

Bangladesh

Grassroots Interface Meetings (GIMs): Phase II

**A PILOT PROJECT ON CAPACITY BUILDING ON ELECTRICITY
REFORMS IN BANGLADESH, INDIA AND NEPAL**



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1. Introduction

Grassroots Interface Meetings (GIMs) were conducted in two phases with support from local stakeholders including legislators, farmers, small entrepreneurs, educationists, lawyers, doctors, media persons, etc in different districts of Bangladesh. The key agenda of the grassroots interface meetings were to reach out to the different shareholders at the local level (rural-semi urban) and make them aware of the role that they need to play in regulatory reforms activities in electricity sector and also to provide them with key advocacy skills, to build their capacity to engage effectively.

During the first phase of the GIMs, relevant information was disseminated to different category of consumers such as domestic, farmer, commercial users, etc at the grassroots level on the present regulatory scenario and efforts were made to register their problems, needs and challenges. Handouts in local vernacular were prepared on the basis of the 'territorial base paper' to facilitate discussions. During the second phase of the GIMs, the key objective was to discuss the possible solutions to the systemic problems identified during the first phase of the GIMs. The problems were discussed in the presence of local legislators and utilities and they provided solutions to the problems to the consumers. The second phase of the GIMs was successfully completed and this report provides a summary of the various GIMs.

The second phase of the GIMs was designed to disseminate solutions to the systemic problems raised by consumers during the first phase. The focus of the meetings was to discuss and provide the consumers an overview of the complaint redressal mechanism procedure. The partners made efforts to ensure that most of the participants were those which had also attended the first phase of the GIMs.



GIM at Khulna on 24 August 2009

During the second phase, a total of 08 GIMs were held at 08 different districts in Bangladesh. In all close to 600 participants comprising officials from the electricity departments and other government departments, local legislators, policy makers, university professors, energy specialists, media, actively participated in the meetings. RESA Coordinator from Unnayan Shamannay facilitated the GIMs while Nodal Person was also present at some of the GIMs. All the meetings were hosted jointly by the local RESA partners with support from the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB).

Matrix 1: presents the locations of the second phase of GIMs with information on district coverage, and number of participants.

Matrix 1: Basic Information of the second phase GIMs

Location	Date (in 2009)	Districts Covered	Number of Participants	Hosting Organization(s)
Sirajganj	19 July	Sirajganj	51	Social Work Center
Comilla	24 July	Comilla	60	United People's Trust
Gazipur	27 July	Gazipur	79	AREED
Chapainawa bganj	03 August	Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj Gaibandha	109	Beel Chalan Unnayan Sangstha
Bhola	10 August	Barisal, Bhola	76	Bhola CAB
Cox's Bazar	16 August	Cox's Bazar	62	Wait N C
Khagrachari	18 August	Khagrachari	46	Ujjibok
Khulna	24 August	Khulna, Jessore Meherpur	113	Desh
Total number of participants			596	

2. GIMs – IInd Phase: Overview

The GIMs began with an inaugural session with introductory remarks on RESA project and outcome of first phase of the GIMs. This was followed by the Session I: Key Systemic problems and their possible solutions and Session II: Grievance Redressal Mechanism (GRM). After completion of these two sessions, floor discussion took place, where the consumer participated actively and engaged with the resource persons. Given the presence of high level officials, policy makers and experts from Dhaka and local level officials of electricity authorities and legislators in the GIMs, consumers were provided with an opportunity to engage with them and be able to get solutions to their problems.



10 August 2009 (RESA Coordinator, Residential Engineer, West Zone Power Distribution Company, Assistant Manager of 38 Megawatt rental power plant, President of CAB Bhola and local legislator at Bhola GI, GM and AGM of REB (not in the picture) were also present)

Resource Persons and Facilitators

All the GIMs were facilitated by the local partners of RESA project alongwith support from Unnayan Shamannay. Relevant resource persons for all the GIMs were from local electricity authorities (Refer to Annexure 2 and 3--list of external and local resource persons). The external resource persons included distinguished persons such as university professors, high officials of the electricity authorities, ex-DESA official and a member of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC). Apart from the resource persons and facilitators, most of the GIMs were attended by high officials of local electricity authorities, local administration and local NGOs.

