

An Overview of the Power Sector in West Bengal: Focussed initiatives with consumers reflecting the actual scenario

West Bengal is the 10th largest consumer of electricity accounting for nearly 4.38% of total energy consumption in India¹. Following is a brief overview of the power sector of West Bengal:

West Bengal Power Sector at a glance	
Total Installed power generating capacity (in MW) ²	10,476.41
Total inhabited villages (as per Census 2011)	37,463
Un-electrified villages as on 31.07.2017 ³	3
Total rural households (in lakhs)	138.20
Un-electrified rural households (in lakhs) ⁴	1.28
Peak demand shortage from April, 2015 to January, 2016 (in MW) ⁵	20
Major DISCOMs in West Bengal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (WBSEDCL)b. CESC Limitedc. IPCL (Formerly DPSC) – India Power Company Limitedd. Durgapur Projects Limited (DPL)e. Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC)
Share of DISCOMs in total power sold in West Bengal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. WBSEDCL: 55%b. CESC Limited: 22%c. IPCL: 2%d. DPL: 4%e. DVC: 17%

¹ http://powermin.nic.in/sites/default/files/uploads/joint_initiative_of_govt_of_india_and_West_Bengal.pdf
(Power for All, West Bengal, by Govt. of India and Govt. of W.B.)

² http://www.cea.nic.in/reports/monthly/installedcapacity/2017/installed_capacity-08.pdf

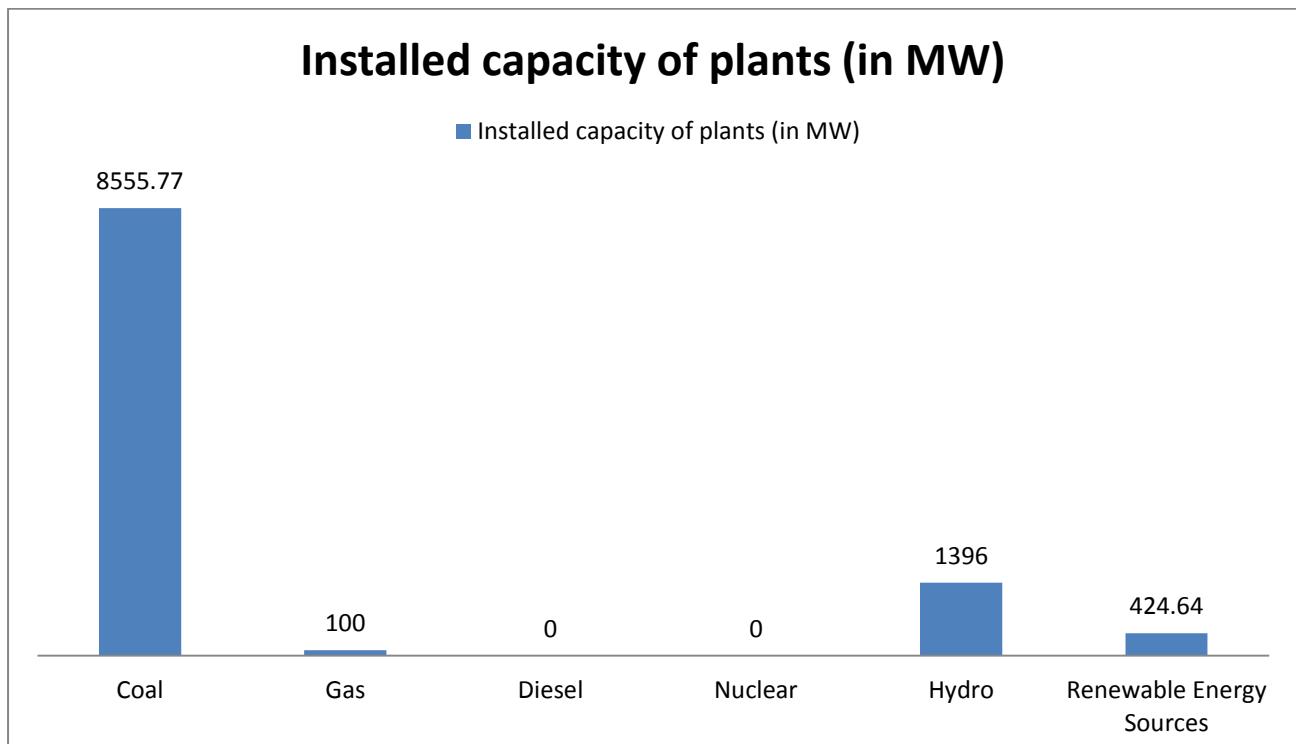
³ <http://garv.gov.in/assets/uploads/reports/statesnaps/West%20Bengal.pdf>

