

## Consumers' Views: Electricity in Botswana

A study of Botswana electricity consumers explored satisfaction and concerns. Information awareness and use are limited. Recommendations for consumer actions and power company efforts are made.

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As U.S. consumers face deregulation of electricity, Botswana consumers express a need for regulation to ensure affordability of electricity. Consumption is growing in Botswana, approximately 30 percent of households have electricity (BPC Annual Report, 1995). The study investigated Botswana consumers' needs and concerns about service quality of electricity (Peters, 1997). Objectives were to (1) gather data to serve as guidelines to improve and enhance satisfaction with electricity services; (2) provide recommendations to develop education programs; (3) determine consumers' concerns and make recommendations to Botswana Power Corporation (BPC) and the government. As consumerism is new in Botswana, studies have not explored consumers' views on service quality of electricity. A questionnaire was developed and mailed to Botswana electricity consumers residing in eight selected towns and big villages. The response rate was 45 percent (101 usable returns).

The consumers' profile indicated low education (61%)—from standard one to certificate level—and middle and low income levels—P500 to P3,000 (\$167 to \$1,000 (US)) per month. Electric bills averaged P119 (\$40 (US)) per month. Most used both electricity and gas—gas for cooking and heating water; electricity by a majority for lights, irons, televisions, stereos, refrigerators, and fans. Most consumers “did not know” about items concerning consumer satisfaction, but, on a general item, indicated satisfaction with services. The majority had not experienced disconnections. Few knew of the disconnection notice printed on all bills.

The majority of consumers expressed concerns about high prices. Most were concerned about receiving electricity bills after due dates. The cause of delays was not determined. Over 60 percent experienced situations warranting complaints: inflated charges, power failures, poor service, delayed connections, service disruptions, inappropriate disconnections. Two-thirds with complaints took no action. Reasons for not filing were inadequate information and not knowing how to present complaints. Most consumers were not aware of energy efficiency and electricity information even though BPC produces brochures and pamphlets. Most consumers were aware that energy efficiency information could help save electricity, but did not know where to get information. No differences in awareness of information between town and village consumers, education levels, and income levels were found.

Recommendations on policy are for the Minister of Commerce and Industry and government units; those on dissemination of information are for BPC. Four major needs/concerns were identified: (1) lack of knowledge or inadequate information on electricity issues; (2) lack of knowledge or awareness of energy conservation; (3) electricity charges; and (4) late bills. Though information and materials are produced, consumers need education—how to process and understand information to make wise decisions.

Consumer education programs in Botswana can empower consumers to make wise decisions, but will only be effective if consumers exercise their rights and responsibilities. To improve awareness and knowledge, it is recommended that (1) consumers form watchdog committees to discuss and take action on concerns (most consumers indicated an interest in serving on such a committee); (2) through these committees, consumers can meet with BPC's representatives; and (3) can ask BPC and/or Consumer Affairs' representative to hold educational workshops/seminars. Lacking agencies similar to public utility commissions, it is recommended that the Consumer Education and Protection Unit collaborate with other agencies to address priorities related to consumer awareness, representation, and redress.

### References

- Botswana Power Corporation Annual Report. (1995). Financial results and operating statistics. Author.  
Peters, S. (1997). Botswana consumers' views: Service quality and prices of electricity. Unpublished master's thesis, Colorado State University, Fort Collins.

### Endnote

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