

**REPORT OF THE SECOND REFERENCE
GROUP MEETING (RG-II)**

APRIL 21, 2009

JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN



**A PILOT PROJECT ON CAPACITY BUILDING ON ELECTRICITY REFORMS
IN BANGLADESH, INDIA AND NEPAL
RESA (REGULATORY REFORMS IN ELECTRICITY SECTOR IN SOUTH ASIA)
PROJECT**



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I. Background

Project Summary

CUTS Centre for Competition, Investment and Economic Regulation (CUTS C-CIER) along with its project partners are undertaking a project, titled 'A pilot project on capacity building on electricity reforms in Bangladesh, Nepal and India (Rajasthan and West Bengal) - <http://www.cuts-ccier.org/RESA/index.htm> . The project aims at building the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) to take-up action oriented research, carryout advocacy with policymakers and regulatory agencies to effect changes in the electricity regulatory/policy processes, etc. The project is being supported by Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD).

In Rajasthan, the project is being implemented by CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART), in collaboration with local CSOs at the local level. The local CSOs are located in 10 different districts of the State, which provides a wide geographical coverage to the whole project. They have diverse knowledge of working in the area of consumer awareness and advocacy, which is necessary for the successful implementation of the project.

Reference Group

A Reference Group (RG) were constituted in each of the project territories comprising of subject experts, academicians and practitioners, people's representatives, government officials and civil society representatives. The RG provides guidance to the implementation of the project at the national level. It ensures quality in project execution as per the stipulated plan. (See Annexure I, for complete list of NRG Members)

Role of the Reference Group

- Provide inputs (comments and suggestions) on certain key outputs of the project;
- Act as '*brand ambassador*' for the project, spreading awareness about the mission of the project through interactions with key people, nationally and also at the regional level; and
- Participate in the discussion during the RG meetings.

Objectives of the 2nd NRG Meeting

- acquaint RG members with the project activities, its goals and outcomes and to brief them about the activities implemented so far *vis-à-vis* SLOT analysis of the project
- seek inputs on implementing GIM Phase II
- discuss future activities of the project.

Materials

A number of documents were given to the NRG members in advance so that they could prepare for the meeting. The documents included -- papers on Grassroots Interface

Meeting (GIM: Phase I), Territorial Base Paper, a paper on Consumer Participation in Electricity Regulation: Rajasthan, a draft matrix on systematic problems related to electricity consumers and their possible solutions, and draft strategy and agenda for the 2nd phase of GIMs. Each of the members was also provided with a CD on the RESA documentary, “Powered to Grow”.

II. Proceedings of the NRG Meeting

Welcome address

Rijit Sen Gupta, Centre Coordinator & Deputy Head, CUTS CCIER welcomed all the participants. He briefly spoke about the project objectives and the way forward. He thanked all RG Members for their active participation and valuable guidance to the project team to ensure the desired outcomes. He stressed the need to think how to expand or further deepen the project activities and to replicate the model in other areas.

Expectation and focus of the meeting

Rajesh Kumar, CUTS CCIER highlighted the objective and expectations from the meeting. He stated that the objective of the meeting was to apprise RG members about the progress of the project so far and to seek their comments on its effectiveness / utility, to seek inputs on key outputs such as Synthesis Base Paper, Handouts, Policy Brief etc.

Presentation on Overall progress and SLOT analysis of the project in 1st phase

Amarjeet Singh, CUTS CART delivered a presentation highlighting the major activities such as territorial trainings; grassroots interface meetings etc. concluded during the first phase of the project. He also spoke about the planned and unplanned achievements of the project. Further, he shared with the participants, the various systemic problems being faced by electricity consumers at grassroots level collated during the first phase of the grassroots interface meetings (GIMs - I).

He also briefed the members about action taken on the suggestions given by them and the activities to be undertaken in the next phase. Following that, he presented the SLOT analysis of project implemented during the first phase.

The RG members expressed satisfaction on the project progress so far and suggested some action for advocacy to solve the systemic problems. Udai Mehta, CUTS CCIER, informed the members that under the project there is provision of advocacy seminar and a regional conference and these platforms will be utilized for engaging with the policy makers.

Discussion on draft Synthesis Base Paper

After the presentation on the overall progress of the project, discussion was held on the draft Synthesis Base Paper, which was shared with the RG members in advance. The RG members commented that there is lot of data and analysis but there is a need to highlight certain burning issues. Though Rajasthan is a leading state in power reforms but nothing

concrete has been done for consumer protection on the part of RERC and utilities, particularly for redressal of consumer's grievances.

P N Bhandari pointed out that unlike many other states such as Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, and Tamilnadu etc., the grievance redressal mechanism in Rajasthan is not consumer friendly. The redressal forum comprises only the officers from various utilities. Consumers cannot expect better outcomes unless forums are independent of the utilities.

Shanti Prasad suggested for effective advocacy by NGOs for ensuring independence of RERC and grievance redressal mechanism. He stressed on the need for the same to be mentioned in the synthesis paper.

RC Sharma, Joint Secretary, RERC informed the participants that RERC is in process of drafting new regulations to ensure independence of grievance redressal mechanism for electricity consumers and he would be happy to share the details of the same, once the same is published.

III. Discussion on implementation of 2nd phase of the project

Deepak Saxena, CUTS CART briefed the members about the activities to be conducted during the second phase. Proposed strategy on various key activities such as GIM 2nd Phase, Advocacy Seminar and Final Consumer Survey were discussed at great length.

A detailed strategy note for implementation of GIM 2nd phase along with the possible solutions of systemic problems which were collated during GIMs 1st phase, were shared with the members and their inputs/comments were sought. In the discussion, members opined for further involvement of CUTS with the present ongoing system of Vidhyut Chaupals.

Summary of the suggestions/comments as under

- Use of existing channels /mechanism such as 'Vidhyut Chaupals' and encourage local partners to participate in these meetings.
- Project activities should be designed to build convergence between conflicting interests of consumers and service providers.
- Suggestion should be given to utilities that at least 2% of proposed budget for Feeder Renovation Programme should be spent for consumer awareness.
- Analysis of functioning of the grievance redressal mechanism should be undertaken to find out the effectiveness of the system.
- Data /information generated in the 1st phase should be utilised in the next phase to resolve the consumer problems. During the 2nd phase, consumer representatives,

policy makers and service providers should be involved in meetings and outreach events.

- Deep interaction between consumers and utilities should be encouraged for mutual understanding and confidence building.
- There should be provisions of registration of local CSOs with utilities to ensure improved consumer participation. Representatives from the authorised CSOs should be allowed to meet the utility officers without any problems.
- Capacity of local CSOs should be enhanced for better consumer protection.
- Citizens Charter and other important documents should be made available in a simple format drafted in local vernacular language to the consumers.

IV. Showcasing of RESA Documentary

The RESA documentary “Powered to Grow” prepared capturing select GIMs organised in Rajasthan, was showcased to the members. They appreciated the effort and suggested for wider dissemination of the same.

Vote of thanks

Udai Mehta thanked all the members for their active participation and the valuable inputs and guidance provided during the first phase. He assured that the suggestions that emerged from the meeting will be taken into consideration and that the members will be kept in the loop during the activities to be conducted in the second phase.

Highlights

- Active participation on behalf of RG members.
- RG members appreciated the project progress achieved during phase one.
- Good time management and arrangement during the meeting.

Lowlights

- Some of the members could not participate in the meeting because of other commitments.
- Most of members did not come prepared despite sharing of the documents, agenda well in advance.

Annexure I

LIST OF RG MEMBERS

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