⁴ <http://garv.gov.in/assets/uploads/reports/statesnaps/West%20Bengal.pdf>

⁵ http://www.cea.nic.in/reports/monthly/executivesummary/2016/exe_summary-01.pdf

AT&C loss of WBSEDCL in FY 15 (Actual)	29.8%
Targeted reduced AT&C loss of WBSEDCL by FY 19	22.5%

Installed capacity of Power Plants in West Bengal (in MW), as on 31.08.2017:



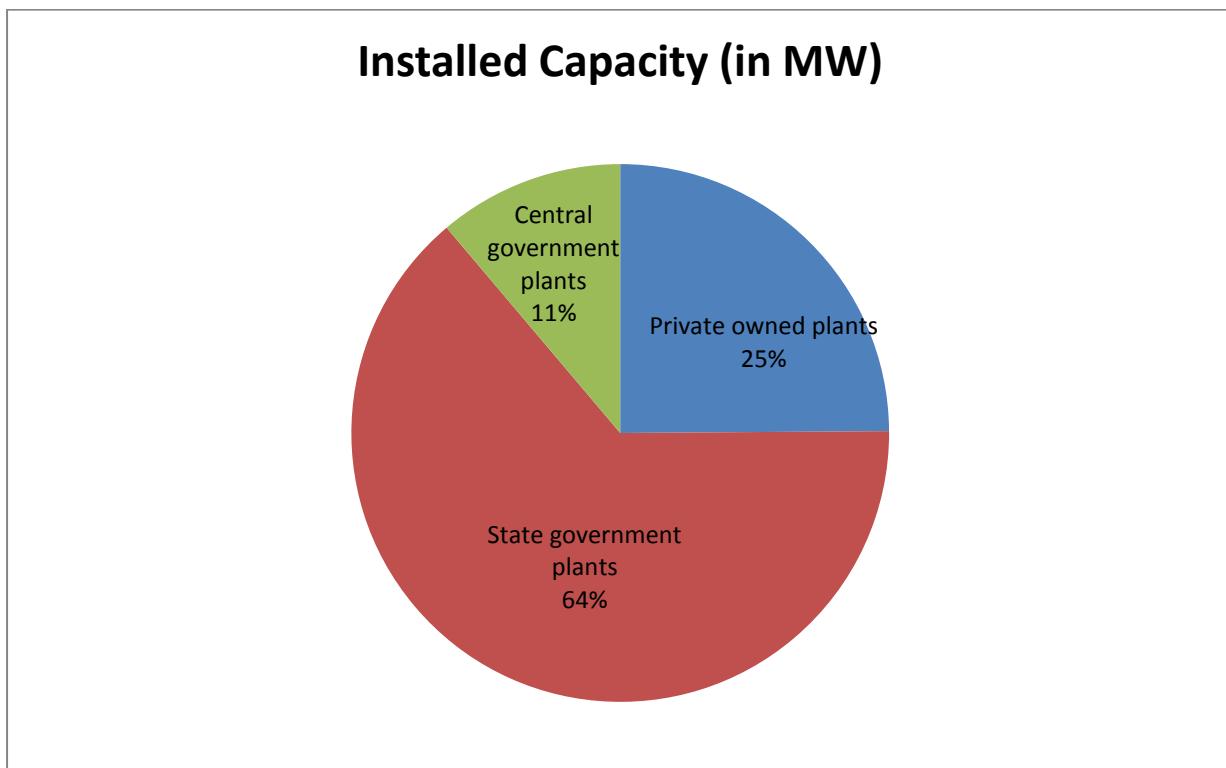
Estimation of energy requirement and peak demand for the utilities in West Bengal (FY 15 to FY 19)⁶ is illustrated below:

