issue 2.40

- a) Do you propose any change in the existing system of selection of tariff plans for the audit of metering and billing system of service providers to make whole exercise more effective?**

Ans.

1. Auditing of plan which holds subscribers less than 10% will not be feasible taking cost factor into consideration for a service provider.
2. 10 service plan along with 3 prepaid and 2 postpaid is a optimum mix which can audited and in any plan if subscribers are more than 10% than that plan auditing will help in proper auditing
3. In case if more than 3 prepaid plan holds more than 10% subscribers than the plan holding more number of subscribers should be audited by the company.

Issue 2.42

- a) What method of alert do you prefer for premium service calls (Call rates higher than normal local call charges rates) before such calls are put through?**

Ans.

1. IVR in case of voice call is the feasible option for both the customer as well as service provider. Apart from normal call/SMS, if a customer wants to access value added services he can be informed before hand by an IVR system.
2. In case SMS services customer should get a check message from the service provider regarding the cost of the service.
3. Prices of these value added services should be mentioned/specified clearly in the advertisement or any other mode of promotion.
4. In case of web application/Data services customer can be informed about charges at the end/termination of that session. This is done by most of the operators which specifies that amount/usage done by the user.

Issue 2.44

- a) What information in your view should be provided to prepaid subscribers immediately on completion of every call to facilitate him understand his usages and verify correctness of the deductions?**

Ans.

1. Call duration/Call summary/Data usage should be shown at the end of every call/SMS/Data services depending on the service being used by the customer for at least 10 seconds or if possible until the customer cancel that display.
2. Per call/sec charges should be mentioned depending on STD/ISD/local calls. For example Last call charged at rate **Rs per sec/min.
3. Charges and Balance amount should be shown along with the summary. In case customer is using some additional pack apart from service pack, then details regarding that pack along

with the above mentioned details should be shown. For example in case A company's subscriber is using night calling pack then amount spend/call duration on that service should be mentioned properly.

4. These services can be shown at the end of every call or on demand basis where customer can send toll free message to get the balance information.
5. Also if customer has registered for "DO NOT DISTURB" service he/she should not get any advertisement or other information about from call details and charges.

Issue 2.46

a) What information do you feel is necessary after recharging a prepaid connection to ensure complete value for money immediately after recharging/top up?

Ans.

1. In case of recharge coupons details of administrative cost, service tax, and talk time should be mentioned on coupons itself and once recharged, SMS stating total balance should reach to the customer.
2. In case of mobile based/machine based recharged or online recharge customer should get all the above details on SMS from the operator.
3. In case customer wants to see the details of latest recharged he/she should be given toll free numbers where they can get the information by sending free SMS.

Issue 3.46

a) In your opinion, what should be done to increase the awareness about the call centre?

Ans.

Customer Awareness should be given the highest priority for effective relationship building

1. Most of the customer call commercials played on TV channels emphasize on the services they offer rather than the benefits of the customer care
2. Government should take an initiative to ensure every CSP has a TV commercial emphasizing the benefits of calling a call center (especially the Doordarshan Channels)
3. The same audio should be played on every radio channel
4. Posters, Placards, Hoardings should be kept at every nook and corner of the city / town

Remembering the fact that 198 is the common number of the call centers for most of the CSPs,

1. Publish the same through pamphlets and send it to their addresses
2. Prepare some commercials by Govt. of respective states and play them in TV Channels, Radio Channels, Print Media, Theaters etc

Issue 3.53

a) How can we enhance accessibility of call centres for booking the complaints?

Ans.

1. Respecting the decision of TRAI that the 2 QoS parameters i.e., Response time to the customer for assistance (Benchmark >95%) and Percentage of calls answered by the operators (voice to voice) within 60 seconds (Benchmark >90%), benchmark can be achieved only when the call center executives are in proportionate to the number of subscribers the CSP is having.
2. For example, BHARTI AIRTEL has a subscriber base of >136million (as of Jun '10) and AIRCEL has a subscriber base of >41million. So, the call center executives handling BHARTI AIRTEL issues should be more than 3 times as compared to AIRCEL. This is infact not the case and hence there is a problem for not reaching the benchmark for most of the operators.
3. Few operators charge the customer to have the accessibility to talk to the customer care executive. This should be removed and made free of cost.

b) What are your suggestions about the location of the menu option for talking to a customer care agent/executive in the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system of the Call Centre/ customer care number, for facilitating easy access to the call centre agent/executive? Should it be the first sub-menu at the third layer, the first layer being the choice of language and the second layer being service menu?

