

Bernama - Changing Consumer Behavior Through Campaign

Written by Administrator

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By Melati Mohd Ariff
KUALA LUMPUR, July 3 (Bernama) -- The Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations (Fomca) has embarked on a campaign with the aim of changing consumers' lifestyle towards sustainable consumption. The theme chosen for the 4-year campaign, running from June 2008 to June 2012 is "Change Begins With Me". According to Fomca president Datuk Marimuthu Nadason, behavioural change is extremely difficult and a long term investment and commitment is needed to change the mindset of consumers.

Consumers, he said, need to take greater responsibility in responding to the numerous challenges confronting them these days. These includes structural challenges like the global hike in fuel and food prices, which are often beyond the control of any government.

NEED TO RESPOND DIFFERENTLY

According to Marimuthu, Malaysian consumers are increasingly adversely affected by structural challenges at the global level. They need to respond to these challenges in a different manner than previously. In retrospect, Malaysians need to analyse their lifestyle and be willing to make fundamental changes. "While global issues in the past have been cyclical, the changes happening today are structural in nature. This means that they are not going to go away anytime soon. "These problems are here to stay and we need to adapt to the situation by making changes to our lifestyle," he further explained. Marimuthu said the new global challenges are many fold and these include increases in the price of oil and gas, increasing grain consumption, conversion of food to biofuel and changes in the climate.

"In short, the time for cheap food and cheap fuel is over. Price of rice has increased by 141 percent and wheat by 120 percent over the past year. "Thirty seven countries are facing food shortages and over 100 million people over the world will be forced into poverty if food prices continue to increase. The United Nations has clearly stated that food production must rise by 50 percent to meet increasing demand," he elaborated. World experts, he said are already talking of a water crisis next, the result of which could be even more devastating than the climb in petrol price.

BIGGEST OBSTACLE

One of the biggest obstacles in facing such challenges, said Marimuthu, is the mindset of the Malaysian consumers. Malaysian consumers, continue to expect and even demand that the government intervene in the market to maintain the price of fuel. As a result, he added, the government has to subsidise the economy at the rate of RM45 billion per year for oil and gas (until the recent price increase) and RM5 billion per year on food.

"Clearly, this kind of subsidy is not sustainable. Malaysian consumers need to take greater responsibility in facing these challenges. "While petroleum production and export has contributed substantially towards these subsidies, it has been reported that by 2014, Malaysia will be a net importer of oil. This will make the situation even more critical," he argued.

FOMCA'S CAMPAIGN

While Fomca will take the lead in the campaign and play the Secretariat Role, the campaign will only be successful if all sectors of society are involved. As such, Fomca has formed a partnership with three primary institutions -- the National Council of Women Organisations (NCWO), Malaysian Youth Council (MYC) and Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Service (Cuepacs).

"We feel that a multi-prong approach simultaneously targeting different groups would be more effective than Fomca going at it alone," he said. Using the media to champion their cause, Fomca will also be targeting students in schools and institutions of higher learning, women, youth and worker groups, in its awareness and education campaign.

Marimuthu said Fomca would also be monitoring the price of goods, distributing seeds for home

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gardening and conduct lifestyle promotions. Speaking further on the promotion of home farming, he said consumers can use pots or any vacant land around the house to grow vegetables for personal consumption. "We are sourcing for seeds to be distributed to interested parties. Guidelines on how to manage these home farms shall also be distributed," he said. Fomca also, he added shall be setting up a price monitoring system, where consumers can make price comparisons, before making purchases. The "smart consumer" awareness programme, shall provide concrete and feasible actions that consumers can do, for example, how to conserve fuel and water, recycling, using cheaper alternatives like hypermarket home brands and cheaper flight, to get more out of their money. On the financial literacy programme, he said it aims to promote personal budgeting and better personal management of finances, especially the proper use of credit cards.

SPECIFIC TARGETS

Speaking on the media awareness programmes specifically targeted at adolescents and youths, Marimuthu said it aims to create awareness of the influence of media in their lives, and how to protect themselves from the negative values of materialism and wasteful consumption. A guidebook on changing one's lifestyle, he said, is being prepared. It will cover issues like budgeting, being a 'smart consumer', home farming, energy, fuel and water saving tips, and transportation tips. "The essence of the campaign is for consumers to take control of their lives geared towards a healthier and sustainable consumption. "Consumers must be willing to make the necessary changes to their lifestyle now least greater sufferings await them in the future," said Marimuthu.

-- BERNAMA