

**REPORT OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE  
A PILOT PROJECT ON CAPACITY BUILDING ON ELECTRICITY  
REFORMS IN NEPAL, BANGLADESH AND INDIA  
(WEST BENGAL & RAJASTHAN) – RESA Project**

**Kolkata, West Bengal, India, April 09-10, 2010**

**Friday, April 09, 2010**

**OPENING SESSION**

**Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International, Jaipur, India**

In the inaugural session, Pradeep S Mehta began with a few words introducing CUTS and the growth of the organisation accompanied and triggered by the experience it has gained over 26 years of its establishment. Speaking about the importance of electricity reforms in India, **Mehta** shared the experience of CUTS' first tryst with electricity sector in 2001 which was a successful endeavour leading to an increase in the feeder's efficiency. The future course of action laid down by this project was to facilitate empowerment of consumers and interaction between government agencies and consumers. He appreciated the public-private partnership (PPP) approach being adopted in the Indian power sector.

**Mehta** pointed out that in the new regulatory regime, consumers need to play an important role and are expected to participate in the regulatory and policy processes to protect their interests. However, in the absence of proactive efforts made on the part of regulatory agencies as well as the government, public participation in the regulatory process is inadequate. There is a need to enhance the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) so that they can act as watchdogs on the regulatory institutions, he argued. CUTS, with support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), implemented this project with one key objective, i.e. to enhance the capacity of consumers and enable them to effectively participate in the electricity reform process, he added.

**Malay Kr. De, MD and Chairman, West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (WBSEDCL)**

Malay Kr. De, MD and Chairman, WBSEDCL who has been associated with the RESA project since its inception, remarked that even after the reforms that have been undertaken in this sector, active engagement of the consumers is missing. This makes the role of consumer organisations critical to voice consumers' concerns and grievances. **De** opined that India in its rapid ongoing political and economic reforms of bureaucratic set up takes longer time to react to these changes. Consumers and CSOs need to play a proactive role by participating in the decision-making processes and demanding quality services. Participation is inadequate due to complex regulatory process as well as lack of capacity within the CSOs to intervene in the decision making process and watch their concerns, he argued.

In the end, **De** said that this important project launched by CUTS has added to the initiatives taken by the government and complemented the entire reform process. The project has helped the government in designing communication strategy in disseminating information to the CSOs

in creating an external environment to support this programme. **De** reaffirmed the support of WBSEDCL to CUTS in taking forward the initiative in the State of West Bengal.

**Aslak Brun, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Norway**

Representing the supporting agency, i.e. NORAD, Aslak Brun, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Norway, said that it is important to identify and utilise the opportunities for replication of RESA model in other territories and sectors as well. **Brun** opined that capacity building activities is the need of the hour and projects such as RESA are important in building awareness among consumers. He welcomed the initiative undertaken by CUTS and assured the continued support of NORAD in scaling up the project activities.

**M M Khandaker, Deputy High Commissioner, Bangladesh**

M M Khandaker, Deputy High Commissioner, Bangladesh, emphasised on the critical need for South Asian Regional Cooperation to ensure proper utilisation of the electricity generation potential of these nations and achieve energy security by sharing generated electricity among the nations. He opined that projects such as RESA create platform for exchange of information and knowledge between nations and it is important that RESA Project is continued.

**Nirupam Sen, Minister-In Charge, Department of Power and NES, Government of West Bengal**

The keynote address was delivered by Nirupam Sen, Minister-In Charge, Department of Power and NES, Government of West Bengal. Going through the history of reforms in the power sector, he noted that the reforms have led to an improvement in the overall functioning of this sector, but major stakeholders, i.e. consumers have not been included in this process. **Sen** spoke about the practical problems that the governments have to face while setting tariff rates for domestic and industrial consumers, where the former expects subsidies and latter wants incentives. It is a difficult trade-off for the government to make a decision to whether serve the high or low end consumers. He underlined the need for efficient and professionally driven, and profitable power generating units which can stand alone on their feet without any support from the government exchequer.

**Sen**, acknowledged the initiative taken by CUTS and promised to extend support on behalf of the State Government to continue it.

**SESSION I: PANEL DISCUSSION ON “POWER SECTOR REFORMS IN ASIA”**

This session was chaired by S L Rao, Chairman, Institute of Social and Economic Change (ISEC). He suggested that the government should look at the problems being faced by common consumers and the need to find unique solutions to overcome it. However, political will to take steps to address the problems is lacking, as emphasised by **Rao**. However, he mentioned that the reforms have brought about changes such as improvement in the financial situation of the electricity boards and setting up of merchant power plants. But, there is a need to identify the poor and support them through government initiatives.

As the first speaker in the panel discussion, K Ramanathan, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), spoke about the Indian power sector reforms and highlighted the key problems existing in the sector. Inefficiencies such as low levels of power generation and high losses during transmission still exist and have seen slow improvement. There is a large revenue gap of

approximately Rs 7800 crores per annum. There are some other major problems such as low reliability of the baseline for measuring improvement, overlapping of government laws and lack of political will. However, power sector has seen some improvement especially with the upcoming PPPs. Certain reforms are expected to be put into place in the near future such as infrastructural improvement, reforms dealing with land, water and social issues and generation of renewable energy. The last one has definitely got a push through incentives, feed in tariffs, National Missions (for solar and other forms of renewable energy). He laid emphasis on coordination of efforts on the part of all the states and then collective action by the centre.

Samai Jai-Indr, Energy Standing Committee, Thailand, spoke precisely about the dependence of his country's power plants on coal. About half of the coal requirements are fulfilled by imports. He also mentioned that government is putting efforts to improve the condition of power sector. In the future, there will be investment to start smart grid systems in the country which will improve the energy security and reduce dependence on conventional sources of energy.

The Director of Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), Sher Singh Bhat, reminisced how the supply of electricity was extended from palaces to people in 1920s, which marks the first set of power reforms in the country. With the establishment of NEA, distributed monopoly was converted into single monopoly. He differentiated between electricity as a social and an economic commodity. In the former case, government must take the responsibility to generate electricity and provide it to all the people. However, if latter is the case, then private sector must take the initiative to develop, generate and sell electricity to those who can afford it. Parno Isworo, Independent, Power Sector Expert, Indonesia and Kanchana Siriwardena, Senior Professional (Tariff), Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka (PUCSL) also spoke during the panel discussion.

An interesting Question and Answer session followed the presentations and discussions. Few questions raised during this session are:

- Is privatisation the solution to ensure affordability?
- Why not explore the possibility of expansion of electricity distribution franchises to the Panchayats (local self-governments at village level)?
- Why are the efforts directed towards finding one solution to all the problems such as non-affordability and inefficiencies?

Towards the end of the panel discussion, Rao emphasised that politicisation is one problem faced by all nations and that government ownership of this sector is inevitable. One of the main problems is affordability, which does not mean cheap but low-priced quality products. Affordability in India is also low because of consumers' attitude. People are ready to pay for expensive diesel for running generators but are not willing to pay higher tariffs. Accessibility, which is again a major problem, can be improved by focussing on off grid solutions than grid based power, especially solar power. Also, with better procurement, planning and distribution, and with land and water reforms in the country, accessibility of the citizens to electricity will improve drastically.