Ans.

1. First sub-menu at the third layer is a good option for the customer
2. Most of the cases it is heard that "press 9 to talk to our customer care executive" and this message is heard at last. If possible, this audio message should be played as soon as we enter the third layer

c) Should TRAI mandate all service providers to provide complaint booking number accessible from other telecom networks also for complaint booking in case of service disruption? Should such call centre numbers also be toll free?

Ans.

1. Yes, TRAI should mandate all CSP to provide complaint booking number accessible from other telecom network also for complaint booking
2. Now that MNP is yet on the roll, we should have a unique toll free number even if it is an inter-operator grievance.
3. Most of the cases, in any family, not all members will have the same service providers' network. In such cases, it is de facto that customer calls using a network of other CSP.
4. The customer calls to express his grievance and this is not the right situation to charge a customer, so any type of call center numbers should be toll free.

Issue 3.56

a) Do you agree that docket numbers should also be sent to subscribers' through SMS who is booking complaint?

Ans.

1. Yes. This facility helps the customer to refer to the docket number the next time he calls the customer care to know the status of his complaint. There might be cases that customer might lose out the docket number in case he writes in on a piece of paper
2. At the time of acquiring customer, customer is promised flawless connectivity. It's the right of a CSP to provide the customer care services absolutely free of cost to the end consumer, except for a VAS service.

b) Will sending of docket number of complaints to subscribers through SMS help them to pursue their complaints and increase effectiveness of consumer grievance redressal system?

Ans.

Definitely Yes.

c) Do you feel that unique format for docket numbers across the service providers will increase monitoring and speedy redressal of subscriber complaints?

Ans.

1. Yes.
2. These days most of the CSPs generate the docket numbers of 8-10 digit which is generated by an algorithm. This random allocation of numbers leads to confusion among the customers.
3. A standard format of docket number should be maintained. The standard format of the docket number should indicate service provider, service area, service type, service disruption code, and date of complaint etc.
4. A standard format helps in inter CSPs complaint bookings.

Issue3.61

a) Do you agree that customers need to be informed about the status of redressal of their complaints before closure of the docket? If so, will it be desirable to inform the subscriber about status of the complaints through SMS before closure of the docket number?

Ans.

1. In the call centers, every member of network team is given an SLA to close the customer complaint with a pre-defined SLA. Most of the times it happens that customer complaint is not resolved but still the customer complaint is closed.
2. Yes, it is necessary that customers need to be informed about the status of redressal.
3. The intermediate status of the customer complaints is to be sent through SMS but the final status of closing the customer complaint is to be confirmed by giving a call to the customer on his phone.

Issue 3.66

- a) **What parameters should be considered to determine the effectiveness of complaint redressal at call centre level? How could effectiveness of complaint redressal at call centre level be measured?**

Ans.

1. Immediate Resolution: Try and resolve the issue over the call. In case if the customer care executive identifies that the issue cannot be resolved online, log a complaint as soon as possible
2. New Complaints/Repeat Complaints: Integrated system should be developed to identify if the customer is calling for a new complaint or a repeat complaint.
3. Acknowledgement Slip: After the complaint is lodged, acknowledgement should be given to the complainant with the following information
 - a. Docket Number / Complaint Number
 - b. Complaint Lodging Date and Time
 - c. Stipulated Resolution Time
 - d. Name of the concerned person and his contact number(preferably)
 - e. Toll free centralized department number
4. SMS Integrated System: As soon as the complaint is lodged, SMS should be sent to both the complainant and the concerned officer to let them know the status.
5. Complaint Status / Monitoring: Regular updates of the status of the complaint is to be sent by SMS to the customer to let him know the status
6. Auto Escalation: In case the issue is not resolved in the stipulated time, it is essential that the complaint should be escalated to the higher authorities automatically.

