

**A Pilot Project on Capacity Building on Electricity  
Reforms in Bangladesh, India and Nepal  
(RESA Project)**

**Synthesis Report**  
**Grassroots Interface Meetings II (GIM II)**

**June– September 2009**

**Submitted by:**



**Submitted to:**

CUTS Centre for Competition,  
Investment & Economic Regulation  
**CUTS C-CIER**



## Table of contents

1. Background .....	2
2. Introduction.....	2
3. Structure and methodology of the GIMs .....	3
4. Participants.....	3
5. Proceedings .....	3
<i>5.1. Inaugural Session</i> .....	3
<i>5.2 Session on key systemic issues and their possible solutions</i> .....	4
<i>5.3 Session on grievance redressal mechanism at NEA</i> .....	4
<i>5.4 Closing session</i> .....	4
6. Perception of the consumers .....	5
7. Perception of local partners.....	6
8. Success Stories.....	8
9. Some more key systemic issues identified from the discussions .....	9
10. Highlights.....	9
11. Lowlights .....	9

## 1. Background

South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics & Environment (SAWTEE), Kathmandu, in collaboration with partner community-based organisations/civil society organisations (CBOs/CSOs) at 10 different districts in Nepal, is undertaking a pilot project 'Capacity Building on Electricity Reforms in Bangladesh, India (Rajasthan and West Bengal) and Nepal (RESA Project)'. The 10 project districts are- Ilam, Sunsari, Morang, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Parsa, Rupandehi, Palpa, Banke and Dailekh.

RESA project is an undertaking of Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) Centre for Competition, Investment & Economic Regulation (C-CIER) in collaboration with its project partners in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. This project is supported by Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD).

The overall objective of the project is to increase long-term capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs), to improve consumers' representation as a measure to enhance effectiveness of regulatory regimes in electricity sector in the project countries.

## 2. Introduction

After the project launch meeting on 12-13 March 2008 in Kolkata, the project was formally kicked off in Nepal in the month of April 2008. Initially, a perception survey carried out in 10 project districts to identify the problems faced by different category electricity consumers. Consumers' understanding about electricity reforms in Nepal was also gauged. The findings of the survey helped in identification of a number of problems faced by grassroots consumers. These served as vital inputs for planning the Territorial Trainings and Grassroots interface meetings.

Grassroots interface meetings (GIMs) are the project activities designed to reach out to the consumers in the rural as well as remote areas. These consumers were targeted during the baseline survey and GIMs aiming at enabling them to appreciate the role that they need to play in regulatory reforms and also at transferring some of the key advocacy skills to them.

A total of nine first phase Grassroots interface meetings (GIMs I) were organised in the project districts in Nepal from November 2008 to January 2009. In the first phase meetings, information was disseminated to various categories of electricity consumers such as agriculture, domestic, non-domestic and industrial users at the grassroots level on the present scenario of the power sector in Nepal and efforts were made to gauge their systemic problems, needs and challenges.

The possible solution to their systemic problems was discussed in the second phase of these grassroots meetings (GIMs II). The problems were documented in the form of systemic issues with rules and regulations regarding each of them laid thereof in different laws and manuals and various platforms to get them resolved. These systemic issues were discussed in the presence of public representatives, who were present in each of the programmes. In the second phase, a total of nine GIMs were organised.

### 3. Structure and methodology of the GIMs

The half day meetings were divided into an inaugural session, two technical sessions and a closing session. During the inaugural session, representative of the partner organisation delivered the welcome speech, representative of SAWTEE shed light on the objectives of the programme. The head of the local government or their representatives (people's representatives in some cases) were invited to deliver a keynote speech on electricity reforms in their districts. Half an hour was allotted for the opening session.

The first session was the most important session dealing on the systemic issues as collated from the GIMs I with the possible solutions and the ways to approach the concerned authority. The second session was on the grievance redressal mechanism available at Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) with issues on existing mechanism for the redressal of complaints and ways to file complaints and follow up by the consumers. The technical sessions were of one hour duration each. Time was also allotted for the floor discussion in each of the technical sessions.

The closing session was allotted 30 minutes. All the participants once again gave their perception on the overall benefits through the activities done in past one year under the project. The Chairman of the programme and other important guests were asked to deliver their concluding remarks in this session (See Annexure II: Programme agenda).

In each of the meetings, SAWTEE officials served as the resource person in the first technical session. In the second technical session, NEA Chief of the respective districts enriched the deliberations. Besides, other experts and practitioners also served as the resource person in various meetings (See Annexure I: Details of GIMs).

