

Proceeding of Seminar on
Role of Utility and Media in Strengthening
Reform in Power Sector of Bangladesh
(RESA PROJECT)

25 March 2010

CIRDAP Auditorium, Dhaka



Jointly Organized by



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Introduction

Unnayan Shamannay- a non-profit organization for research, development and cultural learning in association with CUTS International and Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB) jointly arranged a seminar on Thursday, 25 March 2010 by the title “Role of Utility and Media to Strengthen Electricity Reform in Power Sector of Bangladesh” at CIRDAP auditorium, Dhaka.

In all, 92 participants, who included representatives from government and non-government organisations, partners and academia attended in the seminar. Chief Guest of that seminar was Major General Md. Shubid Ali Bhuiyan psc (retd), MP and Chairman of Standing Committee on Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources. Here, also participated Bhuiyan Shafiqul Islam, Chairman, Rural Electrification Board (REB) as a special guest. The seminar was chaired and presided over by Dr.



Taiabur Rahman, Research Director (honorary), Unnayan Shamannay and Professor of the Department of Development Studies, Dhaka University. Moreover, Kazi

Faruque, President, Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB) and many representatives from different quarters relating to power sector including electronic and print media were also attended.

Speech by

Taiabur Rahman introduced Honorable Chief Guest and other distinguished guests and welcome all to the seminar. He pointed out that electricity is the forcing power of any country. In Bangladesh, per capita electricity consumption is very low compared with the other countries. We are interested to work with all including civil society, government and others to develop this sector.

Welcome Speech by

Kazi Faruque, President, Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB)



The seminar began with a welcome speech by **Kazi Faruque**. He noted that we can't avoid electricity anyhow but half of the population of this country is deprived from it. What is the opinion of consumer and how the general consumer would complain regarding electricity problems? These are very important, he said. He appreciated the initiative of such a new idea to aware consumers about their rights to use electricity by CUT International implemented by Unnayan Shamannay and also thankful for keeping CAB to work together.

According to the primary research findings of reform issue in 2008, consumers knew little about the power generation and also consumption, he informed. Even, few consumers became sentient that the reform activities are going on towards power sector development in local and national level. Eventually, they don't know what was being done by Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission. General consumer even didn't know the way to report their problems, demands, complain etc. he talked.

To enhance the capacity towards reform in power sector development, RESA is an experimental project which has already accomplished its activities in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, he informed. He also informed that they arranged a training program where participated civil society members and allied persons along with the employee from electricity board, member of BERC and energy experts around the country.

At the end of the project, a research report shows that consumers are now more conscious about the electricity consumption. In addition, a relationship has been grown up among the civil society, consumer and the authority of utility, he talked. Around 700 consumers frequently go to the electricity office to inform their problems and also discuss how to reduce the misuse of energy. This consciousness has been build by the RESA Project, he said. Finally, he supposed to continue the prioritization of consumer's opinion and request media persons to publish more news on consumer's rights and opinions.

Overview

Chinmoy Mutsuddi, Nodal Person, RESA Project, Unnayan Shamannay, Dhaka



Chinmoy Mutsuddi presented an overview of the RESA Project. He appreciated some outcomes of the project pointed by Kazi Faruque. He said that the impact of utility to produce electricity is important. In contrast, the consumer who will use electricity, they also have the responsibility to utilize it efficiently.

Consumers were not aware on the subject of power and electricity but they now know better than previous about their rights in this regard, he added. At the beginning of the project, we arranged few workshops to aware people and also conduct base line survey and collect information from 13 districts, he said. We also established a national reference group by which people from grass root level have had the opportunity to share their problems and potentials, he replied.

Moreover, we arranged Grass Root Interface Meetings in 8 different places in 2 times, first one was arranged at the beginning of the project and another was latter with the same participants to identify their progress, he informed. But what will happen after the end of the project, we should think about it, he noted. He also put emphasis on how to make the committee more effective, we have to be careful.

Appreciating some points of Chinmoy Mutsuddi, Taiabur Rahman has put an example that Indian Government came to augment power sector after ending the same type of project. He requests media to inspire government to carry out the rest works like India.

