Zim business launch customer service organisation

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Zimbabwe's private sector has launched the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) as the country grapples with poor quality products and service delivery due to an economic crisis now in its ninth year.

Poor service delivery, once confined to government administration, has become rampant in the private sector due to the crisis, which has resulted in shortages and therefore limited options for consumers.

The customer, long touted as the king in business circles, is now treated as a bother in hospitals, banks, supermarkets, and other public facilities where services have become pathetic.

“It is very important for the country to be very active in enhancing customer service, competency and capacity through training,” said Lovemore Tsvangira, the executive director of ICS at the institution's launch last week.

He said the ICS would engage partners for an audit of customer service across different industrial and service companies, with a list of the best and worst performers being compiled from that audit.

“The benefits are that top performers will use the results to generate customer confidence, loyalty and new business, while at the same time leading by example to non-performers,” said Tsvangira.

The Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC) president Marah Hativagone, said customer care had to extend beyond service and tackle the issue of quality production.

“Good customer care demands that the producer looks after those activities that ensure the production of the right product,” she said.

Hativagone added: “Yesteryear's business approach focused on the needs of the producer than the consumer. In some companies, this practice is still rampant and must be changed.”

Zimbabweans have lately shunned domestically produced products like washing soap and others because of the deteriorating quality, preferring products from South Africa which are, however, more expensive.

Bread quality has also deteriorated markedly, and most retailers now warn customers to slice it at their own risk. Local producers argue that they have been hit by price controls and lack of inputs due to a foreign currency shortage in the country.