



‘KATYABAAZ (POWERLESS)’

An outreach campaign aimed at sensitising stakeholders regarding India’s energy crisis and theft issues

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CUTS INTERNATIONAL

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I. BACKGROUND

With over a quarter of India's population living without access to electricity, there is surprisingly little public discussion about the country's overwhelming energy crisis. While tremendous work is undertaken by several organisations to formulate better energy policies, their efforts find limited attention in the public sphere areas with the worst access to electricity, particularly in the states, such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Further, transmission losses of about 30 percent, much of it arising from electricity theft, compound the problem for utilities. There is an urgent need to create ground-level awareness regarding the scope/scale of negative impact of electricity theft, and the need to take steps towards use of sustainable alternative resources in the long run.

'*Katiyabaaz* (Powerless)' is an award winning documentary directed by Deepti Kakkar and Fahad Mustafa. The documentary narrates the story of the conflict between the citizens of Kanpur and its bankrupt electricity supply company, and is narrated through the eyes of two protagonists – a woman bureaucrat and an electricity thief popularly known as Katiyabaaz, whose actions contribute heavily to the electricity utilities losses but on the other hand, provides access to electricity to consumers, who don't have legal connections. The documentary, which found tremendous critical and audience acclaim, encapsulates the everyday story of small towns across the country that are under threat of economic and social stagnation due to insufficient infrastructure. It charts the relationship between electricity, governance, citizenship and economic prosperity.

The energy debate in India needs strong grassroots involvement (bottom up approach) to lobby effectively for better and more sustainable energy policies for civil awareness regarding the negative impact on economy and society. Thus, Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) implemented an outreach programme with the aim to generate awareness/debate amongst the public as well as high-impact stakeholders on issue pertaining to energy crisis and theft in India. *Katiyabaaz* provided the medium to create awareness across a different section of society and media, resulting in stirring a debate on the important issue of electricity theft.

II. METHODOLOGY

Katiyabaaz screening was organised in the capital of four states of India i.e. Rajasthan, West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The screenings were organised with support from local partners involving participants from state governments, elected representatives, distribution

companies (discoms), regulatory agencies, district administration, academic institutions, consumer groups, media and other key stakeholders. The purpose of the screenings was to reach out to policymakers and relevant stakeholders in capital cities to sensitise them about issues highlighted in the documentary and initiate a discussion/debate. The target was to cover 60-80 stakeholders (approximately) in such screenings. However, in most of the screenings we were able to bring in more than 100 stakeholders.

CUTS have initiated a forum at the state level called *Vidhayak Samvaad* in Rajasthan and Parliamentarians' Forum on Economic Policy Issues (PARFORE) at the National Level, which not only discusses economic issues, but also strive to coordinate between the Centre and States. The idea behind the Forums is to discuss the divergent opinions on the core economic policy issues reflected in and out of the Parliament and media. The Forums were conceived as non-partisan and informal forum where Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Members of Parliament (MPs) are able to air their views on a periodic basis on the core economic issues in the field of trade, competition, regulatory reforms, investment and their cross linkages. Thus, through the inroads of *Vidhayak Samvaad* and PARFORE, CUTS made an attempt to screen the documentary and be able to engage with MPs/MLAs to discuss issues related to power theft.

Towards the beginning of each screening, purpose of the meeting and the documentary was briefly explained, which was then followed by screening of the documentary. Post showcasing of the documentary, a panel discussion was organised which comprise of representatives from the government (local admin, electricity companies), consumer organisations, elected representatives, media, etc to debate on issue of electricity theft. The purpose of such screenings was to reach out to consumers, policymakers, etc and sensitise them on issues pertaining to electricity distribution reforms. The screenings resulted in sensitising consumers and civil society groups about the reform process, and moreover about their rights and responsibilities. Further, the screening and the panel discussion helped sensitising other stakeholders, such as utility, elected representatives, media, consumers, block and district administration officials and regulators regarding the needs and concerns of the consumers.