Indian states are experiencing different levels of improvement in the power sector. On one hand, states like Gujarat and Kerala are making significant progress by providing separate feeders for agriculture and creating integrated systems for supplying power respectively. On the other hand, some other states are making huge amount of money by depriving their customers, and selling power to the neighbouring states for profit. He also emphasised on the need to have a South Asian Grid which will help all the countries in this region to utilise their power generation potential and ensure energy security to their citizens.

## SESSION II: KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESA PROJECT

The overall objective of this session was to disseminate the key findings of the RESA project. Respective nodal persons delivered the country presentations (Bangladesh, India and Nepal). Key activities, outputs, outcomes and messages derived from the project were shared with the participants. The presentations were mainly focused on the following four key points:

- Capacity building
- Advocacy
- Research
- Networking

### B. Country Presentations

**Bangladesh:** The presentation for RESA experience in Bangladesh was made by Chinmoy, Mutsuddi, Unnayan Shammany. He started the presentation briefing overall objectives and key activities concluded under the RESA project in Bangladesh. He mentioned that the project was very useful in resolving the day-to-day problems of consumers and generating awareness at the grassroots.

One of the key outcomes of the RESA initiative is the establishment of electricity consumer committees at the grassroots. These committees were utilised as effective platforms by consumers to share their systemic problems and find possible solutions. Broadly, the following key issues discussed during the committee meetings:

- Discourage theft of power in the country
- Encourage consumers for making efficient use of electricity
- Ensure proper registration and redressal of consumer complaints

**Mutsuddi** shared few success stories, i.e. initiative taken by consumers who got their problems resolved utilising the experience gained during the grassroots interface meetings (GIMs), conducted as part of the RESA project. As a way forward, he suggested few action points, i.e. in order to effectively utilise the network established among stakeholders, the project should be continued and also be implemented in other areas of Bangladesh

**Nepal:** Dhrubesh Regmi, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics & Environment (SAWTEE), made the country presentation for Nepal. **Regmi** provided a general overview of power sector reforms in Nepal. He briefed that per capita consumption of power in Nepal is one of the lowest in the world. The dependency on the traditional fuel sources such as dung and firewood is very high. Though, Nepal has a huge potential of hydro power, however, only less than two percent is being utilised so far. Among the drawbacks in private sector participation in the sector, poor policy initiative is the major barrier hampering the development of the sector.

He further stated that the RESA project had helped immensely in making the consumers aware of the reforms process. After having attended the GIMs, Regmi opined that the consumers are now more aware of the reform process and are in a better position to engage effectively with the policy makers. Based on the experience gained under the RESA project in Nepal over the last two years, **Regmi** recommended that there is an urgent need to take more reforms' initiative in the sector. In the new regulatory environment, some space for effective consumer interventions should be created. He also laid stress on the need to implement RESA project in other areas of Nepal.

**India:** Keya Ghosh, CUTS delivered the presentation for both the states, i.e. West Bengal and Rajasthan. Highlighting the key activities of the project, **Ghosh** stated that initially, there was a complete lack of awareness among consumers on electricity reforms and regulation. Grievance redressal forums were not accessible to grassroots consumers. Further, the access to service is also among key consumers concern in the power sector.

**Ghosh** informed that because of RESA initiative, the capacity of consumers as well as CSOs has enhanced significantly to take up the issues in power sector. The project has also helped them in addressing the systemic problems of consumers recorded during the GIMs. She further suggested that given its contribution in generating awareness at grassroots, RESA project should be implemented more intensively. GIMs should be conducted in large number so that the consumers in other areas are able to get their systemic problems resolved.

### **C. Discussants**

#### **i) P N Bhandari, Former, Chairman, Rajasthan State Electricity Board (RSEB), India**

Reacting to the presentations, **Bhandari** added that effective consumer participation is one of the key objective of reforms. However, at this stage, there is also a need to strengthen the institutional capacity of the utilities. For example, complaint redressal mechanism (CRM) is one important focus area of reforms process. Unless the CRM is designed properly, outcomes benefiting the consumers cannot be expected from the newly created system. The grievance redressal forums should be independent of utilities as well as the government so that consumers' interest is protected effectively.

#### **ii) Salahud Din Ahmed, Member, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC), Bangladesh**

**Ahmed** reacted to the presentations and spoke about the key initiatives taken by the Government of Bangladesh as a part of electricity reforms process in the country. He stated that Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) has been constituted as an independent regulatory agency to regulate the electricity as well as other energy sub-sectors such as oil and gas in the country.

He further explained that to promote effective, consumer participation is one of the important mandates granted to the BERC. He stated about his own experience of having taken part in various activities conducted under the RESA project in Bangladesh. According to him, it was a learning experience in engaging with grassroots consumers and having got the opportunity to understand their problems. He assured that BERC would continue providing support to RESA project in future as and when required.

### **D. Floor Discussion**

There was a good floor discussion during the session. Reacting to the presentations, among others, the following key points were raised by the participants.

It was shown in all the presentations that the project has encouraged people to take certain actions such as effective participation, proper registration of complaints and make efficient use of electricity. It was suggested that there is a need to conduct a study for the specific actions taken by consumers as well as other stakeholders as an outcome of the project.

In Nepal, there is huge potential for generating hydro-power. However, utilisation so far is negligible. Thus, there is an urgent need to make the required amendments at the policy as well

as institutional level so that the country is able to utilise the potential efficiently with the help of private sector.

### **E. Remarks by Chair**

Allan Asher, CEO, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), Australia

Towards the end of the session, **Asher** summarised the discussions held during the session. He stated that consumer participation helps in making the system more transparent and accountable. Consumers need reliable information to ensure effective participation in the policy formulation and regulatory decision-making process.

Sharing his experience while engaging with RESA project activities, he stated that the way the project was initiated was excellent. The project has helped consumers as well as other stakeholders in effectively engaging with the reforms and regulatory process. The project has resulted into many positive changes at the grassroots.

## **SESSION III: CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT IN POWER SECTOR REFORMS**

Session III focussed on empowerment of consumers and increased participation in the power sector. Relevant case studies were brought out by the participants (national and international), which highlighted regional and international best practices. Prasad Ranjan Ray, Chairperson, West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission, India as the Chair of the session, welcomed all the participants.

The first presenter was Huzna Zahir from Yayasan Lembaga Konsumen Indonesia (YLKI), Indonesia. She shared YLKI's successful model of a dialogue forum between the consumers and electricity providers. Seeing the overwhelming number of unattended complaints about electricity supply and lack of standards for product and service quality, YLKI developed a strategy called *Collective Consumers Complaint Handling*. This strategy has been implemented in 17 cities since 2004. The programme was launched and announced through various popular media such as press conferences, brochures and letters to editors. Consumers were asked to file their complaints through mail, emails, fax, messages and telephones. In the first round 1430 complaints were received which were then segregated into systemic and non-systemic problems. Then a dialogue forum was created where the consumers (representative group) could communicate their problems to the providers (management level) directly and the providers could also explain the hurdles that they face in solving these problems and the possible solutions. Mass media was given a critical role to monitor the progress that the providers make in solving the problems, after the dialogue.

