

CONSUMERS LACK PRIOR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT POWER OUTAGES

58% of urban low income Sri Lankan micro-entrepreneurs (MEs) who used electricity for their business did not receive prior notice about power outages. This is according to a survey of urban low income micro-entrepreneurs in selected Bangladeshi, Indian, and Sri Lankan cities, conducted by LIRNEasia¹.

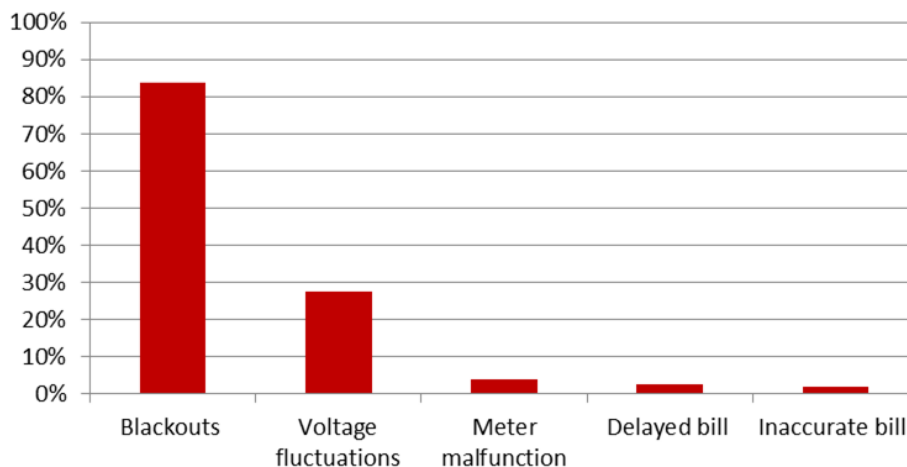
Sri Lanka has higher overall electrification rates than India. So it wasn't surprising that 84% of Sri Lankan micro-entrepreneurs surveyed reported having an electricity connection which is used for business purposes, compared with 37% in India. But, while Sri Lanka's electrification rates are high, those connected still experience problems, with blackouts and voltage fluctuations being the most commonly reported problems (Figure 1).

Among Sri Lankan micro-entrepreneurs who used electricity for business, 58% stated that they did not receive advance notice about power outages (Figure 2). Of the Sri Lankan micro-entrepreneurs who *did* receive advance notice about power outages, the majority (73%) were informed through public announcements (Figure 3). The second most common method of receiving notice was through radio and television (36%).

Given that the survey was conducted in two urban areas (Colombo in the Western Province, referred to as strong city; and Kurunegala, Kuliyaipitiya, Puttalam and Chilaw in the North Western Province referred to as weak cities²), it is possible to see differences between the two areas. Over 65 % of micro-entrepreneurs in Colombo stated that they received notice about power outages through radio and television, but in cities in the North Western Province the figure was 7% (figure 4).

Micro-entrepreneurs also faced difficulty in carrying on their business during power outages, with 41% stating that they did not use any alternative sources of energy during power outages. Another issue was that during unplanned power outages, micro-entrepreneurs were unable to contact the provider to make a complaint.

Figure 1: Problems faced with electricity supply in Sri Lanka (as a % of micro-entrepreneurs who use electricity for business)



¹ <http://lirneasia.net/projects/2012-2014-research-program/improving-service-delivery-for-e-inclusion/>

² In each country, two locations were selected; the capital city (strong city) and another city which is weaker in terms of governance. Governance was inferred by the proxy indicators related to the human development of the province / state the city is located

KEEPING CONSUMERS INFORMED: MULTIPLE METHODS

Issue: Planned power outages

Solution: Consumers informed through *multiple* methods such as public announcements, newspapers, SMS and electronic media. The use of SMS ensures the message is conveyed to the consumer, unlike in the use of public announcements and radio/TV where there is a risk of the message not reaching the target audience

Issue: Unplanned power outages

Solution: Consumers informed through SMS

In both cases, the challenge is to get consumers to provide their mobile numbers so that future announcements can be sent to them. The following steps can be taken for a higher chance of success:

- The sign up process should be simple, and clear. Consumers should be informed why their mobile phone number is being requested. They should be prompted to sign up when paying their bill, or by sending a pre-formatted SMS to a designated number. Publicity should be given to make consumers aware of the service.
- Use SMS infrequently, for informing about power outages only: In our surveys we find that mobile owners often receive too many SMS messages, and find this troublesome. Therefore SMSs should only be sent when outages are being announced, and not for other reasons.
- SMSs should contain the relevant information: To the extent possible, a realistic estimate about how long it will take before the power is back on should be included in the SMS. This will prevent consumers calling the distribution companies to find out this information.

For further information please see <http://irneasia.net/projects/2012-2014-research-program/improving-service-delivery-for-e-inclusion/>