The parameters to determine the effectiveness of complaint redressal should be based on aforementioned points. The effectiveness of complaint redressal at call center level can be measured by

1. Defining 100% benchmark levels for the above mentioned parameters and implementing them.
2. Monitoring the status of the complaint.
3. Regular Feedback to the complainant regarding the status of the complaint.
4. Communicating with the customer before closing the complaint.

Issue 3.69

- a) **In your views, will it be feasible to indicate tentative time frame for redressal of consumer grievance? Will it increase subscriber satisfaction level?**

Ans.

1. This process of indicating tentative time frame is already in practice with most of the CSPs. So, indicating tentative time frame for redressal is feasible.
2. But the only issue is that most of these complaints are not resolved in the stipulated time.
3. Customer Satisfaction level would be increased only if:

- a. The issue is resolved in the stipulated time,
- b. In case the issue is not resolved in stipulated time, status updates are to be sent to customer through SMS as and when the tentative time is crossed.

Issue 3.74

- a) What are your suggestions for using complaints received at a call centre for improvement in QoS and processes adopted by a service provider? Do you perceive any need for TRAI to oversee such analysis and monitor corrective actions?**

Ans.

TRAI has to define some SLAs for the CSPs and define the below mentioned parameters along with the benchmark.

1. Customer Complaint Resolution Time
2. Closure of Complaints within SLA
3. No. of Complaints per 100 Subs (Per month)
4. Customer Assessment on Resolution

Once the details are obtained, a "Performance Analysis Matrix" to measure the CSPs performance is to be determined. Segment the complaints into different categories. A thorough understanding of the different complaints helps in analyzing the area where the CSP is faltering frequently. Finally watch and direct the CSP in areas to be improved.

Issue 3.77

- a) In your opinion, what should be done to create awareness about the nodal officer?**

Ans.

TCPRG regulations 2007 already mandated the service provider to publish the details of Nodal Officer through a public notice in Hindi/ English language and in an Indian language in circulation in the service area at least once in 12 months and also through telephone bills issued to the consumers.

For creating further awareness about the Nodal Officer,

1. Mandate to send contact details of nodal officer through SMS
2. The number can be saved in the SIM card of existing users using Over the Air transfer facility.
3. SIM can also be pre-configured giving the details of call centre, Nodal Officer and Appellate Authority.
4. The public notices and the press releases should show a 3 level hierarchy (preferably pictorial representation) of Call Center, Nodal Officer and Appellate Authority
5. Government should advertise the same as TV Commercials on all channels and especially the Doordarshan channels
6. Another way of creating awareness about the Nodal Officer is by way of introducing a uniform number across all service providers, separately for basic telephone service, CMTS and

Broadband service. Common number can either be identified by the industry or can be allocated by DoT.

Issue 3.80

a) What should be the maximum permissible time in which nodal officer must acknowledge the receipt of the grievance and indicate a unique number for future reference?

Ans.

1. Acknowledging the receipt of grievance from customer should not take much time. The maximum time required to acknowledge a complaint:
 - a. In the form of email – 4 hours
 - b. In the form of a postal mail – 3 days
 - c. In the form of a telephone complaint – Immediate
2. Nodal Officer should be facilitated with tools wherein he/she can lodge the complaint and the give the complaint number instantly. Also care must be taken that unique number has to be sent to customer's mobile through SMS.

b) Do you suggest that the nodal officer give an indicative time for redressal of grievance while communicating receipt of grievance? Will it boost the confidence of the subscriber?

Ans.

1. By giving an indicative time for redressal of grievance, it helps the customer garner some confidence from the Nodal Officer.
2. It is to be remembered that the issue has come up to Nodal Officer because the same issue was not solved at the customer care level. It is to be noticed that the issue is a high priority issue and hence giving an indicative time for redressal of grievance boosts customer's confidence.

c) Will it be feasible to communicate the tentative time for redressal of the grievances and ensure redressal within prescribed timeframe?

