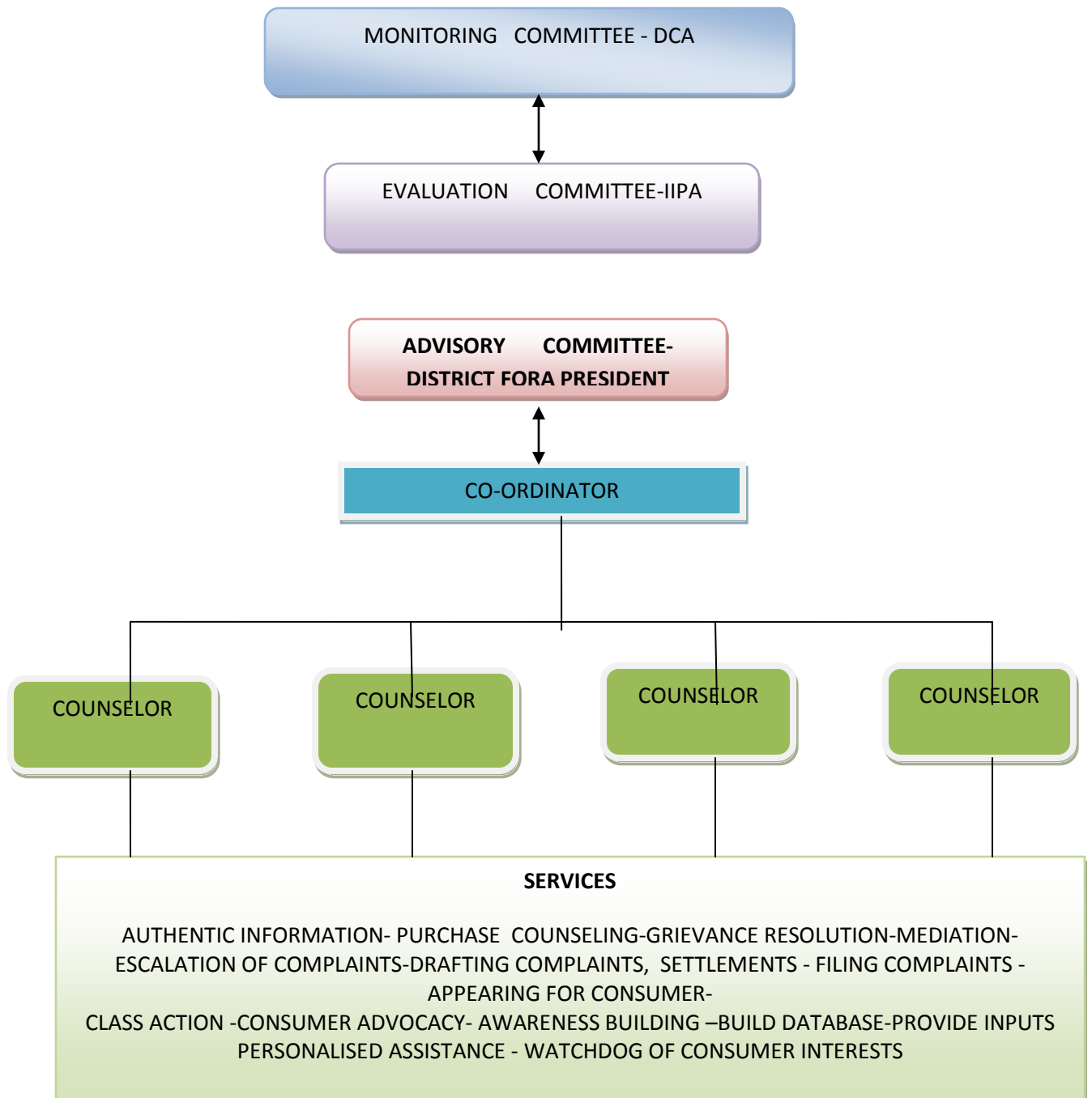


# GRAHAK SUVIDHA KENDRA



## SERVICE PROTOCOL



# GRAHAK SUVIDHA KENDRA

Consumer Care Guidance Centers (Grahak Suvidha Kendra) operating as 'single window' are effective nodal points in raising the awareness on consumer rights through campaigns and solving consumer problems.

Grahak Suvidha Kendras, can help Indian citizens faced with every day practical consumer problems by offering them information and professional advice, thus promoting consumer education and awareness and in the process empowering consumers. The Consumer Care Centres will be networked through a common IT platform and website for uniformity and appropriate guidelines are issued for their functioning.

Informed and empowered consumers play a key role in strengthening competition in the market and stimulating growth. Providing consumers with clear information about their rights and obligations and assuring them that they can obtain effective redress in case of a problem improves their confidence and helps unlock the full economic potential of the market. The aim of GSKs should be to offer consumers a wide range of services, from providing information on their rights when shopping, giving advice, guidance and assistance with their complaints when problems arise.

