



Sierra Leone Electricity and Water Regulatory Commission
Supporting Efficient and Sustainable Delivery of Electricity and Water Supply Services

Address: No. 55 Berwick Street, Freetown



CONSUMER PROTECTION POLICY

OVERVIEW

Consumer complaints play a valuable role in helping the Sierra Leone Electricity and Water Regulatory Commission (SLEWRC) identify those areas where current legislation/regulation may be lacking and where best to target intervention.

A key indicator of successful consumer protection practices is the time taken to resolve consumer complaints. This helps demonstrate the level and cost of resource required to address a complaint and identifies the best means through which complaints can be addressed/resolved.

The right to complain and have access to a fair and transparent complaint process is an essential part of the Commission's consumer protection framework. Putting the consumer at the heart of our decision making maintains the focus on competition for delivering consumer benefit and helps to address areas where the electricity and water markets does not fully deliver.

Consumer Protection provides consumers with the basic rights such as

- the right to basic needs such as water and electricity
- the right to be informed;
- the right to choose;
- the right to be heard;
- the right to make complaints and seek redress;
- the right to safety;
- the right to healthy environment.

OBJECTIVES

The specified objectives of the consumer protection policy are:

- a) To prevent the production and supply of low quality electricity and water services
- b) Ensure that the supply of services to consumers are rendered in accordance with standards that are prescribed in the standards of performance regulations as put forward by the Commission
- c) Ensure that regulated services are supplied in accordance with applicable regulations and tariff structures as approved by the Commission;
- d) To prevent unfair trading practices such as misleading or deceptive or fraudulent conduct;
- e) To empower consumers to make informed decisions and to reduce misunderstanding of information passed between consumers and service providers

- f) Commit to ongoing evaluation of priorities and strategies to sustain the consumer protection policy objectives of the Commission.

PROVISIONS FOR CONSUMER PROTECTION WITHIN THE SLEWRC ACT 2011

The Sierra Leone Electricity and Water Regulatory Commission Act of 2011 address specific aspects of consumer protection as follows:

The **SLEWRC Act of 2011** gives the Commission the power to

- Consult with stakeholders where it considers it necessary or expedient to introduce or make any changes to key policies (**Sections 13**), thereby giving consumers the opportunity to be heard.
- Grant license to operators within the electricity and water services sectors in Sierra Leone (**Sections 29-37**), thereby encouraging market entry into these sectors which will give consumers the opportunity to choice;
- Ensure an effective and efficient delivery of these services to consumers (**Section 29**) to guarantee safety and reliability;
- Set standards of performance and monitor the performance of the service providers (**Sections 40**) to ensure that consumers receive quality electricity and water services;
- Determine the rates/tariffs at which these services are to be provided to consumers taking into account the interest of the consumers, the interest of the investors, the cost of production, etc. (**Section 43**);
- Ensure that Service Providers provide bills to consumers. **Section 53** of the Act states that, ‘A public utility shall give to every consumer..... a bill showing the sum payable by the consumer for the service provided by the public utility during the preceding month or such time as may be determined by the Commission’;
- Ensure that Service Providers establish procedures for dealing with complaints from consumers and provide copies (free of charge) of these procedures on request from consumers (**Section 56**);
- Stop any activity intended to have the effect of unfair competition between businesses operating within the electricity and water services sectors (**Section 57**);
- Ensure that Service Providers provide equal opportunity for access to the same type and quality of service to all consumers of the same type in a given area at substantially the same tariff rate (**Section 57(3)**);
- Enforce any decision taken or direction given by the Commission (**Section 62**).

At Sierra Leone Electricity and Water Regulatory Commission, we plan to ensure **CONSUMER PROTECTION** by:

- Giving customers the opportunity to make their complaints and finding redress to **CUSTOMERS COMPLAINTS**. The Commission encourages utilities to develop fair, effective and transparent mechanisms to address consumer complaints
Utilities are mandated by set regulations to provide consumers with access to remedies that do not impose a cost, delay, or undue burden to the economic value at

stake and at the same time do not impose excessive or undue burdens on consumers and their businesses

- Ensure that customers receive **QUALITY SERVICE AT A REASONABLE COST**.
- **EDUCATING CONSUMERS** about their rights and responsibilities: The Commission works with utilities in the development of sector consumer education and information programmes, and the effects of change in their consumption patterns. The aim of such programmes is to enable consumers be more discriminatory, offering them the capability of making an informed choice of services, and to be more conscious of their rights and responsibilities.

It is usually intended that consumer groups, business and other relevant organizations of civil society are involved in these educational efforts.

Guiding Principles

The consumer protection regime of the Commission contemplates the interests of consumers as far as those interests are impacted by the consumer's social and economic circumstances. To that extent, this consumer protection policy is guided by certain principles that will inform the overall consumer protection regime:

- a. Consumer's economic interest as far as price, quality and access to electricity and water services across the two sectors are concerned
- b. Social and economic equality as far as income distribution and access to income-earning opportunities;
- c. Standards of performance regulations, international standards and codes of conduct as far as adopting them and ensuring adherence to prescribed standards and codes can advance these essential services in Sierra Leone;
- d. The need for a robust and effective complaints handling: service providers should make available complaints handling mechanisms that provide consumers with expeditious, fair, transparent, inexpensive, accessible, speedy and effective dispute resolution without unnecessary cost or burden.

The wider approach to consumer protection means clear and transparent establishment of the;

- Mutual obligations of consumer and service provider
- Definition of quality of supplied electricity and water services
- Protection of vulnerable categories of consumers.

The major criteria for customer protection and transparency are: transparent information about supply prices and tariffs, comprehensible bills, dispute settlement mechanisms and guaranteed quality of production and supply standards. All this formed the basis in the drafting of the 16 regulations that guide the behavior of every stakeholder in the electricity and water sectors.