Ans.

1. Nodal Officer is a highly experienced person and he might have handled similar grievances from other customers. He has knowledge of how long the issue takes to get resolved.
2. It is highly feasible to communicate the tentative time for redressal of grievances.
3. Nodal Officer should take the responsibility to assign the issue to the concerned person and ensure the resolution is done within the stipulated time. This is something similar to strictly adhering to the SLAs.

Issue 3.82

a) What framework do you propose for timely disposal of consumer grievances and feedback on status of grievance redressal before disposal?

Ans.

Feedback on consumer grievance redressal is an important activity which boosts subscribers' confidence and ensures better satisfaction. Feedback on consumer grievance redressal will also help the service provider in identifying the weaknesses in the system of grievance redressal by the Nodal Officer and in taking remedial measures for further strengthening the system.

FRAMEWORK:

1. Contact Details → The complete details of the Nodal Officers i.e., Landline Number, Mobile Number, email and postal address.
2. Accessibility → Most of the cases only one Nodal Officer is assigned for one service area and this number are not sufficient. So the number of Nodal Officers should be in proportionate to the number of subscribers available in the service area. This should be made mandatory by the regulatory authority and should be implemented by the CSP.
3. Auto Escalation → The issue is to be automatically escalated to the Nodal Officer in case the issue is not sorted out at the call center level. This helps automation and saves time. Customer doesn't have to take extra pain to get in touch with the Nodal Officer and explain him the issue right from the scratch, thus saving time, labor, and money.
4. Complaint Redressal Process →
 - a. Complaint Recording
 - b. Complaint Resolution
 - c. Monitoring, Reporting and Complaint Analysis
5. Analysis → Once the complaint is resolved at the Nodal Officer level, he should work on analyzing the issue and come up with a permanent resolution for the issue to ensure no further complaints on the same issue. The Root Cause Analysis Corrective Action has to be taken for every issue registered.
6. Reward → For every issue sorted out by the Nodal Officer, he must be appreciated and rewarded. This would be one boosting factor for him to work efficiently.
7. Feedback → After the complaint is closed; the executives / Nodal Officer should call the complainants and ask for their feedback. The feedback should address the following:
 - a. Overall Customer Satisfaction (Satisfied / Meagerly Satisfied / Unsatisfied)
 - b. Do you think that the behavior of any of the executives needs improvement?
 - c. Any suggestions for improvement

Feedback received in closed complaints should get reflected in the database. This would make the Customer Grievance Redressal System a robust system and further strengthening the monitoring process. It would also be useful for the higher authorities to demand and explanation from the customer care executives / Nodal Officers for poor feedback.

Issue 3.87

a) In your opinion, what should be done to improve the accessibility of nodal officers?

Ans.

1. A circle (License Area) consists of major cities, small cities and villages. Now the service provider must ensure that the part of circle that has major portion of subscribers will get one dedicated Nodal Officer. And there can be one Nodal Officer for rural and smaller cities. The call center must take the responsibility and intimate the appropriate Nodal Officer's number to the customer.
2. There can be subordinates appointed by service provider to the Nodal Officer who can become representatives and address customer grievance. They can have decisive powers for non-critical complaints. Only emergency or important cases shall be transferred to the Nodal Officer. One subordinate can represent group of 2 or 3 cities. The Call center can intimate the representatives numbers to the customers in case he is not satisfied by the Call Center response.
3. In case a customer wants to meet the Nodal Officer, he must send an application letter in writing or in electronic form to the office of Nodal Officer seeking appointment well before time. He would be required to mention about his issue and then it would be checked by one of the juniors (secretary) to the Nodal Officer to decide whether the customer has a valid reason to come and meet the Nodal Officer personally.
4. Installation and use of a system where in the consumer gets a Unique Number when he registers a complaint with the Nodal Officer via e-mail and SMS. This Unique number shall enable customer to track the status of his complaint.

b) How would effectiveness of Nodal Officer be monitored?

Ans.