3. Summary of issues discussed during the GIMs

Mainly two key issues were discussed in two session's i.e. systematic problems raised by consumers in the first phase with the solutions and complaint redressal mechanism and its effectiveness. The following is the gist of discussions that emerged from the GIMs.

Key Systemic problems and their possible solutions

Systematic problems are huge in the electricity sector in Bangladesh. Across different categories of consumers face these problems day after day. They narrated their daily experiences during first phase of GIMs. During second phase of GIMs we presented those same problems that they are facing at present, and those have been discussed in presence of local legislators.



GM of REB, Comilla, CAB president, BERC member, PDP officials were present at Comilla GIM, 24 July, 2009

The following categories are the systematic problems included for discussion.

Policy/government related

- Transmission lines, grid sub-stations, distribution lines are 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

Redressal and procedural related/utility

- Once the power is gone, it is hard to tell when it will return
- Customers have to contribute for replacing stolen transformers It is a big problem for agricultural subscribers
- 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 cannot pay on time. Sometime excess bills appear. Inconsistencies in billing system are also common.
- Meters are faulty and those faulty meters are installed for meter reading.
- Delay in meter installation is always there. Applicants do not get meter/connection in due time.
- Average billing is very familiar to consumers
- Complaint of presence of a middleman between the applicant and the utility (that makes the scenario complicated).

Regulatory related

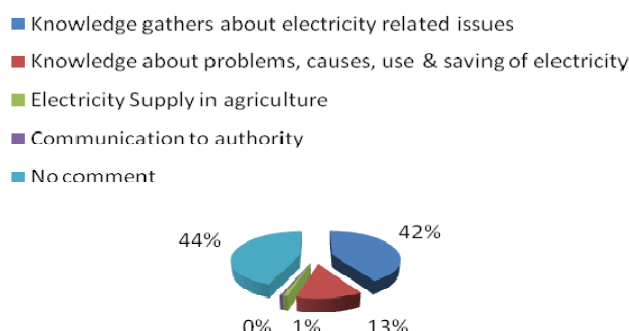
- Electricity officials harass subscribers after submitting complaints
- Electricity officials do not help subscribers in getting connections. They harass the customers for connecting/ reconnecting the line.
- Procurement of low quality materials results low quality power supply. It increases the operation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

Responses from the local utilities

Bangladesh faces serious power crisis now. 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. Required planned investment in the power sector, has not been made for many years. Sufficient power generators were also not installed; this led to frequent load shedding. To minimize load shedding and low voltage situation local resource persons stressed on taking immediate steps to increasing power generation capacity and energy conservation focusing efficient management, and public awareness to save power. They have suggested that the government initiatives are needed to upgrade the old lines/substations. Electricity officials harass consumers is partially true, said the utilities in the meeting. However, they have committed to the consumers that from now on any harassment in terms of new connection, complaints attendance or other issues will easily be solved, if they (consumers) come to one point service centre. Regarding theft of transformers they said cost sharing by the agriculture consumers for replacement has been introduced to ensure ownership of transformers by the consumers so that the owners become more careful to stop stealing. They also favored building strong public awareness against stealing of transformer. Utilities assured the meeting that billing and metering problems will be solved if the consumer's come to one point service centre. Meter reading and billing, failing which concern officials must be punished. They have assured that one point service is capable of handling these problems. Utilities mentioned that they do not allow any middlemen for new connection or any other consumer's affair. So, consumer's should go to the utilities, said the local resource person in the meeting.