## **FUNCTIONS**

- Advise on consumer rights and obligations while shopping /ordering goods online (pre-purchase advice and guidance),
- Give practical pre purchase consumer tips, which will help save money, get value for money and avoid problems,
- Build and maintain data and knowledge base on issues relating to consumers within the state,
- Identify a pool of accredited non-advocates to act as legal representative (e.g. in forum/commission) and handle consumer complaints,
- Liaison between the consumers , VCOs, state/ central government and other agencies on matters relating to consumer welfare,

- Help redress consumer complaint against a trader based in another State (for instance, if one is claiming a refund which the trader has refused and which the consumer believes he/she is entitled to),
- Ask counterpart center in the State of the trader/ service provider to contact the trader on consumer's behalf and try to find a solution to his/her complaint,
- Advise on further action if an amicable solution is not possible – for example, out-of-court settlements, or other legal action.

## **WHAT SERVICES WILL GSK PROVIDE?**

The services which GSK Network can provide to consumers focus on;

- Consumer-to-Business problems when buying products or availing services, either in person or via distance purchases (mainly e-commerce),
- Provides information on Consumer rights and how to assert the rights,
- Build and maintain data and knowledge base on consumer issues of the state
- Advice and provide information to consumers who are having problems with a company.
- Inform consumers on alternative ways to deal with complaints if they cannot be solved amicably with the trader/ service provider, e.g. ADR or a Court,
- Intervene in disputes where the consumer and trader are unable to reach a positive outcome through non advocates.
- Co-operate with other agencies and networks, such as the Consumer helplines, Mediation Centers and Consumer Fora.
- Provides valuable input for the state government and DCA on consumer policy issues. GSK will be in a unique position to know the everyday/local concerns and problems of consumers and will increasingly provide input to policy-makers at both National and State level.
- If consumer is not satisfied with the outcome or response from the trader/ service provider, the GSK may be able to help - on points of law, consumer entitlements and guidance on the next step. The service provided by the GSK is advisory - GSK may not have any enforcement powers and cannot compel traders to take any action or accept their point of view.

## **DESIGN**

The Consumer Guidance Centres need to function as an extended arm of State Helpline of the state and be on a network co-sponsored by the DCA and the States. At pilot stage there can be five such Centers (North, South, East, West and Central) in the five zones of the country offering free and impartial advice and also assistance in disputes between consumers and traders.

GSK's function is to provide only advice and assistance in consumer disputes –They will have no powers to enforce legislation or investigate traders/ service provider.

## **LOCATION**

There is an utter lack of consumer rights awareness, especially among rural populations and particularly the way of using these rights. Therefore there is need for spreading consumer rights awareness among various section of society, particularly the uneducated and more so the helpless and unorganized sections among them where due to lack of choice the business tends to exploit the poor consumers in many ways. Defective goods, adulterated food items, short weighing, over charging and poor services are some of the common problems. We should pay more attention to problems of the rural areas. Consumer needs to be educated about such practices and the remedy available to him under law.

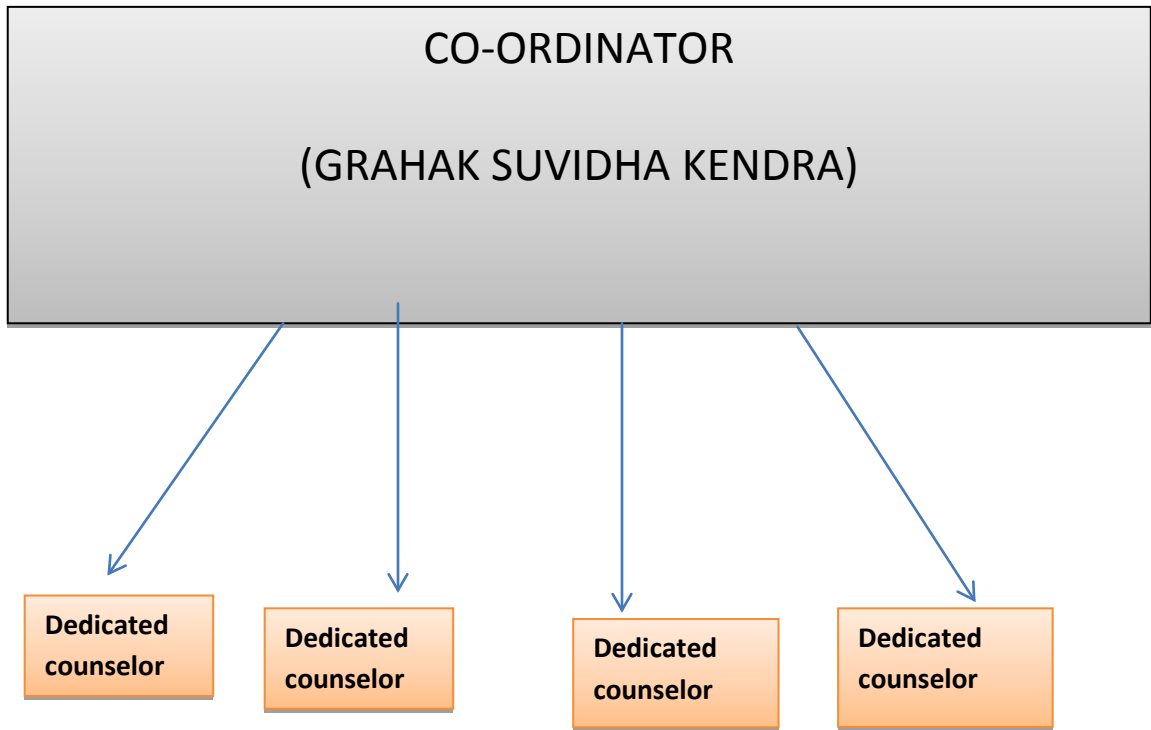
Consumers should be able to reach the GSK in their vicinity by phone, fax, e-mail or enquiry form. The contact details of the Centres shall be made available at the common network website and on the websites of the State government. Perhaps a District/ sub divisional headquarters is ideally suited for this where the suburban and rural people live. The selected location should be easily accessible to people and located at a prominent place with all modern facilities.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Grahak Suvidha Kendra will have minimum a two bay office room (1000sq ft) at a vantage point accessible to all. The office should be equipped with furniture, Computers, telefax and net facility. The GSKs operate from a common platform and website and will be allowed to access database of the state helpline and also develop its own database.