The effectiveness of the forum can be judged from the resultant increase in awareness among consumers about their rights, quality of products and service and also the practical problems faced by providers in satisfying electricity needs in Indonesia. Thus, through this model, there was an enhancement in the democratisation of the system, which is indicated by active involvement of the consumers.

The second presentation was a critical evaluation of the power sector reforms in Bangladesh and how consumer empowerment has still not been fully addressed. The presenter was Shamsul Alam who is a Professor of Electrical and Electronic Engineering in Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology, Bangladesh. Alam explained in detail about power sector reforms

in Bangladesh since 1990s. Three types of reforms were made, i.e. upstream, mid-stream and downstream with the objective to promote competition, encourage private sector investment and ensure consumer participation. Number of regulations, acts and policies were formulated to facilitate improvement in the power sector. The Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) was established as an independent body and also setup Rural Electrification Board (REB).

However, despite the introduction of reforms in the power sector, many consumer problems were not being addressed. Moreover, the role of consumers was not effective in all three sets of reforms. But through the RESA project, communication was build up among utility authority, public representative and consumer at grassroots. Alam also recommended that BERC should organise training for consumers to enhance their capacity to effectively participate in the power sector reform process and communicate their grievances to the commission. Also he suggested that one of the BERC members should be a consumer representative. He concluded that power sector need more reforms in public interest and that the consumer empowerment can be more effective if the RESA model is replicated in all the South Asian countries with a wider scope.

In the next presentation, Asoka Abeygunawardana, Director of the Sustainable Energy Authority, Sri Lanka shed light on the power sector reforms since 1927. He listed various consumer concerns in the country, many of which have been addressed by the reforms. Access to electricity has improved due to reforms such as PPPs. In 2009, approximately 85 percent of Sri Lankan households had access to electricity. There is a Federation of Electricity Consumer Societies which address consumer concerns. Also, issues like prices of electricity, fair distribution of expenses, consumption and distribution have been addressed to some extent but much more needs to be done. The National Electricity Consumers Movement (NECoM) must be established to represent consumers in an organised manner and work towards ensuring an environment where they can exercise their rights.

An important issue was discussed by the discussants in this session, i.e. consumer self-regulation. Given that the electricity generated is not sufficient to satisfy the needs of the consumers and transmission losses are also high. As a result, supply to consumers is currently less than what is required. In these circumstances, the consumers can also try to help the power sector by limiting their use of power to the extent possible. Self-imposed load shedding will be more convenient to them, than what is imposed by the electricity distributors.

The discussant's point of view of *self-imposed load shedding* was questioned by few in the audience. They were of the opinion that there is a lack of incentives for the consumers to take such measures. The discussants responded that a high level of awareness among the consumers about their role in the power sector and success of the reforms is required. Also the consumers need to realise that they are a part of this crisis and the solution would require their helping hand.

#### **SESSION IV: EMERGING ISSUES IN THE POWER SECTOR AND THE ROLE OF CONSUMER**

The session started with opening comments by M Fouzul Kabir Khan, Ex Power Secretary, Bangladesh who was chairing the session. He stated that the power sector reform process was initiated in backdrop of high losses, poor performance and inadequate investment leading to need of government subsidies causing political interference. The remedy was proposed as unbundling, independent regulators and private participation. The main idea was to promote

competition in the power sector like telecom sector. But even after 20 years, yet there is not much competition in the power sector.

There are many emerging issues such as appointment and performance of regulator, absence of regulatory independence due to interference by politicians or discoms; availability of primary energy to produce electricity, diversification of fuel resources, etc.

Anuradha Bhattacharji, Manager (Strategy & HR), Bureau of Energy Efficiency, India

**Bhattacharji** focused on various issues relating to energy efficiency and the role of consumers. She provided a brief introduction of Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), which was established in 2002, under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001, to improve energy efficiency through various regulatory and promotional instruments to provide a policy framework and direction to national energy conservation activities, disseminate information and knowledge, and facilitate pilot and demonstration projects and establish Energy Efficiency delivery systems through PPPs.

She also briefed about various schemes and initiatives taken by BEE, such as Bachat Lamp Yojana, Standards & Labelling Scheme, Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) Agricultural and Municipal Demand Side Management (DSM), Operationalising Energy Conservation Act by strengthening institutional capacity of State Designated Agencies (SDAs) and Energy Efficiency Improvement in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

**Bhattacharji** stated that for energy efficiency there is a need to work simultaneously on regulations, demand pull and service push. Towards the end of the presentation, **Bhattacharji** spoke about regulatory framework for energy efficiency in India and the role played by consumers in energy conservation. Talking about the potential of energy efficiency in India she highlighted that due to Standards & Labelling Scheme of BEE, capacity addition achieved during 2008-09 was 237 percent higher than the previous year and exceeded the target of 1200 MW set up by the Ministry of Power. It has also resulted in CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction of 5.2 million tonnes as against 2.95 million tonnes in the year 2007-08.

**S P Gon Chaudhuri, Managing Director, West Bengal Green Energy Development Corporation Limited (WBGDCL), India**

In his presentation, **Chaudhuri** focused upon opportunities, regulatory environment in the area of renewable energy in India as well as other South Asian countries. **Chaudhuri** started by providing the energy outlook in South Asia, which largely depends on biomass, being the most reliable and cheap source. The relative share of traditional sources of energy ranges from one third (India) to 90 percent (Nepal) and it is likely that fuel-wood would continue to remain the main source in the years to come. Citing example of successful bio-mass project being implemented in the Sunderbans (West Bengal) with the help of local community providing green jobs to them, he said that there is huge potential of other renewable sources in the region but most of the potential still remains untapped.

Further, he stated that poor policy and planning, inadequate budgetary support for Renewable Energy (RE) technologies and its high costs are the major issues and barriers, which needs to be tackled to promote RE. He also cited some examples of support policies to promote RE such as tax on conventional power to create “Green Energy Funds” implemented in Maharashtra. He recommended a few policy tools to encourage RE such as providing soft loans for RE infrastructure, declaration of Renewable Energy Portfolio (RPO) obligations by states, special



incentives for certified green buildings, declaration of appropriate “Feed in Tariff” for solar and wind power, setting high, long-term targets for wind and solar power – 150,000 MW by 2030.

Discussant Wanun Permiphikul, Renewable Energy Institute, Thailand commented on the presentations and mentioned initiatives such as star labelling, government subsidising renewable energy (RE) etc. also taken in Thailand. She suggested that in many areas in Thailand, where consumers were not connected to the conventional power supply grid, RE could be a better option. She said consumers are not using those mainly due to high cost involved in RE sources/technologies, but the Thai government is planning to subsidise and launch instalment schemes to make it more affordable for consumers to get access to RE. She further commented that stressing on climate change issues and having RE technologies and sources will not be of much help unless such climate friendly options are not accessible, affordable and consumer friendly.

The second discussant Ramesh Chandra Paudel, Economist and Central Member, Forum For Protection of Consumer Rights, Nepal commented that RE is inevitable in the near future. In South Asian region, India is much ahead in energy efficient (EE) & RE, especially when one compares with Nepal and other countries can learn lessons from India. He highlighted that in Nepal only 18 percent of energy demand is met by electricity and rest comes from traditional sources such as wood. Though Nepal has not adopted regulations for EE still there are certain initiatives that are being taken to promote energy conservation.