Dr. M. Fouzul Kabir Khan, Professor of Economics and Finance, School of Business, North South University and former Secretary, Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, GoB, Dhaka



Fouzul Kabir prepared a presentation on 'Role of Utility to Strengthen Electricity Reform in Power Sector of Bangladesh'. His presentation focused on the need for reforms in power sector in Bangladesh and role of utility to strengthen it. Utility means specially public utility according to Fauzul Kabir. Now, a public utility is a business that furnishes an everyday necessary to the public at large, e.g. electricity. It may be publicly or privately owned and operated as private businesses. But government must regulate these public utilities to ensure that they provide a reasonable level of service at a fair price. Fouzul Kabir focused that the public policy is now based on the idea that competition rather than regulation is a better way to manage Utilities.

In 1990, Bangladesh Power Sector was constitutionally public and extensive political intervention in all aspects of activity continues. These lead to high level of losses, poor collection performance and supply interruptions.

To make the market competitive and encourage private sector investment the reform has become an inevitable issue in 1993 on the recommendation of interministerial committee and REB beyond the scope of reform. Hence, unbundling generation, transmission and distribution, it created framework for competition and private participation accompanied by corporatization and creation of new companies. As a result, distribution losses have fallen from 30% a decade ago to 14.6% now.

Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission issued licenses for power generation, transmission and distribution in delay. It passed order for bulk supply electricity tariff re-fixation of BPDB on September 2008 and subscribers raised by around 10 per cent | October 2009. It also announced a hike in retail power tariffs of BPDB, DESCO, DPDC, WZPDC by 6-7 per cent on an average with effect from March 1, 2010. But it was always going to be a challenge.

Unbundling has generally been successful but reform remains a work in slow progress and ambitious hopes of structure like telecoms industry is dead. On the other hand, regulation has a long way to go. Therefore, role of Utility in generation, transmission and distribution is very important.

Views from the grassroots

Policy/Government Related

- Transmission lines, grid sub-stations, distribution lines are very old and undersized and need to be renovated and augmented.
- Frequent load shedding, especially during evening time, hampers the studies of the students which affects the examinations
- Low voltage is a common problem

Procedural related

- Once the power is gone, it is hard to tell when it will return
- Customers have to contribute for replacing stolen transformers
- Frequent power outages hamper daily life. Most of the day, it takes up their important time
- Electricity bills are not sent on proper time; as a result most of the consumers can not pay on time. Sometime excess bills appear
- Meters are faulty.
- Delay in meter installation is always there. Applicants don't get meter/connection in due time.
- Complaint of presence of a middleman between the applicant and the utility

Regulatory Related

- Electricity officials harass subscribers after submitting complaints
- Electricity officials do not help subscribers in getting connections. They harass the customers for connecting the line
- Procurement of low quality materials results in low quality power supply. It increases the operation and maintenance cost and also project costs

Responses from the local utilities

- The actual demand for electricity in the country increased gradually, but supply is not the same as it was before, rather it has been decreased, this led to frequent load shedding.
- To minimize load shedding, immediate steps needed to increasing power generation capacity and energy conservation focusing efficient management and public awareness to save power.
- Initiatives are needed to upgrade the old lines
- Electricity officials harass consumers in partially true, said the utilities in the meeting

Panel Discussion

Professor M. Shamsul Alam, Professor, Department of Electrical & Electronic Engineering, CUET, Chittagong



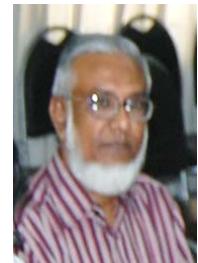
Shamsul Alam argued that there are no alternatives of reform of power sector but what is happening by this ground, people don't know. If we consider this sector vertically then we can find up-stream and down-stream segmentation. How can contribute the utility in down-stream to strengthen power sector? This is the issue of today's seminar, he said. In up-stream, the parliament members and government's representatives will identify the constitutional impediments and people's rights, he hoped.

Secondly, if the utility separated, it may also isolate from the government administratively by corporatizing the generation, transmission and distribution. Meanwhile, we should regulate the monopoly market and that's why the Regulatory Commission has been arrived. Now, if we insert this commission in a vertical stream then we can assume that a mid-stream segmentation has been developed.

Therefore, up-stream member will prepare policies, regulatory commission will make regulatory decision and finally the down-stream will provide utility services to consumers. Now, he read the point no. 6 of his paper that how the mid-stream Regulatory Commission contribute to strengthen power sector in Bangladesh and simultaneously, interpreted all important points from his paper.