Particulars	FY 15 (Actual)	FY 17 (Projected)	FY 19 (Projected)
WBSEDCL			
Energy requirement (Million Units viz., MU)	22,509	25,301	26,955
Peak Demand (in MW)	5,321	6,047	6,351
CESC			
Energy requirement (Million Units viz., MU)	10,207	11,490	12,452
Peak Demand (in	2,042	2,110	2,320

⁶ http://powermin.nic.in/sites/default/files/uploads/joint_initiative_of_govt_of_india_and_West_Bengal.pdf
(Power for All, West Bengal, by Govt. of India and Govt. of W.B.)

MW)			
DVC			
Energy requirement (Million Units viz., MU)	7,068	8,417	10,006
Peak Demand (in MW)	1,117	1,550	1,828
IPCL			
Energy requirement (Million Units viz., MU)	901	1,031	1,256
Peak Demand (in MW)	167	171	174
DVC			
Energy requirement (Million Units viz., MU)	1,979	4,249	4,287
Peak Demand (in MW)	320	380	499

Sector-wise installed capacity of Power Plants (in MW) in West Bengal, as on 31.08.2017:



Consumer Issues in the electricity sector in West Bengal

Since its inception in June 2004, the West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission (WBERC) and the Ombudsmen have dealt with more than ten thousand cases against the licensed DISCOMs operating in West Bengal till FY 2014-'15. Following is a representation of the same:

Grievance against	No. of complaints		
	Received	Disposed off	Pending
WBSEDCL	9100	9012	88
CESC Limited	1304	1299	5
DPL	8	8	NA
SHRELCOP	36	36	NA
IPCL	3	3	NA
DVC	2	2	NA
Total	10,453	10,360	93

Lack of drive for adequate communication, dearth of awareness building exercises by the DISCOMs, are assessed to be the principal barriers behind several persevering issues pertaining to the electricity sector of the district.

Category wise complaints of consumers lodged with state electricity regulatory commission and the Ombudsmen as on 31.03.15⁷ are exemplified below:

Sr. No.	Category-wise complaints	No. of complaints received by the Commission and Ombudsmen	No. of complaints disposed of by the Commission and Ombudsmen	Pending cases
1	Incorrect electricity bill	1126	1106	20
2	Disconnection without observing procedural formalities	307	304	3
3	Overcharging for new connection	234	233	1
4	Non-functioning of meters	164	161	3
5	Delay in providing services	1046	1042	4

⁷ Annual Report 2015-'16 of the West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission (WBERC)

6	Delay in giving new connection	2111	2097	14
7	Miscellaneous representations	6512	6464	48
Total		11,500	11,407	93

However, the commission as well as the Ombudsmen are of the opinion that majority of the consumers are not well versed with the grievance redressal mechanism and the numbers of complaints illustrated above, are only a minuscule representation of the actual numbers of complaints which the consumers have. Hence, the state electricity regulatory commission, viz. WBERC, approached CUTS to pilot an initiative for better understanding of the consumer grievances in two districts of West Bengal.