For all media coverage, please visit:

<http://www.cuts-ccier.org/Katiyabaaz/Media.html>

For all details regarding the events (List of participants, Glimpses, etc):

[http://www.cuts-ccier.org/Katiyabaaz/Capital Parliamentarians Screenings.html](http://www.cuts-ccier.org/Katiyabaaz/Capital_Parliamentarians_Screenings.html)

CAPITAL SCREENINGS/MLAs SCREENING/MPs SCREENING

CUTS with the support from World Bank through Energy Sector Management Assistant Programme (ESMAP) organised four capital screenings (namely Patna, Bihar; Jaipur, Rajasthan; Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and Kolkata, West Bengal) of the documentary entitled '*Katiyabaa?*'. CUTS also organised a special screening for MPs, representatives of various Embassies, etc in New Delhi. Further, in order to provide a platform for common consumers to be able to engage with the elected representatives and the policymakers, CUTS clubbed the screening for the MLA's along with the capital screening in Jaipur, Rajasthan.

The objective of organising such screening was to generate awareness among various stakeholders, viz. government, MPs, MLAs, regulators, producers, farmers, households, consumers etc. at different level on issues pertaining to electricity theft.

KOLKATA, WEST BENGAL

CUTS Calcutta Resource Centre (CUTS CRC) organised the screening at Nandan Hall, in Kolkata, West Bengal on August 21, 2014. The screening was well attended by spectrum of dignitaries including C R Bhowmik, Advisor (Retd), West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission; R Shome, Officer on Special Duty (MIS), Department of Power, Government of West Bengal; Siddhartha Mehta, CEO, India Power; P Chakraborty, Actor; Rupayan Dutta, British High Commission, Kolkata; Tirtha Biswas, Music Director; S Paul Majumdar, General Manager, Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation (CESC) Ltd; Biswajit Palit, General Manager (Loss Control Cell) CESC Ltd; Utpal Ghosh, Professor, Indian Institute of Social Welfare & Business Management (IISWBM); Prititosh Ray, Empanelled National Level Monitor, Ministry



of New and Renewable Energy, Government of India; Dilip Samajpati, Consultant, Reliance India Ltd; S Adikari, Power Department; Nikhil Agarwal, Press Trust of India; Abhijit Ganguly, Correspondent, Business Economics; etc among others. More than 100 people were present at the screening of the documentary.

The screening was followed by a discussion and interaction with the directors. Some excerpts from the discussion are as follows: One of the participants, Samajapati shared his opinion with filmmakers and emphasised that as a power engineer he felt defeated at the end of the documentary as no action was taken against Loha Singh, the power thief, while the MD of KESCO Ritu Maheswari, who initiated action against power theft, was transferred to a remote location. He was also critical about the section of politicians who fabricated issues to gain/retain power. Responding to Samajapati, filmmakers clarified that they are just story tellers and their perspective was to showcase a documentary and not to glorify any person.

Siddharth Mehta while sharing his experience suggested that people like Loha Singh should be utilised. He informed that during his tenure he had taken help of such people for the benefit of the system, as they are aware of each minute details of the demand and supply problem that exists in their locality.

Keya Ghosh, sharing the experience of CUTS in West Bengal, pointed out that the state utilities had reached this abysmal stage and were running in huge losses due to years and decades of inefficiency and absence of good customer service. Many utility officials refuse to meet the common consumer in order to understand their problems and make a genuine effort to resolve the same. Therefore, there is much to be done at the utility level itself. Ghosh ended her intervention by probing the audience that if in case power cut would have happened during the screening of *Katiyabaaaz* and continued for two long hours, would the audience be discussing the issue of power theft with the same enthusiasm or would they all have left the hall. Hence, access to power is crucial. In the absence of access to electricity, it would be difficult to address the issue of '*power theft*'.

Key messages that emerged out of the discussion were:

- Need for co-ordination: there is lack of coordination between the consumers and the Discoms officials. Hence, there is a need to bring them to a common platform
- Consumer groups can play a vital role to bridge the gap between consumers and policymakers
- Public Awareness and Responsibility: People need to be aware of energy conservation. They should be taught about their duty of not stealing electricity and paying proper bills

LUCKOW, UTTAR PRADESH

CUTS along with its local partner Consumer Guild, Lucknow and in collaboration with Uttar Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission (UPERC) organised the screening of *Katiyabaaz* at Wave Cinema, Gomati Nagar in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh on August 25, 2014. The purpose of the screening was to generate awareness among policymakers as well as local administration, discom, consumer groups, media houses etc.