After the presentations and comments by discussants the floor was opened for discussion during which following key issues emerged out:

- While estimating the potential of RE we should check the ground realities such as requirement of large land area and investment etc., otherwise it will not be achievable.
- While creating awareness about energy efficient products/appliances like CFL, consumers also need to be made aware of the safety issues involved, for e.g. how to dispose off E-Waste. Anuradha Bhattacharji pointed out that BEE is working on E-Waste policy for manufacturers.

Wrapping up the session Khan said that it is true that people are still sceptical about the potential of RE and it has high costs. But, he added, it is not costlier than keeping people in dark without having access to energy.

## **SESSION V: PANEL DISCUSSION ON “ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS IN POWER SECTOR REFORMS IN ASIA”**

The panel discussion focused on the importance of institutions (such as consumer organisations, governments, regulators, utilities, etc.) in facilitating power sector reforms in Asia. The session was chaired by J L Bajaj, Distinguished Fellow, TERI, India and following panellists shared their views/expertise:

- Allan Asher, CEO, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), Australia
- G D Gautama, Principal Secretary, Department of Power & NES, West Bengal, India
- M Fouzul Kabir Khan, Ex Power Secretary, Bangladesh
- Samai Jai-In, Energy Standing Committee, House of Representatives, Thailand

- Dilip Samajpati, Senior Manager, Customer Relations, Calcutta Electricity Supply Corporation (CESC), India
- Job Bordamonte, Philippines
- Anjali Garg, World Bank

**Allan Asher** stated that though the power reforms are taking place in South Asian region since last 20 years but still there are many concerns such as access to electricity, quality and quantity of service, safety issue etc. All stakeholders need to cooperate to make the reforms a success and at the same time there is a need to examine whether the reforms are heading towards in the right direction. He reinforced that apart from structural reforms there is also a need for financial reforms in the power sector. Industry has vital role in the power sector which should be given incentives for investment in the sector.

He further stated that governments have to play key role in setting up regulatory mechanism and providing policy guidance. Transparency in selection process is vital for the independence of regulators.

Explaining the role of consumer groups he said that they should hold the service providers, regulators and policy makers accountable for their acts and omissions but they should not demand impossible things. Consumer should not demand exemption from paying cost of supply or government to pay subsidy. There is a need to build the capacity of consumers in the power sector reform process so that they can play their role effectively in the regulatory decision making process.

**G D Gautama** stated that electricity service is a vehicle for development of an economy. India is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest economy but still per capita power consumption is very low in comparison to other big economies. Power sector requires huge investment so no one can avail service without paying his share. He stated that more than Rs 4,000 crores is lost due to transmission and distribution (T&D) losses in India, which he termed as “Theft & Dacoity” losses.

Before the reform process, there was government monopoly; it was performing the role of a service provider, judge and police as well. Electricity Act, 2003 put forth a path breaking anti theft law which has not been implemented in its true spirit. He shared some instances where Discom employees involved in power theft were put behind the bars to curb power theft.

He further said that the structure of companies (private or government) is not an answer but main thing is efficiency of that structure or system and E-Governance can be very helpful in this.

**Kabir Khan** commented that governments have an important role to play in policy guidelines but should not interfere in day-to-day functioning of the Discoms and regulatory agencies. He said procurement process should be made transparent based on competitive bidding, which can result in efficiency in power projects leading to lower tariffs for end users. Apart from making consumer aware about energy efficiency, Discoms should be energy efficient as their transmission losses are still very high.

Sharing the initiatives taken by the CESC (Discom) **Dilip Samajpati** told that due to new regulatory environment there are lots of positive changes in customer services and consumers are more aware of grievance redressal mechanism (GRM) etc. He, however, said that it is unfortunate if a consumer is forced to take recourse to GRM. He added that consumer should be provided quality service to his satisfaction. Highlighting consumer awareness activities being undertaken by the CSEC, he said that apart from radio and TV programmes, CESC is organising

school programmes to make students aware about safety issues, GRM, power theft, energy conservation etc. As a result, consumers are cooperating and T&D losses have come down from 20 to 13.2 percent. He also shared that CESC has started organising consumer awareness camps in association CUTS

**Anjali Garg, World Bank** shared initiatives and approach of the World Bank (WB) in projects related to power sector. She opined that wide scale consultation is done with all stakeholders, while financing any such project, keeping long term objectives in perspective. Presently, the main focus of the WB is on regulatory environment and it is supporting a project of Haryana Electricity Regulation Commission (HERC) being implemented with the assistance of CUTS. She pointed out that consumer organisations have a vital role to play in the reform process as regular feedback is required to keep the reforms on track and WB would like to support training programmes as conducted under the RESA project. In future, WB would focus on access to energy mainly in rural areas, RE and capacity building.

Summing up the session J L Bajaj stated that there is a need to find out whether the institutions involved have lived up to the expectations or not. In the last 20 years power reforms have been much talked about but the progress in terms of financial viability and T&D losses is lacking. Even the losses of many Discoms have gone up. There is a need to look into the governance of the sector. Most of states have not taken steps to build the capacity of grassroots level utility staff, till now focus is on regulators and higher officials. He pointed out that after the Electricity Act was put in place, the number of training programmes for officials in the power sector have gone down, which are crucial for building of institutions.

In power sector nexus of staff, consumers and politicians are draining out large amounts of money illegally. The sector is underperformer and there is an urgent need to find out the causes for that, whether it is politics or governance or any thing else. In most of the cases policy is found on the wrong end rather than consumers. There is need to build the capacity of consumers to hold the system accountable.

There is a need to look why some other sectors like telecom and banks are successful in reform process but not power sector. He called upon to look beyond cosmetic changes and focus on real change.

### **Closing Session**

During the closing session **Mehta** opined that after so many years of ongoing reform process many of us are still puzzled about the direction of reforms and other issues. Still large numbers of people are not connected with electricity service. Capacity of consumer need to be built to put pressure on the system to perform and the RESA project was initiated by CUTS for this. There has been considerable increase in consumer awareness after the project.

Highlighting the CUTS experience he stated that it has been working in the area of power sector for more than 10 years. He also mentioned that CUTS is the Regional Resource Agency (RRA) for Rajasthan under the National Environment Awareness Campaign (NEAC) – a flagship campaign organised by the Ministry of Environment and Forests – for four consecutive years, i.e. from 2006 to 2010. It is also working on governance issues.

He stressed on the need of empowered and independent regulatory institutions in power sector which can work better and not merely approving joint secretary level regulations. He stated that

the conference had many enriching discussions and deliberations and helped in experience/knowledge sharing.

Malay Kr. De, MD & Chairman, WBSEDCL being the co-host thanked all the participants and shared his views. He stated that political economy in electricity sector is very strong and there are huge regulatory assets. The sector requires another restructuring. The history of bad governance and corrupt practices still prevail in Discoms. He said the CEO of Discom should be made fully accountable for its performance and corporate governance practice like independent directors should be introduced. Competition is required but it will take some time to speed up.

Discoms also need new skills for customer relations, regulations etc. Presently the feedback mechanism of Discoms is not proper so it is very tough to get actual data of losses, revenue etc. Discoms first need internal reforms. Government should not interfere in decisions such as new investment or recruitment.