Md. Showkat Hossain, Former Member, BERC & Director Finance Power Grid Company of Bangladesh Ltd. Dhaka

Md. Showkat Hossain stated that utility is utility, this is not only public utility by opposing Fouzul Kabir. According to him, utility means both public utility and also private utility. He expected more clear definition of Utility from him. In addition, he didn't say the past of it elaborately.



Furthermore, he didn't note about Rural Power Company Limited (RPCL) which produce more than 210 mw energy and supply to the national grid. PGCP is the only transmission company in Bangladesh, he argued. Fouzul Kabir didn't mention the distribution company name of North West Power Generation Company Ltd. already has been build it North West zone, he noted. However, he had strongly supported the reform activities despite of all barriers.

He suggested that reform is necessary for the following four reasons:

1. Low Coverage
2. Reliability and Quality is very poor
3. Loss making organization
4. Encourage to investment

And he offered the following recommendations:

1. Segregate industry vertically (by generation, transmission and distribution)
2. Make a commercial relation with relevant bodies
3. Tariff should also be reform

Arun Karmakar, Special Correspondence, the Daily Prothom Alo

Arun Karmakar made a presentation on 'Electricity Reformation in Power Sector of Bangladesh: Role of Media in Strengthening the Awareness of CSOs'. He presented some case studies of beneficiaries by the project from different areas of our country. He depicts some examples that how people came to know about electricity and identify electric bill. He showed that people now also conscious to power consumption they are using electricity very efficiently. He requests media to focus more coverage on this important issue.



Panel Discussion:

Molla Amzad Hossain, Editor, the Energy & Power

Molla Amzad Hossain said, reduce 1 mw electricity is more important than generate 1 mw. We are very much courageous that many people from rural areas are now using solar energy. He replies that media is playing a very good role.

Open Floor

Taiabur Rahman proposed open floor to all participants including media to discuss on the topics of the seminar.

Salma Nasreen, Deputy Secretary, Chittagong Hill Tracts Affair Ministry

In the consumer point of view, her observation is that parity between per capita income and per capita power consumption should be ensured today. We are living now a modern era and can't get over our problems by only the obsolete slogan, she quoted.



Secondly, her observation is that diversification of energy sources can reduce the cost because the cost of power generation that varies, depending on the type of fuel used. The capital cost of power also varies because power plant with the lowest variable cost that is coal can meet the base demand where as with higher variable cost that is gas can meet the picking demand, this can minimize the overall variable cost of power.

In our country, new power strategy needs to be domestic flavor and certainly foreign players can come and join, we don't mind, she said. But they have to ensure our domestic flavor. Power sector financing is another vital issue according to her but she could not find anything special on it. Finally, she requested authority to give incentives to IPPs and make it more competitive.

Munsi Abdul Ahad, Deputy Director, Agriculture Department

Munsi Abdur Ahad wanted to know from media and power sector authority that how many resources we are being used to improve this sector and by so called reform.

Secondly, in a consumer point of view, they are ready to pay actual cost and profit margin but authority must ensure uninterrupted and quality power supply. Abdul Ahad also ready to buy pre-paid meter like others but it should not be mandatory for farmers and if need to do so, authority must support him financially.

He put some examples from government and private organizations and individuals that how they misuse electricity inefficiently. He requested media and authority not only to regulate but also control them by more campaign or forcing by rules.

Ram Chandra Das, RTM International

Ram Chandra articulated three issues like aware grass root community, restructuring policy level and finally role of media to strengthen power sector. We need to mount up the three things, he suggested.

Secondly, at the beginning of each government's regime, a base line about the present condition of power sector can be published and media should focus it comprehensively. Thirdly, we need to conduct more action research like RESA to meet the rights of our life.

Jagangir Hossain, Journalist

According to him, media can't alone solve all problems. It can only identify problems and also potentials then publish. But when government becomes fail, we blame media, this is not fair, he said. However, he recognized electricity problems as a major problem of our country.

Abdul Hai, Freedom Fighter

Firstly, the actual demand for electricity in the country increase gradually but supply is not the same as it was before rather it has been decreased, this lead to increase load shading. Secondly, to minimize load shading, immediate steps needed to increase in power generation capacity. Two

above statement had been taken by Abdul Hai from Fouzul Kabir's presentation. Hence, he urged authority to take an immediate step to develop this sector.