### 4. Participants

Participants in each meeting include electricity consumers from different categories, personnel from the Electricity Utility, representatives from the political parties, journalists and representatives from various governmental and non-governmental organisations. There was the same set of participants in each meeting, who were present in the previous meeting of the first phase comprising of different categories of electricity consumers. The participants were handed a kit containing vernacular handouts to facilitate informed discussions during the sessions. A total of 658 consumers and 11 NEA Officials participated in the meetings (Annexure I).

### 5. Proceedings

#### 5.1. Inaugural session

In each of the GIMs, local partner organisation representative welcomed the guests through a welcome speech. SAWTEE representative while delivering the speech on the relevance and objectives of the program presented the project overview for



Glimpse of an inaugural session of Lalitpur GIM

the sake of the participants coming for the first time and then highlighted the overall activities conducted under the project with some major achievements.

The participants were asked to provide their feedback by filling up the feedback form. Special guests spoke on the issues of power sector in the local context.

### **5.2. Session I: Key systemic issues and their possible solutions**

During this session SAWTEE representative presented possible solutions to the problems being faced by the electricity consumers. These electricity related systemic problems that were identified during the first round GIMs and also responded by the utility officials present there at that time was collated in a document putting in categories of policy and utility related (See Annexure III: Note on systemic issues in English). The handout was also translated into vernacular (simple Nepali) for the better understanding of target audience (See Annexure IV: Note on systemic issues in Nepali). Classification of complaints and the redressal procedure and associated fees for registering different types of complaints was also explained to the participants during the session. The possible solutions to the problems at the local level were discussed amid the presence of different stakeholders. SAWTEE was asked to put forth the common consumer to the concerned authority at the national level.

### **5.3. Session II: Grievance redressal mechanism at NEA**

After the nature of the electricity problems and the procedure for making complaints on them was explained in the first session by SAWTEE representative,

consumers put forth their electricity related problems and grievances to the Utility personnel. Consumers complained about poor service delivery of NEA. The NEA Chiefs in turn explained that utility is trying to improve its performance. However, there are certain limitations affecting the quality of service. Economic limitations and undue political interference were cited as the hindering factors to



Upadhyay during his presentation at Lalitpur

enhancing NEAs organisational capacity in most of the meetings. At the same time, all participants came up with a consensus that this increasing consumer participation would help in ensuring more transparency and accountability in the system and ultimately improving in the quality of service.

### **5.4. Closing session**

During this session distinguished guests like the representatives of political parties, local leaders spoke on the electricity issues at the local level. They were of the view that the consumers, NEA

and the government should go hand on hand to solve multi-faceted problems in Nepali electricity sector. They demanded greater role for the consumers in power sector decision-making process. They stressed on the urgent need for raising awareness on the use of energy efficient devices and to curb the massively prevailing pilferage in their local levels.

At the end, SAWTEE representative thanked the participants for their active participation in the programme and requested to fill up the feedback form. They explained the way and procedure for filling the feedback form.

## 6. Summary of participants' feedback

On the basis of the participants structured questionnaire that the participants filled up at the end of the programme, following feedbacks have been listed out:

- **Have you participated in any of the GIMs under the phase one and which session did you find most interesting and useful? Why?**

Most of the participants had participated in the first phase GIM. Almost all of them found the meetings useful to them as no programme of this nature is ever organised. On top of all, GIMs provided them knowledge on the electricity sector that is useful in their day to day life. In reply to the question about the most interesting and useful session, participants mentioned that all of the sessions were very interesting to them. Most of the participants liked the session on electricity conservation and reducing the power theft. This is because of these two issues being very important amid the power crisis prevailing in the country. They also found the session on complaint redressal mechanism useful to them as most of them were not aware of this mechanism within NEA.

- **Did you share the important issues that you learnt during the community meetings with the people who could not attend the meeting?**

Participants opined that the meetings have been very helpful in gaining knowledge about the power sector reform process going on in the country. They were happy to know their role in the reform process and were willing to discharge their duties. They said that they have been sharing the information that they gained in the meeting with other consumers who could not participate in the meeting as they found those information very important for those people to know.

- **Since the meetings, have you been able to submit a complaint or stopped someone from stealing electricity, or did you help a neighbour or a friend?**

When the participants were asked whether they have stopped anyone from stealing electricity or told people for energy saving or have helped anyone taking their complaints



Floor discussion during Rupandehi GIM

to the authorities, the answer was mixed. Most of them have started using the energy efficient devices as far as available and possible; and also asked others to do so. Consumers lodging complaints at NEA has increased. They said that whenever people in their places face electricity related problems, they go and help them sort out the problem. However, very few have explicitly mentioned their involvement in reducing pilferage. Few mentioned that though they informed NEA about the act, no step was taken to stop this illegal act.