The screening was well attended by more than **250 people**, alongwith spectrum of dignitaries including Desh Deepak Verma, IAS (Retd), Chairman, Uttar Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission



(UPERC); Meenakshi Singh, Member (Finance) UPERC; B Pandey, Member (Technical) UPERC; Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, Holding Charge of Secretary & Director and Generation UPERC; Abhishek Srivastava, Deputy Director, UPERC; B D Srivastava, Director, Electricity Safety, UPERC; Jugal Kishore, Bollywood Actor; Anupam Srivastava, Former National Secretary, Samajwadi Student Council; A P Singh, Chief, Lucknow Electricity Supply Administration; Levy Tikka, President, *Avadh Upbhokta Sanrakshan Samiti*; Avadhesh Verma, Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Consumer Council and others.

After screening of the documentary, the floor was opened to facilitate discussion among stakeholders on issues related to electricity theft and its impact on discoms and consumers. It emerged from the discussion that policymakers need to analyse the root cause of the electricity theft and take relevant steps to eliminate the same, instead of eliminating thieves. Policymakers should analyse the reason as to why consumers are inclined towards power theft instead of paying for legal electricity connections? Further, it is important to involve all stakeholders in the regulatory process in order to generate a sense of ownership among consumers.

Several participants emphasised on losses suffered by discoms on account of electricity thefts by consumers. Thus, consumers need to understand that if their neighbour is stealing electricity

than ultimately whole society has to bear the cost. Thus, there is a need to create awareness and sensitise consumers on issues related to electricity theft and enhance public participation to curb it. Further, consumer groups can also play a vital role in spreading awareness in the society.

Absence of coordination, trust deficit, complicated procedures between consumers and officials of discoms were identified as key barriers in the development of power sector. Most of the participants were of the opinion that problems can be resolved with proper communication between consumers and discoms. The need was also felt to bridge the gap between consumers and discoms by bringing them together on a common platform, more regularly.

Key messages emerged out of the discussion were:

- Absence of coordination, trust deficit, complicated procedures between consumers and officials of discoms is the key barriers in the development of power sector
- There is a need to create an effective system to eliminate electricity theft and provide reliable electricity supply
- Existing tariff structures does not reward those consumers who are saving electricity by using it more efficiently. This issue could be collectively raised by all consumer organisations before the Electricity Regulatory Commission (ERCs) during tariff hearings.
- Distribution Company should associate with grassroots consumer organisations in preventing theft, meter reading and bill distribution in rural areas.
- Quality Standards for supplies and services must be implemented with equal thrust in rural areas also

PATNA, BIHAR

CUTS along with its local partner Nidan organised a screening at Regent Fun Cinema, Gandhi Maidan, Patna, Bihar on September 13, 2014. The screening was organised in collaboration with Bihar State Power (Holding) Company Limited (BSPCL).

From head honchos to the line man from the BSPCL, its subsidiaries companies and other many eminent dignitaries viz. state administration, law abiding citizens, NGOs, media etc. and several other stakeholders participated in the screening. **550 people** were present during the screening.

Pratyaya Amrit, IAS, Secretary Energy and Chairman-cum-Managing Director, BSPCL along with its subsidiary companies' representatives, Palka Sahni,

Managing Director, South Bihar State Power Distribution Company; S N Lall Karan, Legal Adviser, Electricity Board; Balamurugan D Muragan, Managing Director,



North Bihar Power Distribution Corporation Limited; Sanjay Kumar Singh, Managing Director, Bihar State Power Transmission Company Ltd; Jitendra Srivastava, Bihar State Power Generation Limited; Rajiv Kumar, Deputy Development Commissioner and many more actively participated in the screening.

Power officials to line man appreciated the efforts by CUTS to organise such event to generate awareness among people and sensitise them about the negative impacts of electricity theft. Udai S Mehta, Director, CUTS was also present at the screening and shared the overall objective of



the screening which was to generate mass awareness, and build a common consensus against electricity theft.