Habibul Hasan Siddique, TMSS

Initially, information in details about the power sector should be published in the website so that consumer can know easily, Habibul Hasan said. Moreover, we need to identify the sector which needs to be focused, he added. He emphasized on renewable energy and suggested government to encourage it comprehensively as the world already setting up it as a gainful source both an economically and also environmentally.

Saiful Islam, BPDB

Concurring reforms, Saiful Islam pointed out some issues against so called reform concern. PDB has been wrecked persistently in last 17 years by the reform issue, he said. But we can't yet reach our production to 5000 mw. Although, almost 10 companies has been raised. As said by Saiful Islam, vertical segregation may be the reason for no technical coordination to generation, distribution and transmission and as a result two national grid failure has been occurred whether Asugong Power Station and PGCD were alleged for that failure although the two companies are followed by reforms. If we made horizontal segregation under the umbrella of PDB in our own style, the technical coordination and accountability must be persisted. He demanded the statistics of wheeling charge during PDB and the charge during PGCP. It should be published in the media, he replied.

AK Mahmud, BPDB

In accord with Saiful Islam, AK Mahmud stated that this is the time to evaluate the outcome of reform. According to him, until we measure the benefit of reform, we should not take further step to continue the process. We entirely fail to increase the production of electricity in a whole, he added. Media can help the authority by publishing appropriate information, he replied.

Major General Md. Shubid Ali Bhuiyan psc (retd), MP and Chairman of Standing Committee on Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources



Shubid Ali Bhuiyan stated that this is a seminar on an important contemporary issue which will help people to aware about their rights to use electricity and also reduce the misuse of it. The actual demand of electricity at present 5500 mw and very recently we are producing 4000 mw electricity, he informed. In fact, if we produce 10000/12000 mw electricity then the demand will also increase, he assumed. Because, many people have interest to invest money in different sector but power failure is a big issue to discourage them.

The present government has taken this issue very seriously, he said. He has put a special focus on media to publish more news on power sector. However, private sector has moved towards to get over the present situation and government is being prioritized them but must hold all responsibilities to regulate them, he argues. Our government is trying lot to produce more electricity, he said but it's true that government alone can't solve the problem. He emphasized on private sector to make it more competitive. But the price must depend on the consideration of government's decision and also play a crucial role to regulate them. He argued that corruption increases usually in terms of government interventions and in this regard privatization is the apparent solution and as soon as possible the power sector will ramify its activities to private sector and hope, we will produce more power than our needs within 5-6 years.

Concluding Remarks:

In conclusion, Taiabur Rahman requests all participants to save energy and also urges the policy makers and rich people to use electricity efficiently in his/her house or office etc. The main objectives of today's seminar are to identify the role of utility and media to strengthen power sector in Bangladesh. In that sense, many fruitful discussions have been taken place. As already our

honorable chief guest informed that we need 5-6 years to produce power sufficiently and we hope so, Taiabr Rahman said. Moreover, many rural people are using solar energy although it is costly and therefore we need local solar panel to meet the demand of it. He also suggested to make it more cost effective. Wrapped up the seminar by thanking all and special thanks to Chief Guest Shubid Ali Bhuiyan by Taiabur Rahman and hope, the seminar will build mass awareness to use electricity efficiently as well as production.

Key Points and Recommendations Emerged from the Seminar

- Reforms of the power sector are inevitable to ensure the quality of it.
- Many success stories of the RESA Project around the country have been identified by Arun Karmakar, Special Correspondence, The Daily Prothom Alo
- The RESA project has contributed lot to make mass awareness and build the capacity, so that they could participate in the reform process. A research finding show that many consumers now are going to the electricity office to inform their problems and discuss how they can reduce the misuse of energy in their house or office etc.
- Private sectors participation has already ensured to make the market competitive. But the competition is inequitable in public and private sector
- Alternative energy sources can be the solution
- To ensure effective consumer's participation/empowerment, role of utility and media in strengthening reform in power sector of Bangladesh are very crucial. It had been clearly identified in the seminar.



Chairman, Rural
Electrification Board
(REB)

Chairman, Standing
Committee on Ministry
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Annex-I
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