In the reform process emphasis is on lip service rather than concrete action. Discoms need to have a higher representation of consumer voices and that is the reason why WBSEDCL has decided to work with CUTS on consumer awareness issues. But ideally funding for such exercises should be routed through the regulatory commission for it to be more feasible, transparent and efficient. He concluded by saying that WBSEDCL will be looking forward for further collaboration with CUTS for capacity building of consumers.

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## AGENDA

**FRIDAY, 9<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2010**

**09:00 – 09:30                      Registration**

**09:30 – 11:00                      Opening Session**

Opening remarks by *Pradeep S Mehta*, Secretary General, CUTS International, India

Welcome address by *Malay Kr. De*, MD & Chairman, West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (WBSEDCL), India

*Aslak Brun*, Minister Counsellor, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Norway, New Delhi, India

*Syed Masud Mahmud Khandaker*, Deputy High Commissioner, Bangladesh

Keynote address and Release of Report, “Consumer Empowerment in Electricity Reforms – A Review from South Asia” by *Nirupam Sen*, Minister in Charge, Department of Power & NES, Government of West Bengal

**11:00 – 11:15                      Tea Break**

**11:15 – 13:00                      Session I: Panel discussion on “Power Sector Reforms in Asia”**

Panel discussion would focus on economic, social, legal and political issues pertaining to power sector reforms in Asia. Panellists are requested to share their respective country experiences, challenges and lessons learnt.

*Chair:* S L Rao, Chairman, Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), India

*Panellists:*

- Parno Isworo, Independent, Power Sector Expert, Indonesia
- Kanchana Siriwardena, Senior Professional (Tariff), PUCSL, Sri Lanka
- K Ramanathan, Distinguished Fellow, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), India
- Samai Jai-Indr, Energy Standing Committee, House of Representatives, Thailand
- Sher Sing Bhat, Director, System Operation, Nepal Electricity Authority, Nepal

**13:00 – 14:00                      Lunch**

**14:00 – 16:00                      Session II: Key Findings of the RESA project (Country Presentations)**

*Chair:* Allan Asher, CEO, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), Australia

*Presenters:*

- Chinmoy Mutsuddi, Nodal Person, RESA Project, Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh
- Dhrubesh Regmi, Programme Director, SAWTEE, Nepal
- Keya Ghosh, Head, CUTS Calcutta Resource Centre, India

*Discussants:*

- Salahud Din Ahmed, Member, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC), Bangladesh
- P N Bhandari, Former Chairman, Rajasthan State Electricity Board (RSEB), India

16:00 – 16:15

Tea Break

16:15 – 18:00

### **Session III: Consumer Empowerment in Power Sector Reforms**

This session will focus on relevant case studies on effective consumer empowerment in the power sector highlighting international as well as regional best practices.

*Chair:* Prasad Ranjan Ray, Chairperson, West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission, India

*Presenters:*

- Huzna Zahir, Yayasan Lembaga Konsumen Indonesia (YLKI), Indonesia
- M Shamsul Alam, Department of Electrical & Electronic Engineering, Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET), Bangladesh
- Asoka Abeygunawardana, Executive Director, Federation of Electricity Consumer Societies Energy, Sri Lanka

*Discussants:*

- Prititosh Ray, Former Member, West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission, India
- K L Vyas, Member, Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission (RERC), India

20:00 – 23:00

**Reception followed by dinner at Hotel Hyatt Regency**

## SATURDAY, 10<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2010

09:00 – 10:30

### Session IV: Emerging Issues in the Power Sector and Role of Consumers

The session will have two separate presentations on energy efficiency (overview, regulatory dimension and role of consumers, etc) and renewable resources (opportunities, regulatory environment, forthcoming initiatives, etc) with the key focus on the role of consumers.

*Chair:* M. Fouzul Kabir Khan, Ex Power Secretary, Bangladesh

*Presenters:*

- Anuradha Bhattacharji, Manager (Strategy & HR), Bureau of Energy Efficiency, India
- S P Gon Chaudhuri, Managing Director, West Bengal Green Energy Development Corporation Limited (WBGEDCL), India

*Discussants:*

- Wanun Permiphikul, Renewable Energy Institute, Thailand
- Ramesh Chandra Paudel, Economist and Central Member, Forum For Protection of Consumer Rights, Nepal

10:30 – 10:40

Tea Break

10:40 – 12:00

### Session V: Panel discussion on “Role of Institutions in Power Sector Reforms in Asia”

The panel discussion will focus on the importance of institutions (such as consumer organisations, governments, regulators, utilities, etc) in facilitating power sector reforms in Asia.

*Chair:* J. L. Bajaj, Distinguished Fellow, TERI, India

*Panellists:*

- Allan Asher, CEO, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), Australia
- Armando Job Bordamonte, Programme Staff, Freedom from Debt Coalition, Philippines
- Anjali Garg, Energy Specialist, World Bank
- G D Gautama, Principal Secretary, Dept. of Power & NES, West Bengal, India
- M. Fouzul Kabir Khan, Ex Power Secretary, Bangladesh
- Dilip Samajpati, Senior Manager, Customer Relations, CESC, India

12:00 – 12:30

### Closing Session

- Pradeep S. Mehta, CUTS International, India
- Malay Kr. De, MD & Chairman, West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (WBSEDCL), India

12:30 – 14:00

Lunch and departures

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

SN	Name & Designation	Organisation & Address	Phone/Fax /E-mail
1	M. Fouzul Kabir Khan	Ex Power Secretary, Bangladesh Chairman & CEO Keystone Business Support Company Ltd. House # 207/A , Lane # 10 Mohakhali D.O.H.S. Dhaka 1213	Tel: 880 2 8812515, 880 1713 004 388 Email: <a href="mailto:fouzul@keystone-bsc.com">fouzul@keystone-bsc.com</a> Web: <a href="http://www.keystone-bsc.com">www.keystone-bsc.com</a>
2	Allan Asher	CEO Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) Australia	Email: <a href="mailto:allan.asher51@gmail.com">allan.asher51@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:allan.asher@accan.org.au">allan.asher@accan.org.au</a>
3	Syed Masud Mahmood Khundoker	Deputy High Commissioner Deputy High Commissioner for Bangladesh, 9 Bangobandhu Sheikh Mujib Sarani, Kolkata 700 017	Tel: +91 33 2290 7868 Fax: +91 33 4012 75555 Email: <a href="mailto:bdhc@bdhckolkata.org">bdhc@bdhckolkata.org</a>
4	Anuradha Bhattacharji	Manager (Strategy & HR) Bureau of Energy Efficiency 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Sewa Bhawan R.K.Puram, New Delhi: 110066	Tel: +91 11 2617 9699 Fax: +91 11 2617 8352 Email: <a href="mailto:abhattacharji@beenet.in">abhattacharji@beenet.in</a> Web: <a href="http://www.bee-india.nic.in">www.bee-india.nic.in</a>
5	Aslak Brun	Deputy Chief of Mission Minister Counsellor, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Norway 50 C, Shantipath, Chanakyapuri New Delhi 110 021, India	Tel: +91 11 4177 92 00 Fax: +91 11 4168 0145 Email: <a href="mailto:aslak.brun@mfa.no">aslak.brun@mfa.no</a> Web: <a href="http://www.norwayemb.org.in">www.norwayemb.org.in</a>
6	K L Vyas	Member, Technical Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission Shed No. 5, Vidyut Bhawan Jyoti Nagar Jaipur- 302 005, India	Tel: (O) 2741091 ® 2398473 Fax: 2741018 Email: <a href="mailto:recjpr@sancharnet.in">recjpr@sancharnet.in</a>
7	F Parno Isworo	Principal Prakarsa Ekatama Advisory Summitmas II, 5 <sup>th</sup> floor Jl. Jend. Sudirman KAv. 61-62 Jakarta 12190 - Indonesia	Tel: 62 21 5202100 Fax: 62 21 5202141 Mob: 62 811 967 847 Email: <a href="mailto:p.isworo@prakarsaekatama.com">p.isworo@prakarsaekatama.com</a> <a href="mailto:pisworo@gmail.com">pisworo@gmail.com</a>
8	Job Bordamonte	Coordinator Natioanl Advocacy against the Privatization of Essential Services and Commons (Power) 11 Matimpiin Street Barangay Pinyahan Quezon City 1100 Philippines	Tel: +632 921 1985 Telefax:: +632 924 6399 Mob: +63 920 914 9561 +63 917 880 5027 Email: <a href="mailto:job@fdc.ph">job@fdc.ph</a> , <a href="mailto:jobkevin@yahoo.com">jobkevin@yahoo.com</a> Website: <a href="http://www.fdc.ph">www.fdc.ph</a>
9	Asoka Abeygunawardana	Executive Director, Federation of Electricity Consumer Societies Energy, Sri Lanka Energy Forum 441/6, Highlevel Road, Gangodawila, Nugegoda, Srilanka	Tel: 94115524613 / 94112817710 Fax: 94115532188 Email: <a href="mailto:eforum@sltnet.lk">eforum@sltnet.lk</a> Web: <a href="http://www.efsl.lk">www.efsl.lk</a>