Amrit, CMD, BSPHCL encouraged the efforts and felt that all his colleagues should watch the documentary. Amrit mentioned that "energy is a field where when things run smoothly, everyone is happy but if one day is spent without electricity, the blame comes on the department and the staff has to face public ire." He

said that by next year, energy scenario in the state will be much improved. "This is a field where it is difficult to implement reforms overnight, but we have to work hard to bring substantial changes and we are doing that," he mentioned.

Key messages that emerged out of the discussion were:

- Awareness generation and capacity building of consumers and producers can resolve the issues pertaining to electricity sector
- Deficit of electricity supply and unavailability of connection are some of the reasons for consumers indulging in electricity theft
- Need to take intensified steps to stop power pilferage and improve quality of service, which would ultimately reduce consumer dissatisfaction
- High tariffs and corruption among utility employees were observed as main reasons for power theft. Immediate and stern action is required to be taken on these issues

JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN (CAPITAL & MLA's Screening)

CUTS organised the *Katiyabaaz* screening at Hotel Jaipur Palace, Jaipur, Rajasthan on December 16, 2014. There were approximately **105 participants** representing CSOs, NGOs working on related issues, media and academics. Among



dignitaries, R G Gupta, Advisor to the Government of Rajasthan, Department of Energy; R C Sharma, Director (Engineering), Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Authority (RERC); K L Vyas, Ex-Member RERC; Chhavi Rajawat, *Sarpanch*, Sodha village of Tonk district; Rajendra Prasad Bora, Senior Media Person and Sunny Sebastian, Vice-Chancellor, Harideo Joshi University of Journalism and Mass Communication and several others attended the screening.

Setting the tone of the discussion, Udai S Mehta, Director, CUTS highlighted that power theft is also a major part of the cumulative loss of more than 70,000 crore to the government exchequer in Rajasthan. He informed that Prime Minister's vision is 'Electricity for all' and to achieve the same, Rs 4 billion USD have been allocated to reform the electricity sector. He stressed on the need of mass campaign against mounting losses to discoms and urged the government and masses to stop vote bank politics on electricity.

The screening of documentary initiated very insightful discussion among panellists and participants. Among the panellists, R G Gupta, Chhavi Rajawat, *Sarpanch*, Rajendra Prasad Bora, R C Sharma and Sunny Sebastian expressed their insights on issues presented in the documentary.

Bora appreciated the contents of the documentary and stated that in order to curb power theft, overall system needs to be improved. Whereas, R G Gupta raised his concern on the issue and described the severity of theft in



Northern Indian states and admitted that in Rajasthan, there was some reduction in theft. Gupta defined power theft as a practice, which is the result of vote bank politics. He said that until and unless, there is political will, curbing power theft would be difficult.

Chhavi Rajawat appreciated the documentary and emphasised on the need of coordination between government officials and public representatives. Curbing electricity theft requires action-oriented solutions. Being a rural public representative, Rajawat insisted on the need for awareness regarding electricity issues, such as using solar/alternate energy through waste cycling. She also said that villagers are willing to pay if good quality services are provided to them.

Sunny Sebastian expressed his concern regarding the increasing technical losses, as 25 to 30 percent of the total power losses can be attributed to power theft. Appreciating the case of Gujarat, he mentioned that the T&D losses have come down to only 12-15 percent, which is perhaps due to political will and providing right environment to the discoms to do their business. Sebastian elaborating the figures said that with the control over theft, as much as one thousand crore units annually can be saved.

R C Sharma stressed on the need for improvement in the system as power theft is closely linked with it. He mentioned that the genuine efforts of consumer organisations, such as CUTS International among others and providing incentives to consumers residing in areas where electricity theft is very low, will also incentivise consumers in other areas to also reduce the act of stealing electricity.



Further, Sharma informed that recently RERC has notified 'Standards of Performance' for discoms, to provide time-bound service to consumer and also handle their problems with a clause of compensation in case of default.

The session was then followed by open discussion, wherein many participants raised concern over issues related to bad quality of services, delay in providing connection by discoms, corruption related matters, man-power shortage, lack of availability of separate data for power theft instead of the figures being subsumed in T&D losses, etc.