1. Evaluation of reports submitted by the service provider that consists of complaints booked, resolved and pending to TRAI.
2. Survey of customers who booked their complaints to the Nodal Officer. The information that can be gathered is their experience, satisfaction level and the time he had to wait for his issue to get resolved.
3. Number of non-replies as a percentage of all the complaints booked with the Nodal Officer.
4. Service Providers must publish status of the appeals with the Nodal Officer in the reports that they submit to TRAI and on their websites.
5. Appellate authority appointed by Service Provider can play an important role in monitoring the effectiveness of the Nodal Officer. It can track the categories of complaints that are booked with it and reason for them being unresolved by the Nodal Officer and report it to the Service Provider.
6. Design a framework to classify effectiveness of customer grievance at nodal officer level. Now this framework must be designed by TRAI/TDSAT and must be implemented by all service providers. Monitoring of effectiveness by Service Provider, appellate authority or TRAI/TDSAT at Nodal Level must be given due importance in this framework.

c) What should be the parameters and framework to judge the effectiveness of the nodal officers?

Ans.

1. Parameters can be:
 - a) Categories of Complaints into critical, non- critical and tracking the time taken by the Nodal Officer to resolve such issues.
 - b) Time limit for the first response made by the Nodal Officer to the customer.
 - c) Satisfaction level of the customers who booked their issues with the Nodal Officer.
 - d) Number of complaints resolved and the time taken to resolve it.
 - e) Number of complaints that were not resolved by the Nodal Officer.

2. Framework can be
 - a) Monitoring or analysis of reports containing complaints and their status as and when they are submitted. Now this can be done by an independent employee (not belonging to grievance redress system) appointed by Service Provider.
 - b) Involve Appellate authority and encourage direct communication to take place between the person monitoring effectiveness of Nodal Officer and the head of Appellate authority.
 - c) Involve experts from Consumer Satisfaction domain to decide on the effectiveness of the Nodal Officer towards satisfying the consumer.

Issue 3.89)

a) In your opinion, what should be the time frame for redressal of grievances by the Nodal Officer?

Ans.

1. Time Critical Issues: The customer comes to the Nodal Officer after the call center. Now at this point of time, he is already spent considerable amount of time i.e. 3 days. The Nodal Officer must give him the unique number on the very first day and resolve his issue by the next day if his issue belongs to one of these categories:
 - a) Fault Repair.
 - b) Service Disruption/Disconnection by the Service Provider.
 - c) Network not accessible.
 - d) Shift of Telephone connection.
 - e) Termination of service.

2. Non Time Critical Issues: For other grievances which are not time critical, the Nodal officer must respond with the unique number on the first day and resolve the issue within time period of 3 days to 5 days as customer as already spent 7 days with the call center. Few issues that are not time critical can be:

- a) Resolution of charging complaints.
 - b) Delay in Provisioning of Plans.
3. Refund (in all 3 services), if it is supposed to be made must be given to the customer within time period of 15 days.

For above mechanism,

The above time frame is applicable to all the 3 services i.e. Basic Telephone Service, Cellular service and Broadband service.

b)What should be done to ensure redressal of consumer grievances within prescribed timeframe?

Ans.

1. Framework must be designed by TRAI and followed by service providers, failing which they must be penalized.
2. Proper electronic system must be implemented which can help in tracking the status of complaints with the help of unique complaint number.
3. Categorizing issues into time critical and non time critical and then appointing representatives to resolve non time critical issues. This would reduce the number of complaints with the nodal officer consisting of only time critical issues.
4. The customer must have power to make a monetary claim if his issue was not resolved on time by the Nodal Officer or his representatives if any.
5. The nodal officer must be made answerable to the appellate authority in case he is not able to resolve the issue stating the reason for the same.

Issue 3.91

- a) **What framework do you perceive for regular analysis of consumer grievances at Nodal officer level to identify systemic failures and to initiate necessary actions? Do you perceive the need to mandate such provisions?**

Ans.