CUTS Experience: CAPSOPI Initiative

CUTS International and the West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission (WBERC) have jointly initiated a programme titled, '*Consumer Awareness Programme for improvement of overall Standard of Performance in the Distribution Sector in two districts of West Bengal*', viz, CAPSOPI. The programme aims to edify the electricity consumers on the various electricity issues and therefore improve their knowledge and capacity on conventional and non-conventional electricity in the districts of **South 24 Parganas and Jalpaiguri in West Bengal**. Following are the objectives and the expected outcomes of the collaborative initiative:

Objective of the Programme	Expected Outcomes
The initiative aims to edify the electricity consumers on their rights and responsibilities as mentioned in the Electricity Act, 2003 and subsequent regulations of WBERC and thereby facilitate to improve the knowledge and capacity of the grassroots consumers on conventional and non-conventional electricity in the districts of South 24 Parganas and Jalpaiguri of West Bengal	<p>The programme is expected to enable the electricity consumers to have a better understanding of the processes and procedures towards availing quality and reliable power supply from the supply utility.</p> <p>The initiative will enable the electricity consumers to access and utilize a platform of direct interaction and knowledge exchange with the officials from the utility as well as the representatives from the state electricity regulatory commission.</p> <p>CUTS will also identify persevering issues, pertaining to the electricity sector, in each of the two districts, which have been the major concerns of the electricity consumers for long. CUTS is aiming to identify specific issues and challenges which act as impediments towards providing good quality electricity service by the utilities and will come up with policy level prescriptions to address the same.</p> <p>Vidyut Quick Guide, a comprehensive information booklet on various electricity issues, will be published by end of September, 2017.</p>

Programme Design

CUTS is organizing 240 grass roots stakeholders meetings in two districts of West Bengal (Jalpaiguri & S. 24 Parganas). The objective is to educate and build capacity of the consumers on various electricity issues, especially on the SOP regulation of WBERC



Programme being implemented by CUTS and four district partner organizations (grass roots CSOs), two each from each of the two districts



CUTS with the help of WBERC, WBSEDCL and WBREDA trained the officials from the CSOs on the various electricity issues as specified in the EA, 2003 and relevant regulations as specified by WBERC



Based on the information received from the meetings organized at the grass roots level, CUTS will prepare specific policy recommendations, to address electricity issues which have been persisting for long, especially in the rural areas. CUTS will include specific recommendations based on the interaction with the electricity consumers as well as the DISCOM officials.

Snapshot of the grass roots meetings conducted so far

- Total numbers of meetings conducted till date: **118** (59 in each of the two districts)
- Total participants in the 118 meetings conducted till date: **3,417**
- Several meetings have been conducted in remote villages of Sunderbans (located in South 24 Parganas) and in Doaars (located in Jalpaiguri)
- While most of the issues faced by the electricity consumers in **South 24 Parganas** are pertaining to **low voltage** and **frequent and long duration power cuts**, the major concerns of the consumers from Jalpaiguri are related to **inflated and delayed billing** as well as **non-functioning of meters and their sluggish replacement by the DISCOM**



Figure 1: A grass roots stakeholders meeting in progress in Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal

Major Consumer Grievances (as identified from the grass roots meetings conducted so far):

The major concerns flagged by the consumers, during the awareness meetings conducted under the CAPSOPI initiative, were problems pertaining to:

- Low voltage and frequent power cuts
- Billing issues, which include inflated bills as well as delayed billing by the DISCOM
- Faulty meters and delayed replacement of faulty meters
- Overcharging for new connections by the utility and a few others

A brief overview of the category wise complaints accentuated by the participants in the grass roots awareness meetings is presented below⁸:

Major issues faced by the consumers	Percentage (%) of participants with the respective grievance	
	South 24 Parganas	Jalpaiguri
Low Voltage	35%	11%
Frequent and longer duration power cuts	15%	4%
Delayed billing and inflated billing issues	18%	34%
Non-functioning of meters	10%	44%
Over charging for New Connection	10%	3%
A lengthy and ineffective grievance redressal mechanism	4%	2%
Lack of proper maintenance of the equipment necessary for rendering good quality electricity service, such as replacement of defective transformers, poles, wires etc.	7%	0.64%
Other issues	1%	1.36%