Post the event, R C Sharma sent an email appreciating the intervention of CUTS on the issue of electricity theft (**Kindly refer to Annexure I**)

Key messages that emerged out of the discussion were:

- Enhanced understanding and awareness on various clauses and provisions of 'Standards of Performance' needs to be generated among consumers
- Consumers can eliminate power theft from society, if provided proper support from discoms and regulators
- Strong political will along with effective coordination is required between government officials and public representatives to reduce power theft
- People were in favour of installing community meter outside the village so that theft of power, in there any, can be identified and measured. The village level committee can be formed to take care of that, and, some incentives can be given for good results.
- There is an immediate need for capacity building of the people, especially rural, for creating an environment where people can ensure their active involvement in the reform process. Further, if such workshops could be conducted at district level it can help people realise their role in the reform process.

SPECIAL SCREENING FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT NEW DELHI

CUTS organised the screening of *Katiyabaaaz* for Members of Parliament, media and embassies at Indian Habitat Center, New Delhi on August 13, 2014. The screening was well attended by several dignitaries including Producer of the documentary Anurag Kasyap; Directors, Deepti Kakkar and Fahad Mustafa; Secretary General of CUTS, Pradeep S Mehta and several other representatives of media and embassies.



The documentary was followed by interaction with the *Katiyabaaaz* team and the discussion focussed on issues relating to power theft and social evil, as featured in the documentary. Responding to queries, Kakkar informed the audience that the documentary was based on real life incidents. However, she emphasised that largely Indian audiences are not open to watching documentaries in theatres and want to watch them at no cost in their homes.

Further, lot of media representatives raised questions indicating that the documentary ended without providing solution to the society or with any specific message to the masses. Directors responded that as filmmakers their job is to narrate a story and present it to the audience and not to provide solutions and portray how to fix the issue. This is something which audience needs to find out and think and do they really want to fight against this social evil? The idea behind was to instigate discussion among the common man and sensitise them about issues related to electricity theft.

Reacting to one the questions raised from the audience, regarding selecting electricity as a subject for the documentary and Kanpur as a city, to which Kakkar responded that the sole reason was that Kanpur being the birth city of Mustafa, Co-director, *Katiyabaaaz* wanted to shoot it in the city which was once called the Manchester of the East. Responding to another question, Kakkar stated that the subject could have been anything of water, power or electricity, but it was the web of wires which had pulled her towards finalising the subject.

Way Forward

CUTS has organised screening of Katiyabaaz in total 17 different locations across India with the support of local partners and distribution companies. Based on its experience and feedback received during the screening CUTS would like to expand its base and profile to take up necessary research and consumer advocacy activities on issues related to electricity theft at the grassroots level.

With the proposed initiative, CUTS would like to create a model village through continuous awareness and capacity building activities in a selected village. The purpose would be to sensitise each consumer about the ill effect of electricity theft and build community consensus to eradicate this social evil. The initiative would aim at establishing Vidyut Sudhar Samitis at the village level and they will be mandated to organise and educate consumers, and to eventually become agents in the service delivery chain. Samiti members would comprise unemployed youth, with an interest in the projects and the expectation that their involvement in service delivery may become an income-earning opportunity in the near future.

Well established network of local civil society organisations and consumer groups across the project territories would be utilised to effectively implement this project. CUTS would utilise the expertise of its team which has been built over time through representation in regulatory committees, interaction with CSOs, government bodies, and its past work to implement this project.

**ANNEXURE I APPRECIATION EMAIL FROM R C SHARMA, DIRECTOR
(ENGINEERING), RAJASTHAN ELECTRICITY REGULATORY COMMISSION**

18th December, 2014

Dear Mr. Udai Mehta

I convey my congratulations and appreciation, of the documentary - 'Katiyabaaz', showcased by CUTS on 16th December, 2014. As an outcome of the screening, few consumers visited RERC to discuss issues pertaining to redressal of consumers' problems and Standards of Performance of Electricity service, which itself speaks volumes about huge success of CUTS recent intervention, among many others.

One important thing that I have always appreciated of CUTS including the recent event is the mix of crowd that you are able to bring together on a common platform ranging from senior government officials, regulatory agency, elected representatives, consumer organisations, media, etc for a healthy debate. I once again thank CUTS for taking up the initiative and for providing the regulatory commission with a platform to be able to engage with the consumers.

Regards,

R C Sharma

Director (Engineering), RERC