

Azad Hossain: A Case Study from Chanchal, Malda.

The Background, 16th December 2008

Azad Hossain, a permanent resident of Galimpur Village, Motiharpur Gram Panchayat, of Chanchal Block-I, had a long standing issues with regards to the industrial connection that he had applied for his husking mill. He had first approached the Chanchal Group Electricity Supply for his connection and deposited an amount of Rs.1,55,893/- as quotation on 16.12.2008, as per inspection and estimates submitted by the staff of the local office. His connection needed extension of HT line and installation of a 25 KVA transformer.



The local supply office issued a work order on 30.01.09 and an erection order on 10.02.09. However no work was started.

RESA starts, Baseline Survey in May 2008 and 1st GIM on 30th November 2008

The RESA activities had already started in the Chanchal Block of Malda by that time. The first phase of the Grassroots Interface Meetings was organised on 30.11.08 by Chanchal Janakalyan Samity, the RESA district partner for Malda. Azad Hossain came to know of the activities under the project through the Samity and got in touch with them and explained his case. They suggested him to talk to the station manager and he accordingly did that. He was however informed that no transformer was available at that point in time. His case therefore, remained pending.

Further action taken by Azad, 24th September to 29th October, 2009

The next set of developments started when the local Station Manager received an objection from local people on 24. 09. 09, to the effect that the land designated by Azad for the transformer, was not his own. The station Manager accordingly informed Azad through a letter issued on 15.10.09. The Assistant Engineer (A.E) asked him to bring a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the *Pradhan* of Motiharpur Gram Panchayat. The Pradhan however declined saying that this was a responsibility of the Block Land and Land Revenue Office (BLRO), Chanchal I. Azad then took up the case and had the land plot under discussion surveyed by an *Amin* registered with the BLRO office and submitted the Survey Report on 29.10. 09. The report clearly established the fact that the land plot was indeed owned by him.

Complaint to CGRO, 9th November, 2009

Unfortunately the prompt action from his side failed to evince a similar response from the officials of the Chanchal Group Electricity Supply Office. Azad then approached Chanchal Janakalyan Samity again and asked for their help & support. With their assistance and information provided by them, Azad lodged a formal complaint to the Circle Grievance Redressal Officer (CGRO), Malda Distribution Circle Office of the West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd. (WBSEDCL), Rathbari, Malda on 09-11-2009. He cited the episodes of continuous and intentional harassment that he has faced and also the huge financial loss he had to shoulder since he had loaned a considerable amount of money (to the tune of Rs 300000) for starting the husking mill which could not take off due to non-availability of electric connection. He demanded compensation for this loss of his. Not wanting to take his chances he asked for the contacts of relevant officials from Chanchal Janakalyan Samity and also sent copies of this complaint to the Chairman, WBSEDCL., Salt lake City, Kolkata, the Zonal Manager, WBSEDCL, Berhampur Zonal Distribution Office, Murshidabad; the Circle Manager WBSEDCL , Malda Distribution Circle and the Divisional Manager, WBSEDCL, Malda Distribution Circle, with relevant documents.

Hearing called by CGRO, 1st December, 2009

This evinced a prompt action from the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Cell of WBSEDCL at the headquarters, Kolkata. The Additional Chief Engineer, CRM Cell, WBSEDCL, in his letter dated 16.11.09, instructed the Additional Chief Engineer and Zonal Manager, Berhampur Distribution Zone, WBSEDCL to investigate the matter promptly and solve the issue at the earliest. A hearing was called by the CGRO, Malda (D) Circle on 01-12-2009, where he frankly criticized the indifferent attitudes of A.E. Chanchal Sub-Division and instructed him to adopt proper measures for prompt connection of the husking mill and assured Mr. Azad Hossain to send his demand for financial compensation to his higher authority (Ombudsman). Following this the local utility staff went to provide service connection on 14.12.09 and found that his connection wiring was incomplete. Azad was requested to complete the wiring and submit a test report, which he promptly did by 16.12.09. Finally his connection was effected on 18.12.09.

Hearing at Ombudsman's Office, 29th March, 2010:

The hearing at the Ombudsman's office was held on 29.03.10 with both Azad and WBSEDCL officials participating. The Ombudsman, P. K. Chakrabarti, passed an order that there was a clear case of delay and non-adherence to WBERC regulations on part of the licensee and directed that WBSEDCL should pay an amount of Rs. 77,500/- @Rs 500 per day for a total delay of 155 days in effecting Azad's connection. All this while Azad has been in constant touch with Chanchal Janakalyan Samity, submitting copies of the complaints & orders passed and asking for vital information and direction.

Epilogue:

Chanchal Janakalyan Samity has emerged as a capable organisation to handle issues of consumer protection and guidance, as is evident from the case. Their deep and sincere involvement in the RESA project has paid off. They have effectively helped & guided Azad to not only get his connection but also his rightful compensation. This aptly demonstrates that consumers and civil society when appropriately capacitated and informed can ensure that consumers' get what they pay for. The RESA initiative has evidently made a mark and in all possibilities, will continue to do so.