SN	Name & Designation	Organisation & Address	Phone/Fax /E-mail
10	Dilli Ghimire	<b>Chairman</b> National Association of Community Electricity Users, Nepal(NACEUN) <b>Office:</b> Pulchowk, Lalitpur-10 G.P.o. Box: 8975, EPC 970	Tel fax: 977 01 5009152 Email: <a href="mailto:naceun_community@yahoo.com">naceun_community@yahoo.com</a>  <a href="mailto:dilli_ghimire2001@yahoo.com">dilli_ghimire2001@yahoo.com</a> Web: <a href="http://www.naceun.com.np">www.naceun.com.np</a>
11	Pradeep Chapagain	General Secretary Society of Economic Journalists- Nepal Association: Nepal television	Tel Fax: 977 01 4465914 Mobile: 977 9851040101 Email: <a href="mailto:chapagainpradeep@gmail.com">chapagainpradeep@gmail.com</a>
12	J.L.Bajaj	Distinguished Fellow The Energy and Resources Institute Darbari Seth Block, India Habitat Centre Lodhi Road New Delhi 110 003 India	Phone (O) +91 11 2468 2100/ 11 Fax +91 11 2468 2144-45 Mob: +91 9810547111 Email <a href="mailto:jlajaj@teri.res.in">jlajaj@teri.res.in</a>
13	Kanchana Siriwardena	Senior Professional (Tariff), Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka Level 06, BOC Merchant Tower No.28, St. Michael's Road Colombo 03 Sri Lanka	Tel: +94 11 2392607 / 08 Fax: +94 11 2392641 Mob: +94 77 7185007 Email: <a href="mailto:kanchana@pucsl.gov.lk">kanchana@pucsl.gov.lk</a>
14	Ramech Chandra Paudal	Economist and Central Member, Forum For Protection of Consumer Rights, Nepal	Mob: 977-09842030398
15	Salahud Din Ahmed	Member, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC), Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh TCB Building (3 <sup>rd</sup> Floor) 1 Karwan Bazar Dhaka 1215	Tel: 914 6377 (Work) 8317202 (Home) Fax: 815 5743 Email: <a href="mailto:din6174@yahoo.com">din6174@yahoo.com</a> Website: <a href="http://www.berc.org.bd">www.berc.org.bd</a>
16	Sher Sing Bhat	Director System Operation Nepal Electricity Authority, Nepal	Mob: 977-09851038540
17	J L.Bose	I.A.S. (Retd.) Ex- Chairman M.P. Electricity Regulatory Commission Res: 86, Paras Majestic, E-8 , Trilanga , Bhopal- 462039 (M.P.)	Tele: +91 755 2560154/6450589 Mobile: +91 94250 12460 Email: <a href="mailto:bosehb@yahoo.com">bosehb@yahoo.com</a>
18	P N Bhandari	IAS (Retd.) Former Additional Chief Secretary, Rajasthan Former. Chairman, Rajasthan State Electricity Board (RSEB), India Director , Bank of Rajasthan, Advocate, Rajasthan High Court <b>Off:</b> 307-309, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Floor, Ganapati Plaza, M.I. Rd. Jaipur- 302 001	Tel: (O) +91 141 5115556 (Direct),/5113333 /2389348/2389349 ® +91 141 2552311 / 2552350 Mob: +91 93511 52311 Fax: +91 141 2389351 Email: <a href="mailto:pkajaipur@paraskuhda.com">pkajaipur@paraskuhda.com</a>

SN	Name & Designation	Organisation & Address	Phone/Fax /E-mail
		<b>Resi:</b> S-271, Mahaveer Nagar, Tonk Road, Jaipur	
19	Anish De	Chief Executive Officer Mercados - Energy Markets International, S.A. L4 Augusta Point Suite No. 419, Regus Business Centre Gurgaon, Haryana - 122001 - India	Tel:+91 124 4354000 Mob: +91 9810453776 Email: <a href="mailto:de.anish@gmail.com">de.anish@gmail.com</a>
20	Huzna Zahir	Ketua/Chairperson Yayasan Lembaga Konsumen Indonesia (YLKI), Indonesia Consumer Organisation Pancoran Barat VII/1, Duren Tiga Jakarta 12760, Indonesia	Tel: +62 21 798 1858 / 798 1859 /797 1378 Fax: +62 21 798 1038 Email: <a href="mailto:konsumen@rad.net.id">konsumen@rad.net.id</a> <a href="http://www.ylki.or.id">http://www.ylki.or.id</a>
21	K Ramanathan	Distinguished Fellow The Energy and Resources Institute Darbari Seth Block IHC Complex Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110 003	Tel: +91 11 2468 2100 / 4150 4900 Ext: 2230 Fax: +91 11 2468 2144 / 2468 2145 Email: <a href="mailto:krnathan@teri.res.in">krnathan@teri.res.in</a> Website: <a href="http://www.teriin.org">www.teriin.org</a>
22	Chandra Bahadur Maharjan	Consul Consulate General of Nepal 1, National Library Avenue, Alipore, Kolkata-700 027	Tel: (O) +91 33 2456 1085 ® +91 33 2456 1085 Fax: +91 33 2456 1410
23	Shirish Deshpande	Mumbai Grahak Panchayat	
24	Wanun Permiphikul	Renewable Energy Institute Thailand	Tel: +66 817739866 Email: <a href="mailto:wanunp@yahoo.com">wanunp@yahoo.com</a>
25	S.L.Rao	Chairman, ISEC D-1, Charted Cottage, Lang Ford Road Bangalore 560 072, Karnataka, India	Phone_O 91-80-2321 7010 Cell 91-93431 98450/ 98452 81060 Fax 91-80-2227 5132 ® Email <a href="mailto:surendral.rao@gmail.com">surendral.rao@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:surendra@slrao.com">surendra@slrao.com</a>
26	Anjali Garg	Energy Specialist South Asia Sustainable Development The World Bank 50-M, Shantipath Chanakyapuri New Delhi: 110 021, India	Tel: +91 11 4117 7837 / +91 11 2461 7241 X837 Fax: +91 11 4117 7849 Email: <a href="mailto:agarg1@worldbank.org">agarg1@worldbank.org</a>
27	M Shamsul Alam	Department of Electrical & Electronic Engineering, Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET), Bangladesh	
28	Samai Jai-Indr	Energy Standing Committee House of Representatives Thailand	

