

# Workshop on Role of Civil Society in Uttar Pradesh Electricity Distribution Reforms

Kanpur, August 30, 2017,

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## Introduction

CUTS International in partnership with Kanpur Electricity Supply Company (KESCO) and with support from Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation (SSEF), organised a Workshop on 'Role of Civil Society in Uttar Pradesh Electricity Distribution Reforms' at Kanpur, on August 30, 2017. The purpose of the event was to understand concerns of both consumers as well as the discom (mainly related to ground-level implementation of reform measures) in electricity distribution sector, understanding the role of civil society groups in addressing issues and further brainstorming upon suitable collaborative measures that could be adopted to further distribution reforms in the state. The event witnessed participation from officials of KESCO, representatives of industry and traders associations, consumer groups, academia and media, amongst others.

## Proceedings and Key Highlights

Ashutosh Niranjana, Managing Director, KESCO in his opening address mentioned that the company, under his leadership is working towards achieving the three objectives: profitability, delivery of quality of service and consumer protection. Consumer welfare is a major focus area of the company. He acknowledged that there are challenges in company's functioning, but efforts are underway to address these.

Post this, Udai S Mehta, Deputy Executive Director, CUTS International introduced CUTS intervention in the state, which is supported by SSEF, to participants. He shared the experience of engagement with various stakeholders in the power sector of the state.

Following the above, representatives from various civil society groups (industry and traders associations, domestic consumer groups, academia etc.) and discom officials put forth key issues concerning consumers and discom officials in the city of Kanpur. These have been elaborated below:

- **Issues concerning feeder segregation:** In the industrial area, a single feeder has 40-50 transformers within its coverage area. Therefore, if a fault in the feeder needs to be fixed then all the transformers are shut down.
- **Unmetered and illegal connections:** The meter readers/contracting agencies get involved with consumers, ask for bribe and encourage consumers to opt for power theft. The metres should be put outside the household premises, but there is little motivation with the discom to do the same. In addition, there are also concerns about street lights not being metered.

In response to the above, discom officials mentioned that efforts are going on to curb power theft, but consumers get themselves reconnected.

- **Trust deficit between consumers and the utility:** Outside every substation office, a broker has been made to sit for filing consumer complaints and receiving bill payments. The same is happening with discom officials being fully aware about the same. For consumers, the broker is more efficient in addressing their concerns and providing support to them, in comparison to discom officials. Also, it appears that consumers find discom officials very unapproachable which has resulted into trust deficit between consumers and the utility.
- **Lack of awareness amongst consumers:** The Power Department has introduced 1912 helpline for consumers to file their complaints, but very few are aware of the same. Also, the provision for trust billing has been introduced, but the uptake at consumer's end is little. The BPL consumers are provided free connections, but potential beneficiaries are not aware of the same as well.
- **Resistance faced by officials in high loss making areas:** There have been several instances of discom officials and raid team facing resistance from consumers in high loss making areas when visits were made for checking power thefts.
- **Lack of human resource with discom at lower grade positions:** The discom is currently struggling with the issue of limited human resource at lower grade positions. The discom is not receiving enough applications for the position of Junior Engineer, who is the field staff and has a key role to play in checking/curbing power theft.

## Key Recommendations

Further to deliberations on challenges faced by consumers and discom in the sector, few recommendations were suggested to address these:

- Switches could be put on each transformer to curb the issue of outage at transformer level if there is a fault at the feeder level.
- Greater public accountability could be a strong measure to address the issue of power theft. Thus, publishing a list of feeder level losses and names of concerned junior engineers on the website could be helpful in this regard.
- For greater consumer awareness and effective consumer complaint redressal, committees at Feeder or Divisional level could be set up, involving representation from various consumer groups and concerned discom in-charges for the feeder or division.
- The details of 1912 helpline number should be printed behind the consumer electricity bills for greater awareness.
- Some of the technological solutions could facilitate reduction in losses. These could be advanced metering system, consumer indexing and feeder segregation. The measures would primarily help in effective data management.
- The feeders with more than 15 percent losses should be treated separately and special measures should be taken to reduce losses in these feeders. The measure is popularly known as feeder sanitation.
- Social auditing should be done in every locality and focus laid on maintaining the data on losses.