Major Challenges faced by the DISCOM (WBSEDCL) (as identified by the DISCOM officials during the Grass Roots Stakeholders Meetings under the CAPSOPI programme):

- Poor collection efficiency
- High AT&C losses
- Huge outstanding dues
- Poor ratio of WBSEDCL staffs to the consumers they serve
- Lack of adequate inventory of essential commodities, such as meters, transformers etc. being available at the customer care centres (local supply office) of WBSDECL

⁸ data collected during CAPSOPI Project

Following is the factual representation of the major issues faced by the DISCOM officials in South 24 Parganas District⁹:

Customer Care Centre Office	Area (in Sq. K.M.)	Consumer: WBSEDCL staff ratio at CCC Level	Outstanding Dues (Till June 2017) (INR in crores)	AT&C Loss	
				November 2016	June 2017
Baruipur	-*	32000:9	3.55	53.25%	31%
Basanti	700 Sq. K.M.	69000:12	5.84	83.77%	87.20%
Diamond Harbour	75 Sq. K.M.	37000:15	3.90	65.56%	54.8%
Kakdwip	250 Sq. K.M.	58000:11	8.42	56.39%	59%
Magrahat	136.9 Sq. K.M.	47000:9	2.76	81.49%	80.39%
Mathurapur	375 Sq. K.M.	60000:11	-*	79.81%	80%
Patharpratima	484.5 Sq.K.M.	34000:8	4.89	76.55%	72%



Figure 2: An aggrieved consumer sharing his experience at a meeting in South 24 Parganas on 03.05.17

⁹ Source: Data collected during CAPSOPI Project

Following is the factual representation of the major issues faced by the DISCOM officials in Jalpaiguri District¹⁰:

Customer Care Centre Office	Area (in Sq. K.M.)	Consumers: WBSEDCL staff ratio at CCC Level	Outstanding Dues (Till June 2016) (INR)	Outstanding Dues (Till June 2017) (INR)	AT&C Loss	
					June 2016	June 2017
Dhupguri CCC	631	84000:12	530 Lakhs	330 Lakhs	42%	49%
Matiali CCC	*	22500:6	120 Lakhs	125 Lakhs	28.4%	33%
Maynaguri CCC	535.3	75000:14	90 Lakhs	100 Lakhs	43%	40%
Nagrakata CCC	*	21000:7	15 Lakhs	22 Lakhs	26%	28%
Belakoba CCC	*	34000:11	97 Lakhs	125 Lakhs	16%	14.26%
Kranti CCC	36	24000:10	232 Lakhs	254 Lakhs	56.38% (Sept. 2016)**	36.71%
Phulbari CCC	*	18467:8	112 Lakhs	154 Lakhs	16%	19%
Odlabari CCC	*	28400:13	170 Lakhs	*	28%	30%

*Data not available

An anecdotal story

A certain middleman at 6 No. Kachukhali G.P., Gosaba block of South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, had amassed huge amount of money from the local villagers with an assurance to help them get a quicker electricity connection. The unaware intending consumers had blindly trusted him and while giving him the money had believed in him to get them a quicker electricity connection. He used to charge them more than Rs 1,000 for a single electricity connection. In an attempt to gain faith he even used to claim that he has been assigned the duty of collecting the money and depositing the same at the Basanti CCC by the WVSEDCL officials, which is approximately 30 KMs away from the village and involves a complex process of travelling by boats, *vans* (diesel run vans) and autos. In the journey one needs to cross two rivers. The average time taken to reach the CCC from the village is around three to four hours. When the CUTS officials had met with the local villagers at a meeting on June 5th, 2017 in the same *Gram Panchayat*, they were being informed of the misdeed by the middleman. The villagers being duped of the connection and the money were of the misconception that they have been robbed of their money by the utility itself. The intending consumers had also not received any money receipts etc from the middleman.

¹⁰ data collected during CAPSOPI Project

The CUTS officials had advised the duped villagers to lodge a complaint with the local CCC and with the local police station

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09.09.17