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“Power Trip” Campaign

ADVISORY ASSISTANCE TO THE MINISTRY OF ENERGY OF GEORGIA



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The film “Power Trip” by Paul Devlin was broadcasted on the TV Channel Rustavi 2 and shown on three regional town hall meetings in: Kutaisi, Akhaltsikhe and Zugdidi.

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Advisory Assistance to the Ministry of Energy of Georgia, Public Outreach Strategic Plan Implementation

Success Story – “Power Trip” Campaign

Activity Date:	Summer-Fall, 2005
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Method:	Regional Town Hall Meetings, dedicated to broadcast the film, produced by Paul Devlin “Power Trip”.
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Cooperation with/Participant/Speaker Name:	In terms of organization of regional broadcasting of the film, CORE cooperated with following organization: (i). Ministry of Energy of Georgia (ii). Head office and Akhaltsikhe regional representation of Liberty Institute; (iii). Head office and regional representations of UEDC; (iv). Local governments in Kutaisi and Zugdidi

REPORT

In the scope of “Power Trip” campaign, it was planned to broadcast the film “Power Trip” by Paul Devlin on TV Channel Rustavi 2 and at three specially organized regional town hall meetings in Kutaisi, Akhaltsikhe and Zugdidi.

Power Trip is a documentary about the investment of AES Telasi who served as a buyer, owner, and operator in the electricity sector of Georgia five years ago. The documentary shows the difficulties encountered by the foreign investor in assisting Georgia to reform its sector from a state owned entity to a system that would operate on a sustainable, commercially operated basis. The film is a helpful tool in explaining to regional consumers that Tbilisi, often seen as the beneficiary of public funds over regions, was actually facing similar and equally difficult circumstances as the regional consumers currently face. Of particular emphasis are the difficulties and cause and effects of the re-metering process, which the film documents while this process was on-going five years ago in Tbilisi. Presently the regions are facing many similar issues. At the same time, the film emphasizes the critical importance of re-metering to solving the country's electricity supply problems.

The film also describes how the representatives and the managers of the company AES Telasi try to handle such a painful problem.

The main goals of the regional meetings:

- to show to regional consumers the real case of Tbilisi and the problems faced by the capital and how these problems were handled;
- to underline that Tbilisi has overcome many of the difficulties the regional consumers are facing now;

- that rehabilitation of the system and changing consumers' habits, business models of system operations, and public sector involvement in the sector requires the citizens and the public sector to work in cooperation with one another in order to ease the inevitable pain of a transitional process.

To reach the above mentioned goals under the USAID Advisory Assistance to the Ministry of Energy of Georgia Program, CORE International purchased the right of broadcasting the film on the TV Channel "Rustavi 2" and at three regional public meetings.

The film was broadcasted on "Rustavi 2" on June 20, 2005 as part of the Ministry of Energy's public outreach campaign in order to increase public knowledge of key energy sector issues and to facilitate discussion of collective (public sector, private sector, and individual consumer level users) solutions to increase sector performance.

In order to increase effectiveness of regional town hall meetings, CORE cooperated with the Ministry of Energy, UEDC and representatives of regional governments.

Due to the difficulties connected to the communal re-metering process, it was decided to show the film in those regions where the UEDC operates and is facing the greatest challenges with the re-metering process. The chose regions have the greatest levels of customer dissatisfaction and the least means to deal with the process of change. The regions for the public viewing and discussion were selected in consultation with the UEDC PR representative, USAID technical managers, the NGO Liberty Institute, and the Ministry of Energy.

Along with the mentioned organizations, regional town hall meetings were designed and organized with the support of the representatives of local governments. Every meeting was covered by regional media outlets.

In order to answer all energy related questions posed by the consumers, the town hall meetings were attended by the representatives of the Ministry, CORE International Inc., UEDC and local governments.

The meetings were designed in the following way:

- Opening introduction to the film and the purpose of the meeting (made by representative of CORE)
- Showing of the film
- Discussion (questions of consumers were answered by the representatives of CORE International, Inc., UEDC and MoE)
- Media interviews (Interviews to regional media were given by the PR representatives of MoE and UEDC)

Comparative analysis of conducted three regional shows

The attitudes of the consumers that attended the town hall meetings varied by region - in terms of their attitudes toward electricity sector participants and the government, as well as in their willingness to engage in constructive debate and dialogue. The population of Kutaisi and Akhaltsikhe were more aggressive and rigid than Zugdidi citizens. It appeared that the openness of the Zugdidi population could be explained by the fact that their supply of electricity was much better than in the other regions, and the consumers had received more education about the communal metering process than those consumers in other regions.