SN	Name & Designation	Organisation & Address	Phone/Fax /E-mail
29	Chinmoy Mutsuddi	Nodal Person RESA Project Unnayan Shamannay 2/E/1-B, Mymensingh Road, Shahbag, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh	Tel: +88 02 8610332, 8622320 Fax: 880-2-8622320 Email: shamunnay@sdnbd.org Web: www.shamunnaybd.org
30	Dhrubesh Regmi	Programme Director South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics& Environment P. O. Box: 19366 254 Lamtangeen Marg Baluwatar, Kathmandu Nepal	Tel: 977-1-4415824, 4444438 Fax: 977-1-4444570 Email: dhrubesh.regmi@sawtee.org Web: http://www.sawtee.org
31	Asish Subedi	South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics& Environment P. O. Box: 19366 254 Lamtangeen Marg Baluwatar, Kathmandu Nepal	Tel: 977-1-4415824, 4444438 Mob: 009841 381386 Fax: 977-1-4444570 Email: asish.subedi@sawtee.org Web: http://www.sawtee.org
32	K.C. Modi	Chairman, Consumer Grievance Redressal Forum, BSES Yamuna Power Limited, Delhi, 1 <sup>st</sup> Floor, Sub-Station Building., BSES Shakti Kiran, Karkardooma, Shahdara, Delhi : 110092	Tel: (O) +91 11 32985290 +91 11 32978140 Fax: +91 11 22384886 Mob: +91 9414004061 Email: cgrfbypl@hotmail.com
33	Ritika Goyal,	Sr. Energy & Climate Policy Adviser Climate Change & Energy British High Commission , New Delhi DFID India, B-28 Tara Crecent, Qutab Institute Area, New Delhi: 110016	Tel; +91 11 4279 3464 Fax: +91 11 2652 9296 Mobile: +91 9811006544 Email: <a href="mailto:R-Goel@dfid.gov.uk">R-Goel@dfid.gov.uk</a> <a href="http://ukinindia.fco.gov.uk">http://ukinindia.fco.gov.uk</a> <a href="http://www.dfid.gov.in">www.dfid.gov.in</a>
34	Kengkran Louvirojanakul	Consul Royel Thai Consulate General 18 B, Mandeville Gardens Ballygunge, Kolkata: 700 019	Tel: +91 33 2440 3229 /30/ 31 +91 33 2440 9723 (ID) Fax: +91 33 2440 6251 Mob: +91 9748265311 Email: <a href="mailto:kengkran@gmail.com">kengkran@gmail.com</a>
35	G.D. Gautama	Principal Secretary, Department of Power & NCES Government of West Bengal New Secretariat Buildings 7th Floor, A-Block Kiran Shankar Roy Road Kolkata-700001	Tel:+91 33 22481267 Fax: +91 33 22438379 Email: <a href="mailto:secpower@wb.gov.in">secpower@wb.gov.in</a>
36	Malay Kr. De	<b>Chairman &amp; MD</b> West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Lt. (WBSEDCL) Vidyut Bhavan, Salt Lake, Sector- II, Block-DJ. Kolkata-700 091	Tel: +91 33 2337 1150 / 2359 1915 Fax: +91 33 2337 3002 Email: <a href="mailto:malaykumarde@hotmail.com">malaykumarde@hotmail.com</a>
37	S. P. Gon Chaudhuri	Managing Director West Bengal Green Energy Development Corporation Limited	Tel: +91 33-2357 6361/5347/ 5348, Fax: +91 33-2357 5347

SN	Name & Designation	Organisation & Address	Phone/Fax /E-mail
		(WBGDCL) Bikalpa Shakti Bhavan, J 1/10 EP & GP Block, Salt Lake Electronics Complex, Sector – V, Kolkata – 700 091	E-mail: <a href="mailto:info@wbgedcl.com">info@wbgedcl.com</a> , <a href="mailto:wbgedcl@rediffmail.com">wbgedcl@rediffmail.com</a>
38	Prasad Ranjan Ray	Chairperson West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission Poura Bhavan (3 rd Floor) Block-FD, 415-A, Bidhannagar Kolkata – 700106	Tel: +91 33 2359 3553 Fax: +91 33 2359-3397 Email: <a href="mailto:wberc99@gmail.com">wberc99@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:wberc@cal3.vsnl.net.in">wberc@cal3.vsnl.net.in</a>
39	Dr. Ashim Kumar Bhattacharya	National CTC Phase-out Plan GTZ Focal Point West Bengal Prachi Apt. Flat No. 4A, Block 1 127 Ho-Chi-Min Sarani, Behala Kolkata 700 008, India	+91 33 24458 468 +91 9831 542 372 <a href="mailto:ashim_bhattacha@yahoo.co.in">ashim_bhattacha@yahoo.co.in</a> <a href="http://www.ctc-phaseout.org">www.ctc-phaseout.org</a>
40	Prof: Nabinananda Sen	Reader Department of Business Management University of Calcutta 1 Reformatory Street Kolkata 700027	Tel: +91 33 24499418 Mob: +91 9903090509 Email: <a href="mailto:profsen@rediffmail.com">profsen@rediffmail.com</a> , <a href="mailto:nabinsen@gmail.com">nabinsen@gmail.com</a>
41	Shantanu Das	State Representative DFID , West Bengal State Office 16 Jubilee Court 11/1 Ho Chi Minh Sarani Kolkata 700 017	Tel: +91 33 22883829 /30 Mob: +91 9830118664 Email: <a href="mailto:S-Das@dfid.gov.uk">S-Das@dfid.gov.uk</a>
42	Haimanti Poddar	Sr. Regional Advisor, Eastern Region British Deputy High Commission Kolkata Climate Change & Energy Unit 1A, Ho Chi Minh Sarani Kolkata 700 071 West Bengal ,India	Tel: +91 33 2288 5172 , Extn: 2201 Fax: +91 33 2288 3435 Mob: +91 9831477692 Email: <a href="mailto:poddar@fco.gov.uk">poddar@fco.gov.uk</a>
43	Prititosh Ray	Former Member WBERC 28 F Chandi Ghosh Rd. Kolkata 700 048	Tel: +91 33 24710932 Mob: +91 9874166069 Email: <a href="mailto:rayprtitosh@yahoo.in">rayprtitosh@yahoo.in</a>
44	Dilip Samajpati	Sr. Manager, Customer Relations CESC House, Chowringhee Square Kolkata: 700 001	Tel: +91 33 2237 3612 / 2237 3853 Fax: +91 33 2236 5669 Email: <a href="mailto:dilip.samajpati@cesc.co.in">dilip.samajpati@cesc.co.in</a>
45	Pankaj Kr. Haldar	West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd. Vidyut Bhavan, Salt Lake, Sector- II, Block-DJ. Kolkata-700 091	Mob: +91 9433276098
46	Avijit Nayak	Assistant Director National Productivity Council (Under Ministry of Commerce & Industry Government of India) 9, Syed Amir Ali Avenue, Kolkata: 700 017	Tel: +91 33 2287 6069 / 2287 3116 Fax: +91 33 2287 3919 Email: <a href="mailto:npckol@dataone.in">npckol@dataone.in</a> Website: <a href="http://www.npcindia.org">www.npcindia.org</a>