1. As the Service Provider has 3 levels of customer grievance redressal, the customer has already spent a considerable time with the Call Center (first level) . This may result into customer getting frustrated. So a framework must be adopted where in the complaint after reaching to the Nodal officer will be closely monitored by the Service Provider and the Appellate tribunal.
2. Analysis of complaints by first level bifurcation into time critical and non time critical and then second level bifurcation into resolved and unresolved for each of the first level bifurcation. Different ratios can be calculated through this hierarchical bifurcation. This will help the

Service Provider or the Appellate tribunal to execute corrective measures or necessary actions in case any ratio crosses its threshold level.

3. The service provider must employ experts to scrutinize/analyze the reports that it submits to TRAI which contains data about the complaints received and resolved at the Nodal level and find a particular pattern which may highlight the inefficiency of the Nodal Officer and then corrective measures can be taken.

Issue 3.94

- a) **What are your views regarding charging of nodal officer Number especially in view of the fact that nodal officer is part of consumer grievance redressal mechanism? Elaborate your response.**

Ans.

Nodal Officer is reachable through e-mails, SMS or Telephone. Now if the telephone call to the Nodal Officer is not chargeable, then the concern is that the Nodal Officer may become an alternative call center. To avoid this, the Service Provider can implement a system where in the Nodal Officer is reachable through SMS or E-Mail directly but if the customer wants to make a Telephone call to the Nodal Officer, he must be given the telephone number of the Nodal Officer by the Call Center executive only when the executive is not able to resolve his issue and in that case the call shouldn't be charged to the customer. In this system the Service Provider shouldn't communicate the Nodal Officer telephone number to the customers through any medium.

Issue 3.97

- a) **What should be done to enhance awareness about Appellate Authority to ensure effective redressal of consumer grievances?**

Ans

Appellate Authority is the 3rd Level at the Consumer grievance hierarchy. There is a possibility that the consumer loses faith in this system till he reaches to the Appellate Authority as his issues were not addressed at the Customer Care and Nodal Officer level. There is a possibility that very few consumers despite of knowing about the Appellate Authority would be willing to use this service to get their issues resolved. This factor must be considered by the Service Provider while giving information on the Appellate Authority to the consumers. So the message to create awareness regarding the Appellate Authority should not only contain the contact number, e-mail of the Authority but must also contain a brief on the power lying with the Appellate authority that may restore confidence in the consumer towards the grievance addressal system. However the awareness for the Appellate Authority can be created in the following ways:

1. Contact details like Telephone Number, E-Mail Id given to the consumer the moment he subscribes to the service.
2. Contact details can be displayed on the website and published every three months in the newspaper and the magazines
3. Contact details can be text messaged to the customer every month and printed in their bills as well

4. The system of hierarchy level must be explained to the customer by the call center executive when the customer is not satisfied by the response of the Customer Care executive towards his complaints.
5. Contact details information can be communicated through wall postures pasted in the sales office.
6. The contact details for every service provider must be available on the website of TRAI.
7. Apart from the contact details, the awareness must be considered about the decisive powers with the Appellate Authority as it is the Apex body in the Hierarchal System and the importance of the Appellate Authority among the three levels.
8. The Service Provider can ensure some benefits to the customer if the customer's complaint gets resolved at this level. This will pull the customer to log his complaint with the Appellate Authority.

Issue 3.99

- a) What framework to you suggest for filing of the appeal to Appellate Authority for redressal of consumer grievances by subscribers? How can it be made easy and user friendly?**

Ans.

The framework that requires the filing of the complaint in the prescribed format is acceptable. But there is a possibility that all consumers may not be comfortable with this prescribed format. To address this following actions can be implemented:

1. The Grievance regulation 2007 can be amended to allow Service Provider to use a format that is more simple to understand and use, but it must contain all the necessary information as contained in the prescribed format.
2. If the customer is filing the complaint in written then a personal guidance regarding filling the information in the prescribed format can be given by the Sales executive to the customer .
3. If the customer is filing the complaint online then
 - 3.1 the website must contain the 'HELP' information as sought by the customer. Stepwise instructions in simple language will make the customer job easy. The online form must give alerts in case the customer enters invalid data and the simple message must pop up easy enough to be understood by the customer.
 - 3.2. The customer can call up the Customer Care and get the manual instruction from the executive for filling the online form in the prescribed format.
 - 3.2 In case any information is missing in the online form, that must be communicated to the Customer in the real time.
 - 3.3 The instructions to fill the form online must also be available on the TRAI website as well.