## **STAFFING.**

The Coordinates and the councilors will be trained by the Centre for Consumer Studies as part of its training activities for which DCA would provide additional grant if required.



### **FINANCIAL SUPPORT , SUSTAINABILITY & OWNERSHIP**

GSKs are expected to be permanent facilities catering to consumer needs in suburban and rural areas. The service providers are selected through a competitive bidding process.

### **LINKAGES**

Consumer Guidance Centers will have to have appropriate linkages/liaison with Mediation Centers, State Consumer Helplines, Other helplines which also cater to consumer needs like PDS, FSSAI, Poverty Alleviation Schemes, Drinking water and sanitation, Kisan helplines and Public Service Providers like Power, drinking water, Sanitation, PDS, Health Care and Local Panchayat or Municipal Corporation etc.

### **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

An initial verification of the capacity of the agency needs to be done before entrusting the job. Concurrent evaluation by DCA, an MIS for all networked Centers, annual performance appraisal etc need to be built into the scheme. Initial training and subsequent refresher training of the staff is an important ingredient for efficient running of the Centre. Feedback from consumers may also be sought to know any lacunae in its functioning and corrective

action. The State government will designate a Nodal Officer who would be liaison between the state government, DCA and GSK.

The **Central Monitoring Committee** would have the following composition:

Jt Secretary (CA)	Chairperson
CCA	Member
Chair Professor CCS IIPA	Member
Consultant/IIPA	Member
Dir(CPU)	Member
Dir (CWF)	Member Secretary

g) The **Evaluation Committee** will have the following composition:

Chair professor CCS/IIPA	(Chairman)
Consultant,IIPA / DCA representative	Member
One technical expert from NIC	Member
Nominee of State Commission President	Member

The Evaluation Committee will visit the GSK and assess its performance once in six months and report to the Monitoring Committee.

To help the Consumer Guidance Centre achieves its mandate and address issues of importance, there will be an Advisory **Committee** to manage the day to day affairs of the CCC with the following members;

- a. District For a President or his Nominee - Chairperson
- a. One Member of the District Forum
- b. One representative of the NGO/VCO in the District
- c. One Social worker or academician of the District/State
- d. Coordinator CCC (Member Secretary))

The Executive committee will meet as and when required but at least once every month to review the progress of the CCC and submit its report to the Evaluation committee of the State.

### **Integration with State Helpline Knowledge Resource Management Portal at IIPA**

For the present the software and expertise of the State Helpline Knowledge Resource Management Portal at IIPA will be used with some modification. The Portal would host the server, provide data and knowledge support to the GSK and also monitor their performance and bring out periodic reports. In addition the expertise available with the Centre for Consumer Studies and the National Consumer Helpline at IIPA, New Delhi could also be used to strengthen the GSK.

### **1. GOOD REASONS FOR CONSUMERS TO CONTACT A GSK**

- ✓ It has a dedicated staff to provide with professional consumer advice,
- ✓ It offers advice before buying goods or services to help save money and avoid problems,
- ✓ It offers advice on consumer rights when shopping online,
- ✓ It offers an effective, easy and quick alternative to legal action against traders/service provider,
- ✓ It offers help finding a solution when things go wrong,
- ✓ It offers advice on other ways to deal with a complaint if an amicable solution is not possible,

- ✓ Easy accessibility,
- ✓ Authentic information,
- ✓ Personalized assistance at all stages,
- ✓ Prompt follow up,
- ✓ Help at doorstep,
- ✓ Less hassles,
- ✓ Trust and confidence

-----