SN	Name & Designation	Organisation & Address	Phone/Fax /E-mail
47	A.K. Sinha	Regional Director Natioanl Productivity Council 9, Syed Amir Ali Avenue Kolkata 700 017	Tel: (O) +91 33 2287 6069 / 2287 3116 (R) +91 33 2436 9400 Fax: +91 33 2287 3919 Email: <a href="mailto:npckol@dataone.in">npckol@dataone.in</a> Website: <a href="http://www.npcindia.org">www.npcindia.org</a>
48	Hindole Datta  Private Secretary to Ministry-in-charge	Department of Power & Non- conventional Energy Sources and Labour Department Government of West Bengal New Secretariat Building (Block- A 7 <sup>th</sup> Floor), 1 K.S. Roy Road, Kolkata 700 001	Tel (O) +91 33 2248 1301, 2214 1041, ® +91 33 2484 4977 Fax: +91 33 2243 8114 NMob: +91 9434167759 Email: <a href="mailto:dattahindol@gmail.com">dattahindol@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:hindoledatta@yahoo.com">hindoledatta@yahoo.com</a>
49	Samir Kumar Basu	Addl. Chief Engineer Customer Relation Management Cell West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd. Vidyut Bhavan, Ground Floor, Salt Lake, Sector-II, Block-DJ. Kolkata- 700 091	Tel: (O) +91 33 2359 1329 ( R ) +91 33 2663 7558 Fax: +91 33 2359 1943 Mob: +91 9433164584 Email: <a href="mailto:samir1951@indiatimes.com">samir1951@indiatimes.com</a> <a href="mailto:skb19512000@yahoo.com">skb19512000@yahoo.com</a>
50	Tapan Kumar Roy	West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd. Vidyut Bhavan, Salt Lake, Sector- II, Block-DJ Kolkata-700 091	
51	Benoy Sen	Superintending Engineer Convenor- Secretary, ECAT WBSDA West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd. Vidyut Bhavan, Salt Lake, Sector- II, Block-DJ Kolkata-700 091	Mob: +91 9836089580 Email: <a href="mailto:sensreya@yahoo.co.in">sensreya@yahoo.co.in</a>
52	Priya Brata Sinha Roy	Superintending Engineer (Elect.) Customer Relation Management Cell West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd. Vidyut Bhavan, Ground Floor, Salt Lake, Sector-II, Block-DJ Kolkata-700 091	Tel: +91 33 2359 1329 Telefax:: +91 33 2359 1943 Mob: +91 9831426802 Email: <a href="mailto:crmwsedcl@rediffmail.com">crmwsedcl@rediffmail.com</a>
53	Pradeep S Mehta	Secretary General CUTS International D-217, Bhaskar Marg Bani Park Jaipur-302016, India	Phone +91 141 2282821 Fax +91 141 2282485 Email <a href="mailto:psm@cuts.org">psm@cuts.org</a>
54	Udai Mehta	Policy Analyst CUTS Centre for Competition, Investment & Economic Regulation (CUTS CCIER) D-217, Bhaskar Marg Bani Park Jaipur 302 016, India	Tel: +91 141 2282821 Mob: +91 98292 85926 Email: <a href="mailto:usm@cuts.org">usm@cuts.org</a>

SN	Name & Designation	Organisation & Address	Phone/Fax /E-mail
55	Shruti Mittal	CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics & Environment (CUTS CITEE) D-217, Bhaskar Marg, Bani Park Jaipur 302 016, India	Ph: +91 141 2282821 Fx: +91 141 2282485 Mob: +91 Email: <a href="mailto:sm5@cuts.org">sm5@cuts.org</a>
56	Keya Ghosh	Adviser CUTS Calcutta Resource Centre (CUTS CRC) 3 Suren Tagore Road 2nd Floor Kolkata-700019 West Bengal, India	Tel: +91 33 24604985 Telefax:: +91 33 2460 4987 Mob: +91 9831219339 Email: <a href="mailto:kg@cuts.org">kg@cuts.org</a>
57	Amarjeet Singh	CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART) D-222, Bhaskar Marg, Bani Park Jaipur 302 016, India	Tel: +91 141 5133259/2282 823/2282 482 Fax: +91.141. 4015395 Email: <a href="mailto:as7@cuts.org">as7@cuts.org</a>
58	Daniel Okendo Asher	Nairobi Resource Centre Co-op Trust Plaza, 1st Floor Lower Hill/Bunyala Roads Upper Hill PO Box 8188-00200 Nairobi, Kenya	Email: <a href="mailto:nairobi@cuts.org">nairobi@cuts.org</a> Web: <a href="http://www.cuts-international.org/cuts-arc.htm">http://www.cuts-international.org/cuts-arc.htm</a>
59	Simon Ngona	CUTS Africa Resource Centre, Lusaka Plot 6078/A Northmead Great East Road P O Box 37113 Lusaka, Zambia	Fax: + 260-211-294892 Email: <a href="mailto:lusaka@cuts.org">lusaka@cuts.org</a> Web: <a href="http://www.cuts-international.org/ARC/Lusaka">www.cuts-international.org/ARC/Lusaka</a>
60	Prithviraj Nath	CUTS CRC Programme Officer 3 Suren Tagore Road 2nd Floor Kolkata-700019 West Bengal, India	Tel: +91 33 24604985 Telefax:: +91 33 2460 4987 Mob: +919830481370 Email: <a href="mailto:pn@cuts.org">pn@cuts.org</a>
61	Arnab Ganguly	Research Associate 3 Suren Tagore Road 2nd Floor Kolkata-700019 West Bengal, India	Tel: +91 33 24604985 Telefax:: +91 33 2460 4987 Mob: +919874410391 Email: <a href="mailto:pn@cuts.org">pn@cuts.org</a>
62	Mrinmoy Dey	Project Associate 3 Suren Tagore Road 2nd Floor Kolkata-700019 West Bengal, India	Tel: +91 33 24604985 Telefax:: +91 33 2460 4987 Mob: +919903135054 Email: <a href="mailto:pn@cuts.org">pn@cuts.org</a>
63	Sumanta Biswas	Project Assistant 3 Suren Tagore Road 2nd Floor Kolkata-700019 West Bengal, India	Tel: +91 33 24604985 Telefax:: +91 33 2460 4987 Mob: +919735621680