Grievance redressal mechanism

Table: 3 Explanations of consumer's choice %



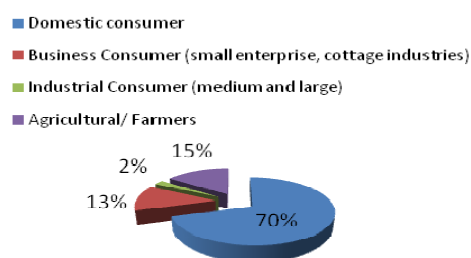
Issues of consumer's complaint were discussed in all the GIMs. All consumers participated in the discussion and they questioned the local utilities in relation to their complaints. Mainly three fold of the complaint related issues were discussed; existing mechanism for the redressal of complaints, filing of complaints and follow up by the

consumers, and time frame for redressal of complaints. In this session, Utilities explained to the consumer's how and where to complain and follow up, another was complaint receiving and solution mechanism. Most of the consumers instantly told the utilities in the meeting that they do not complain because officials do not pay any heed to their complaint. Utilities tried to defend most of the questions regarding the complaints. Utilities suggested the consumer's to register complaints at one stop service centres. REB consumers will get response to their complaints within 24 hours, as was assured by the REB officials.

4. Findings of perception survey of consumers

A perception survey of consumers who participated in the GIMs during the second phase was conducted. Out of 596 consumers (different categories) 389 were surveyed in the meetings.

Table: 1 Categories of surveyed consumers (%)



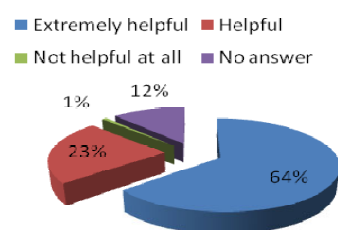
Most of the surveyed consumers participated in the first phase of GIMs. They gave their opinions in formatted coded questionnaires. Surveyed consumers were categorised as -- 70.2% domestic consumers, 12.3% commercial consumers, 2.3% industrial and 15.2% agricultural consumers (Table:1).

Out of the 389 consumers, 292 (75.1 %) attended the first GIMs, which was quite a positive feedback. Consumers who gained experience during the GIMs helped in raising awareness on the reforms process

of the opinion that the experience gathered in the electricity sector in Bangladesh. They were during GIMs was beneficial in raising their awareness level and building their own capacity to comprehend the issues more effectively. 64 percent consumers found the GIMs to be extremely helpful, 23.1 percent said it was helpful but only 3 participants (.8%) found the meeting not very helpful (Table 2).

While satisfaction levels of the participants are shown in Table 2, explanations of their choice are reflected in Table 3. They were satisfied because the consumers were able to get access to

Table: 2 Satisfaction levels of GIMs experiences %



information, interact with experts/resource persons and be able to gain knowledge about issues relating to the electricity sector. Close to 42% of the consumers were able to gained knowledge on issues pertaining to regulatory reforms in the electricity sector to their rights/responsibilities *vis-à-vis* the electricity sector, having participated in the Grassroots Interface Meetings (GIMs). Further, 13% of the consumers gathered information about the causes of electricity problems, proper use of electricity and the importance of energy saving mechanism.

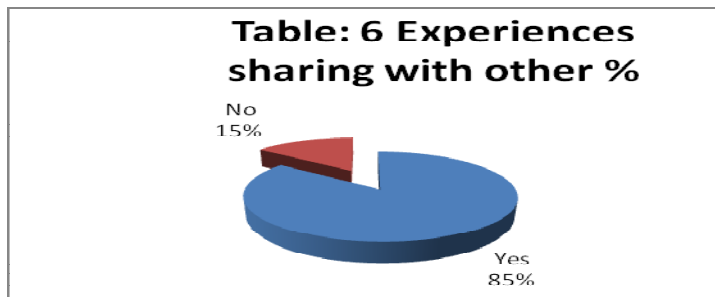


Table 4 Most interesting and useful session

Categories of Session	%
Grievance Redressal Mechanism	44.7
Curbing Power Theft and the Role of Consumers	23.1
Awareness on Energy Conservation and the Role of Consumers	10.5
Facts and Status of Power Scenario in the state	6.9
No answer	14.7

Table 4 reflects that close to 45% respondents found the session on grievance redressal mechanism to be most interesting and useful session in the first GIMs, followed by the session on curbing power theft and the role of consumers.