- **Can you tell us ways that the people who organised the community meetings helped you in any sort of way to deal with issues in the electricity sector that you have been faced with?**

Participants have very positive answer to this question. They mentioned that people who organised the meetings have really laid an impact on the issues and the lessons they taught has helped in raising the level of awareness among the community. They can contact them anytime and ask for the possible solutions to their problems any time. They also feel that they should also follow up the things.

- **Provide suggestions to conduct such activities successfully in the near future?**

In a question asking for their suggestions to improve such meetings in future, most of them stressed the need for organising such programmes on a regular basis. They were of the view that such programmes should be organised in an open space amid hundreds of people rather than targeting a bunch of people. They asked to take such meetings at the community level and also asked to organise such meetings at schools and colleges. Interestingly, participants opined the need for educating NEA personnel through a targeted programme beside the consumers.

- **Would you like to attend such meetings in the future, if provided with an opportunity? Would you also encourage others to attend the meetings?**

Almost all of them had said that they would like to participate in such meetings in the future and would suggest people in their locality to participate in the meeting.

## **7. Summary of local partners' feedback**

- **Given your experience of holding the GIMs, please share how useful were the GIMs?**

All the ten partners found the GIMs very useful and beneficial. They were of the opinion that these meetings have been very useful in delivering message on three pertinent issues in the electricity sector i.e., power theft, energy conservation and complaint redressal mechanism. It has also created an excellent opportunity for interaction and dialogue between the consumers and local utility officials.

- **Was the project helpful in building individual and organisational capacity to undertake work on regulatory and consumer issues in the electricity sector?**

The local partners found the project helpful to large extent in building the individual and organisational capacity to undertake work on regulatory and consumer issues in the electricity sector. At the organisational and individual level, they have been involved in helping people in their locality with the electricity related problems.



- **Given your involvement in the RESA project, have you or your organisation participated in any consultation process organised by the Government or NEA?**

Partner organisations mentioned that they have no idea about the organisation of such consultation in their places. However, most of them have been organising and actively participating in the programmes to pressurise the government to supply adequate power amid the rampant outage. Personnel from one of the partner organisations have been nominated in the Electricity tariff fixation commission (ETFC) and has been actively participating in the proceedings of the commission.

- **Were the GIMs conducted effectively in your district?**

In a question asking about the success of GIMs conducted in each district, Partners have the feeling that they were able to conduct both the GIMs very successfully. They are now in good contact with the NEA officials, consumers of all categories, public representatives, and women groups and the media etc. These GIMs have largely benefited the consumers, specially the rural consumers in creating awareness on electricity issues.



Active women participation: a women participant taking part in the discussion while a women TV journalist shooting the programme

- **Any particular initiative taken by your CSO?**

They cited several examples of interventions which have been positive in helping the consumers solving their problems. Partners either themselves or through their network partners have been helping electricity consumers registering complaints as per the available grievance redressal mechanism and also preaching lessons to consumers for not stealing the electricity.

- **Would you like to continue to work with SAWTEE on these issues in future?**

All of the partners are willing to continue with the project. They opined that the issues covered by RESA are extremely relevant and important, particularly since electricity is a subject that concerns all. They further said that the awareness among consumers is abysmal and initiatives like RESA are very much needed because it not only helps in building consumer capacity but also helps facilitate a common platform for consumers, CSOs, peoples' representatives and NEA to come together. They have been repeatedly suggesting the need for expansion of project coverage and activities in the future.



## 8. Success stories

Few of the efforts taken by local partners regarding the initiatives like taking forward the complaints of consumers before the electricity authorities or motivating people for conserving electricity or stopping them from stealing the electricity have been documented here in the form of success stories.

### ***Grassroots movement in Biratnagar***

Tole Lane Organisations (TLO) operate at the grassroots level in Biratnagar Sub-Metropolitan City. Such organisations were created to institutionalise the participation of local people in the Rural Urban Partnership Programme (RUPP) jointly implemented by the Government of Nepal, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Centres for Human Settlements (UNCHS now UNHABITAT). RUPP came into operation from September 1997. Its objective was to strengthen good urban governance for improving people's livelihoods by taking advantage of the social and economic development opportunities through strengthened rural-urban linkages. TLOs have been taken as an entry point for social capital formation and empowerment through the social mobilization process. There are about 400 TLOs functioning at present in Biratnagar Sub-Metropolitan City. Each TLO covers 50-100 households and at least one person from each household of the locality is a member of the TLO. TLOs stand as self-sustaining units even after the completion of the project. They provide training, credit and seed grant funds for the socio-economic development of its members. TLOs are coordinated by the Rural Urban Partnership Section under the direct supervision of the Chief Executive Officer of the Sub-Metropolis .