Issue 3.103

a) In your view, what should be the time frame for acknowledgement of the appeal by Appellate Authority?

Ans.

The Appellate Authority being the 3rd level in the Grievance Redressal system so the Appellate Authority must Acknowledge the appeal as quick as possible delaying which may result into dissatisfaction of customer.

For Online Appeal:

1. Acknowledging the appeal by E-mail or SMS to the customer, the moment customer submits the appeal form online. The acknowledgement should contain the Unique Acknowledgement Number. The time frame within which the appeal can be addressed can be communicated within 24 Hours of the issue of Acknowledgement Number. This would give sufficient time to the Appellate Authority to make an enquiry of the necessary information as required for the appeal.

For Written Appeal:

1. If the customer is giving the appeal in writing, then the Appellate Authority should make it a point to send the acknowledgement by SMS the moment the appeal form reaches the Appellate Authority office. This SMS should also contain Unique Acknowledgement Number. The time frame within which the appeal can be addressed can be communicated within 24 Hours of the issue of Acknowledgement Number. This would give sufficient time to the Appellate Authority to make an enquiry of the necessary information as required for the appeal.
2. If the customer deposits the form in the Sales Office, the Sales Executive should be able to give the acknowledgement to the customer then and there itself after logging the appeal using the electronic system installed by the Service Provider to log the appeal with the Appellate Authority.

b) Would it be feasible and desirable to convey the tentative time for disposal of the appeal by Appellate Authority to improve subscriber confidence?

Ans.

1. Desirability: Yes, since the customer has already been disappointed twice before appealing to the Appellate Authority. Giving a time frame would restore faith and confidence in the customer and also make the Appellate Authority accountable to the customer.
2. Feasible: As per the answer to the previous question, the Appellate Authority will get 24 hours to make an enquiry to seek for the information required for the appeal, thus it will be feasible for the Appellate Authority to convey the time frame to the customer after 24 hrs of issuing the Appeal Acknowledgement number.

Issue 3.105

a) How feedback at the time of disposal of appeal can be made more transparent, self speaking and impartial? Is there a need to institutionalize feedback mechanism at appellate authority level of service provider to improve effectiveness of the processes?

Ans.

The feedback at the time of disposal can be made effective in the following ways:

1. The feedback must contain the information regarding the date of appeal, Appeal acknowledgement number and the appeal as stated by the customer
2. The name of the person in the Appellate authority who addressed the appeal. The feedback must contain his telephone number and the E-mail Id. The feedback should also contain the timings when the customer can reach this officer and discuss about the decision taken by the Appellate authority on his appeal. This may reduce the dissatisfaction of the customer (if any) to a great extent.
3. The decision taken by the Appellate Authority should be stated clearly and in simple language easy enough to be understood by the customer.
4. The reason for making this decision with the support of facts, company policies and rules should be clearly mentioned in simple language easy enough to be understood by the customer.

To implement the above transparency and effectiveness, there is a need to institutionalize feedback mechanism by TCPERG Regulations at the Appellate Authority level of service provider

Issue 3.107

a) What should be the framework to improve the effectiveness and acceptability of the Appellate authority as an independent and impartial body? Provide details of the proposed framework.

Ans.

It is of utmost importance that the Appellate Authority to act as an independent and impartial body. To make this happen, the following framework is proposed:

1. Unique Appeal Acknowledgement number to be issued to the customer by the Appellate Authority
2. The feedback for disposal should contain the contact number of the officer or the secretary whoever has addressed to the appeal and the timings for the customer to reach him if the customer is not satisfied by the decision taken by the Appellate Authority
3. The Appellate Authority must make the disclaimer that the Service Provider is not involved in its decision on the appeal made by the customer. This disclaimer must also be available on the website of TRAI and can be challenged by the customer if he doubts on the decision taken by the Appellate Authority.
4. The customer must be given right to ask the secretary/office the reasons behind the Appellate Authority decision on his appeal. The officer/secretary must be in a position to address this

query with proper justifications failing which the customer can report this to TRAI/TDSAT. No need of customer to go to the Service Provider if he is not satisfied with the Appellate Authority.

