

LEC, MCA-L Take Power Theft Awareness into Communities



Monrovia, Liberia (Jan. 30, 2019) – Amid the passage of the Power Theft Act, the Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC) and Millennium Challenge Account-Liberia (MCA-L) have rolled out a series of community forums to increase public awareness on the impact of power theft and the penalties now associated with the new law.

LEC loses 49 percent of the electricity produced to power theft, amounting to US\$21.6 million annually. This heavy loss makes it difficult for LEC to obtain the revenues necessary for purchasing equipment and other goods and services to deliver reliable power to customers.

However, on October 4, 2019, President George Manneh Weah signed the Power Theft Act into law, criminalizing power theft and instituting significant penalties and fines for violators. The law defines stealing of electricity as “illegal connections, tampering with meters, transmission and distribution of line, and theft of assets, including light poles, wires and transformers.”

The series of forums held by MCAL and LEC was also meant to brief community members on what to expect from the new law and LEC’s efforts to combat power theft. Kicking off on December 7 at the Newport High School in Central Monrovia, the gatherings ended on Sunday, December 15 at the E. Jonathan Goodridge High School in Bardnersville.

Community leaders and residents were informed of the risk power theft poses to their properties and lives. Additionally, Owen Richards, manager of the Anti-Power Theft Department at LEC, told attendees that power theft overloads transformers, which can cost thousands of dollars and deprive many customers of electricity.

“Some customers who are tampering with their meters buy credit some times to disguise the theft, but a system is being put in place to track tampering. Stop taking illegal current,” Richards said.

At another engagement meeting, a senior member of the LEC management team, Noel Welsh, told attendees that LEC does not condone its staff conniving with residents to engage in power theft. He vowed that any LEC employee found violating those rules would be booted out of the institution immediately.

Community leaders and residents thanked LEC and MCA-L for the engagement, but said the issue of the increase in power theft is deep-rooted and needs the concerted efforts of both communities and LEC. They suggested that one way to reduce power theft would be to improve LEC's response time to problems arising in communities. Community members also advocated for a reduction in the tariff to allow electricity to become more affordable for all.

At the end of each meeting, community leaders and LEC agreed to build a stronger network of cooperation to tackle power theft, to enable LEC to provide stable, affordable, and reliable electricity services – crucial for economic development.

The meetings took place in communities within Central Monrovia, Paynesville, Sinkor, and Bushrod Island.

About MCA-L: *In October 2015, the Government of the United States of America, through its development agency, Millennium Challenge Corporation, provided a grant of US\$257 million to Liberia. MCA-L is an independent, legal, and autonomous agency of the Government of Liberia created by the legislature to administer the compact projects, which address the lack of access to reliable and affordable electricity and inadequate road infrastructure. Learn more about MCA-L at www.mca.gov.lr.*