In both the GIMs, Members of the governing body of the TLOs i.e., United Tole Coordination Committee (UTCC), including the President, were present. Most of the participants of the programme were TLO members. After TLO members participated in the programme, TLOs in coordination with the local partner organisation of RESA Project, have been actively working on the issues of electricity that are important to the consumers. Noteworthy is their efforts at spreading the use of compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs). The use of such lamps has drastically increased after TLOs asked their members to make use of such lamps. The impact was more profound given the level of trust between TLOs and their members. Power theft in areas covered by the TLOs came to an end after TLOs spread the message that power theft is a social crime. The Sub-Metropolis office had always complained that people are not serious about switching off street lights during the daytime. This public apathy cost the Sub-Metropolis coffers dear. Now, TLOs have taken the initiative and asked their members to switch off street lights whenever they are not needed, especially during the daytime. In addition, NEA has been found to have gotten serious about the complaints made by TLO members. During the GIM II, Ms. Leena Upadhyay, Member, UTCC, said that she had been making written and verbal complaints about the broken seal in the electricity meter installed at her house for last three years, but to no avail. However, her meter was repaired just three days after she aired her problem during the GIM I. Many issue have been covered with due focus, success story should cover one issue to keep a focus

### ***Meter rental charge at Banke***

NEA charges Rs. 1120 for installing electricity meter for domestic consumers with capacity of 230-400 V. Given the difficulty in paying the fee by poor consumers, NEA had made a provision to install the meter by taking just a service charge of Rs. 100. The consumers who had

just paid the service charge and not for the meter, however, had to pay Rs. 20 per month as a meter rent to NEA. It was reported during the GIM I that consumers were under the impression that the extra 20 rupees that they were paying was a fee for the meter itself on an installment basis. But NEA Chief clarified that consumers would have to pay the full charge for meter (Rs. 1120) in order to get rid of the rental charge. This was a vital information for the consumers. Following the meeting, some of the consumers paid the meter charge and saved themselves from paying the meter rent. However, those consumers who could not pay the full charge of the meter are still suffering. They asked NEA, and the government, to convert the rental charge into monthly installment.



Subedi during an interview at a local FM Station in Ilam

### ***RESA Partner organisation in government's CFL campaign monitoring committee***

The Government of Nepal and NEA have recently jointly launched a pilot project to distribute CFL bulbs at the household level. This project aims at reducing the power crisis by distributing cost-effective and quality CFL bulbs to NEA consumers. In its pilot phase, the project has been launched at select districts in Nepal. One of the RESA Partner organisations, Forum for protection of consumer rights (FPCR) has been appointed as one of the members in the monitoring sub-committee as a consumer representative organisation. FPCR was appointed in this capacity after it had been noticed by NEA during the GIM I where Senior NEA Officials had participated. FPCR has been actively taking part in monitoring the distribution works being carried out by two private companies that have been selected by NEA for distributing CFL through competitive tender.

## **9. Some more key systemic issues identified from the discussions**

- Consumers facing multiple problems due to persistent outage
- No Government effort to monitor the quality of electricity efficient devices including CFL bulbs
- Squatter settlements in project districts devoid of electricity lines
- No satisfactory redressal of consumer complaints by NEA even after the assurance of the Chiefs during the meeting
- No serious implementation of Government action plan to mitigate power crisis

## **10. Highlights**

- A good platform for face to face interaction between the consumers and the service providers
- There was good participation of consumers, people's representative, local government officials, media and utility officials including women
- The participants applauded the initiative and the resource material provided

- The session on systemic issues was owned by the participants as their own and later participated very actively in the discussion as these were the issues raised by the participants in the GIM I
- Good media coverage of the programme and follow up on the issue by the media along with interviews of SAWTEE and RESA Team Members in various media
- Given the importance of the issues covered by the GIMs, self motivation to the partner organisations to organise similar meetings at various places

## **11. Lowlights**

- In some places ratio of repeat participants was low due to heavy rains and people were busy in agriculture activities.
- Given the curiosity of consumers, the time for floor discussion was inadequate