Issue 3.109

- a) **In your opinion, what should be the maximum time period for deciding an appeal by the Appellate Authority?**

Ans.

The complaints/ appeal should be categorized and time period for deciding an appeal should be fixed as per the categories and communicated to the customer within 24 hrs of issue of Appeal Acknowledgement Number.

The maximum time period can be one month that can be considered is only for those appeals that involve lot of enquiries by the Appellate Authority, involves many employees of the Service Provider e.g. Finance Manager, Revenue Assurance Manager or the Sales Executive.

Issue 3.112

- a) **What should be the time limit within which the information about itemized usage charges should be provided on request from a pre-paid customer?**

Ans.

As TCPRG 2007 mandates Service Provider to issue detail of the records containing usage of the service and its monetary value for the period upto preceding 6 months, the below time frame can be implemented:

Period of Records requested for	Time in days taken to serve the request
Upto 1 Month	7
Upto 3 Months	10
Upto 6 Months	15

Issue 4.7

- a) **Can you suggest further measures to effectively control provision of value added services without explicit consent of the subscriber? Kindly provide details of proposed framework.**

Ans.

Apart from the measures taken up by TRAI to address the problem of provision of VAS without customer complaint, following measures can also be implemented:

1. Intimate the customer through SMS once a Value Added Service is activated. This will inform the customer on time and if he doesn't require the service, he can call up the customer care to disable the service.
2. If a chargeable VAS is activated without explicit consumer consent, then TRAI can make Service Provider liable for this mistake and pay the customer some monetary amount.
3. Network to be upgraded and made robust to avoid wrong activation.
4. TRAI should ask the Service Providers to keep the records of wrong activation. When this record is analyzed and found that the number of wrong activation crosses a certain threshold, the Service Provider is liable to pay fine. The network auditors must ensure that the Service Provider reports true data. This can be ensured by tracking the use of facility of unsubscribing by the customers provided by the Service Provider.

Issue 4.9

a) In your opinion, what more should be done to increase effectiveness of consumer education?

Ans.

1. The sales executive or the retailer must educate customer in local language about Customer Grievance system, contact details of the Call Center, Nodal Officer and Appellate Authority. This will be done when the customer buys the SIM card. Education of the customer by the retailer or the sales executive must be monitored by a dedicated team of the Service Provider.
2. The sales executive or the retailer must educate customer in local language about the VAS that the customer wants to subscribe, its usage and the monetary charges.
3. The above information can also be provided in local language by the Call Center executives.
4. The manual information should be available on the Service Provider website in English, Hindi and Urdu.
5. Workshops in rural areas to be conducted by the Service Provider to educate the customers.
6. A feedback must be taken by Service Provider by making a call to the customer and ask questions related to the information given by the sales executive and the retailer. If the customer is not educated by the sales executive or the retailer, he will report this to the Service Provider along with the information like date and place of purchase and then the Service Provider will be in position to take necessary actions against that Sales executive or the retailer.

Issue 4.12

a) How effectiveness of web based Consumer grievance redressal mechanism can be increased?

Ans.

1. The web-based online Grievance Monitoring System of TRAI must have a provision to use the same unique complaint number or acknowledgement number issued to the customer. If possible the online system of TRAI and Service Provider must use one unique number for all the three numbers. For this to work effectively, it is required that TRAI ensures uniqueness of complaint/acknowledgement numbers across all Service Providers to avoid repetition of numbers between two service providers.
2. The customer must be able to track the status of its appeal with the use of complaint number.
3. If status is not available, the system must have provision which will enable customer to submit a short message asking for the status.

4. The online system of TRAI must have some provisions that would ensure customer about the actions being performed by TRAI to resolve his issue.
5. One dedicated team need to be established by TRAI which will be able to use this web based Grievance Monitoring System.
6. TRAI with the help of this team must monitor the Grievance system closely and effectively and must pitch in as and when required to speed up the process.