Table 5 : Change of Mind Set

Md. Motaleb Rahman, a domestic consumer having attended both the phases of GIMs, claims to be more aware of the various problems relating to electricity and appreciates the role of the electricity authority. Previously, he used to blame the local electricity authorities for the load shedding without being aware of the problems faced by electricity authority. However, having attended the GIMs, he is able to understand issues pertaining to load management, T&D losses, etc and is able to appreciate the situation of the local electricity authority.

After having attended the GIMs, close to 85% of the consumers shared their learning's with other consumers who were not present at the GIMs in their own localities. Close to 66.3 percent participants have been able to stop the activity of stealing electricity, or they have provided advice to consumers in their locality to submit complaints. It is encouraging to note that close to 89 percent consumers, have shown interest to participate in the grassroots interface meetings, if they are organised in the near future and they have also promised to encourage others in their locality to attend such meetings. They believe that meetings such as GIMs are important in order to build awareness and motivate consumers to save electricity and to become a responsible consumer.

5. Way Forward

The participants of the GIMs expressed their pleasure to be able to take part in such activities. They made commitment to attend such meetings in future. They have gathered many experiences from the GIMs. In Khulna a committee was formed under active leadership of a participant who attended GIMs in both phases. This committee is working to increase awareness among all consumers in their locality. This is a positive outcome of RESA project. If we can support this committee in future many more committees are expected to be formed. Electricity officials attended every GIM sessions where they answered all questions and rendered explanations to each complaints raised by the participants. They also inspired the participants to submit complaints if any, without hesitation against the utilities. During second phase an excellent relationship has been developed between consumers and officials of electricity. In future this kind of relationship will bring the consumers and the utilities closer creating opportunities to increase consumer's participation in the reform process of the electricity sector in Bangladesh.

Annex 1

GRASSROOTS INTERFACE MEETING - II

Day, Date

Venue

Time	Sessions
10:00 – 10:30	Registration
10:30 – 11:00	Opening Session <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introductory remarks (on behalf of Partner)• Special address by Local Legislator
11:00 – 12:30	Session I: Key Systemic Issues and their possible solutions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key systemic issues as collated from the first phase• Possible solutions and the ways to approach Project Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay
12:30 – 12:40	Lunch
12:40 – 13:30	Session II: Grievance Redressal Mechanism (GRM) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Existing mechanism for the redressal of complaints• Filing of complaints and follow up by the consumers• Time frame for redressal of complaints Project Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay/Local Distribution Company representative
13:30 – 14:00	Perception survey and feedback
14:00 – 14:30	Closing Session

Annex 2

List of External Resource Persons

Name	Designation	Contact
1. Professor Shamsul Alam	Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET)	Mobile: 01713109917 E-mail: msalam@cuet.ac.bd
2. Salahud Din Ahmed	Member Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh	Phone: +880-2-9146377 Fax: +880-2-8155743 Email: din6174@yahoo.com
3. Engr. A.M. Bhuiyan	Director (Rtd.) Cop. Planning & Design, DESA	Phone: 9133131 Mobile: 01713084053

Annex 3

List of Local Resource Persons

Name	Designation
1. Hossain Ahmed	AGM, Gazipu PBS
2. Engineer Mahbubul Alam	GM, Comilla PBS
3. Abul Basar	Acting GM, Bhola PBS
4. Md. Kausar Ali Howlader	Residential Engineer, WZPDC, BHola
5. Shantanu pal	AGM, Bhola PBS
6. M. Mozammel Haque	Executive Engineer, Chapainawabganj PBS
7. Md. Mamunur Rashid	DGM, Sirajganj PBS
8. Sanot Kumar Ghosh	AGM, Cox's Bazar PBS
9. Abdus Salam	Assistant Engineer, PDB, Khagrachari