The populations in Akhaltsikhe and Kutaisi expressed great unhappiness with the distribution service. As a result, the regional meetings in these locations generated heated discussions. While the showing of the film and holding the meetings was a first step in the

direction of creating a public dialogue on these difficult issues surround Georgia's energy sector, the consumers focused the question and answer session on their individual difficulties. Participants expressed their dissatisfaction with:

- local problems of electricity supply;
- motive of communal re-metering instead of individual metering;
- difficulties, related with money collection, especially when the meter covers more than 50 households;
- problems related to unemployment; and
- problems related to water supply.

Many citizens in these two regions were currently experiencing disconnections which were made by UEDC due to non-payment of the amount shown on the communal meter. Many of the citizens were in dispute in terms of their portion of the communal meter charges that they were being required to pay. Representatives of the UEDC explained the local problems and made analogies to the film. CORE's representative focused on explained that implementation of the new use and payment system, and re-metering in particular, is a challenging process and requires patience and time. The local government authorities discussing the opportunities for mutual cooperation with the UEDC and the Ministry in terms of making the process of change more efficient and less painful for the citizenry.

In all regions the participants of the meetings watched the film "Power Trip" with great interest. The film allowed the consumers to see their current problems in the broader context of Georgia's post-revolution reconstruction. It was obvious that the participants had high regards for Mr. Michael Scoley, the ex-General Manager of AES Telasi, who, even after many years of not being present in Georgia, remains an iconic figure for what he tried to achieve for the country.

Town Hall Meeting in Kutaisi (July 22, 2005)		Town Hall Meeting in Akhaltsikhe (June 23, 2005)	
Opening and Motive of the Show	Show of the Film	Show of the Film	Discussion After Show
			
Discussion After Show		Discussion After Show	
			



Questions brought up during the town hall meetings:

- **Why communal re-metering was instituted**
The explanation was given by CORE representative: Communal re-metering is a periodical tool to control the electricity consumption. For instance, Telasi used millions of USD for Tbilisi re-metering and despite the individual re-metering this activity was not welcomed by consumers. Re-metering of the Georgian regions will cost much more than re-metering of Tbilisi and the State does not have enough funds available for the moment. Therefore, communal re-metering was implemented as a first step to control electricity consumption that will also support the fight against corruption.
- **Questions, connected to local issues like:** meters for districts or problems with local distribution.
Explanation was given by UEDC representatives: PR and technician
- **When the individual re-metering will be done:**
Explanation was provided by the representatives of CORE and UEDC
 UEDC Representatives were explaining the process of re-metering, which took place in that specific region.
 CORE Representative also explained that in addition to financial resources, the re-metering process also requires human resources and time, and that from a technical standpoint the meters need to be connected to the transformers with special secure cables in order to avoid illegal hook ups and the theft of electricity.
- **How to behave if the neighbor does not pay electricity bill, we do not want to cover the bills for the electricity others consume**
Explanation was given by CORE and UEDC representatives
 UEDC Representatives – transformers will provide electricity if the whole amount fixed on the communal meter is completely withdrawn. Consumers should start regulating this activity and we, UEDC representatives will support you.
 CORE Representative explained that this was the first step in the re-metering process done as a first step to control electricity supply and consumption. The next step of re-metering process would be installation of individual meters in regional centers and cities, where it is more difficult to deal with communal meters and is preferred by most household consumers.

- **We have no jobs, no income**

Explanation was given by CORE representative

Building of the country economy takes time and is not easy. Every field is interconnected to each other like: if consumers do not pay electricity bills, the system does not have enough funds for rehabilitation and maintenance, which results in the inability of the country to provide reliable energy to businesses. A poor performing energy sector in a country has a negative impact on the development of the country's economy. Under developed economies have unemployment and low salaries. In order to solve these problems, the government needs to work at both high levels and the grass-roots level, and here your support is needed.

Outcome of the “Power Trip” Campaign

“Power Trip” campaign demonstrated to the regional population that:

- electricity supply problems are solvable
- Tbilisi went through a similar with metering and survived the process in the same way that the regions are now experiencing the process and will also survive
- implementation of reliable system takes some time
- for building a reliable energy sector, patience and the active participation of population is needed

Summary

In the process of planning and designing of the regional meetings, we should take into consideration that holding of such meetings will be connected with the difficulties, such as aggression, noisy discussions, and a lack of understanding from the side of some consumers. Many of those consumers who have negative attitudes and vocalize those attitudes at the meetings do understand the message and can be used as a resource for disseminating the needed information in their communities.

Finally, it can be underlined that regional meetings can play a positive role in enhancing the knowledge and understanding of regional population on energy related issues and providing objective and useful information about the critical processes so needed for the economic development of the country.