

Communication and Awareness Building for Consumer Category Solar Energy in Tamil Nadu

Strategic communication to meet Tamil Nadu's
Consumer Category solar energy target

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Consumer Category solar energy target**

Sustainable Energy Transformation Series

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As per the Tamil Nadu Solar Energy Policy 2019 the Tamil Nadu Energy Development Agency (TEDA) will play a pivotal role in the promotion of solar energy in the state in order to achieve the overall solar energy target for 9,000 MW by the year 2023 and in particular the sub-target of 3,600 MW for Consumer Category solar energy. Consumer Category solar energy is defined as solar energy with the primarily purpose of self-consumption and are typically behind-the-meter solar rooftop systems.

In this paper aims to review promotional activities conducted by TEDA in the past, to identify gaps and to explore possible means to take forward the communication and awareness creation strategy to accelerate Consumer Category solar energy deployment in Tamil Nadu. Strategic communication, targeted at each stakeholder group, has the potential to accelerate the deployment of Consumer Category solar energy in the State. A strategic communication plan based on an established methodology, like the IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum Methodology, can help connecting to the Consumer Category stakeholder through engaging and regular communication. By conducting a SWOT analysis, we identified areas TEDA's communication efforts may focus on. This, in combination with a stakeholder identification, paves way for setting communication goals and objectives and for determining the most appropriate communication channels. Based on the Public Participation Spectrum Methodology of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) , the following actions have been suggested; regular information sharing with consumers, conducting awareness campaigns, providing solar energy training programs, collaborating with banks and financing institutions, empowering local urban bodies and individual consumers to make informed decisions to transition to a solar energy future, and partnering with Civil Society organizations. These actions incorporate preferred target groups and media channels, estimated cost, suggested priority level and possible evaluation methodology for assessing its effectiveness. The adoption of these suggestions depend on the availability of resources, i.e. human as well as financial resources that affect TEDA determining the choice and mix of promotional campaigns. TEDA will make these decisions based on its own discretion.

TEDA has made attempts in the past to promote solar power through limited mediums. Taking advantage of the opportunities that have not been looked into, TEDA's activities can expand and create an impact through increase in reach to all stakeholders. There are myriad available communication channels today. Making informed, strategic choices in relation to communication channels that are most appropriate to the identified target audience will increase the reach of each communication effort and thereby help in achieving the State's Consumer Category solar energy target of 3,600 MW by 2023.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Tamil Nadu Energy Development Agency (TEDA) was established by the Tamil Nadu Government as a registered society in 1985 (TEDA, 2018a), with the objectives to:

1. To promote the use of new and renewable sources of energy (NRSE) and to implement projects thereof.
2. To promote energy conservation activities.
3. To encourage research and development on renewable sources of energy (TEDA, 2014) and (TEDA, 2018a).

TEDA serves as a State Nodal Agency to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE, 2020), to address the need for renewable energy and to reduce the dependence on fossil fuels (TEDA, 2018a). The Tamil Nadu Solar Energy Policy 2019 makes TEDA a key agency for the promotion of solar energy in the State. The Policy includes the following paragraphs under Sections 14 and 17 that are relevant in the context of communication and awareness creation and that define the role of TEDA. (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2019):

1. *State Government Departments and State Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) are encouraged to participate in annual solar energy and energy conservation training programs organized by TEDA and other agencies.*
2. *TEDA shall take the lead in launching this Solar Energy Policy using media, public relations, billboards, advertisements, websites, and more. It will also communicate amendments, if any, to this policy via its website and/or other means.*
3. *TEDA will lead a comprehensive information and awareness creation effort in order to promote solar energy in the State.*

4. *TEDA will provide project development and technical advice and assistance to implement solar energy projects.*
5. *TEDA will provide advisory and consulting services to corporations, municipalities and local urban bodies on financing instruments for solar energy projects.*
6. *TEDA will undertake periodical progress reviews of solar energy projects under development and facilitate speedy clearances and approvals if necessary.*
7. *TEDA shall notify and coordinate with the Directorate of Town and Country Planning to obtain necessary amendments in the building by laws, as outlined in this policy to facilitate extensive adoption of solar plants.*
8. *TEDA shall coordinate with State Government Departments and Public Sector Undertakings to facilitate extensive adaptation of solar energy plants as outlined in this policy.*

To meet the Consumer Category solar energy target of 3,600 MW by 2023, effective communication and engagement with all stakeholders will be required to address an overall lack of awareness about solar PV system. (WRI 2018). This report therefore aims at:

1. Review past and ongoing communication and awareness creation efforts by TEDA against its overall mission and its role as per Tamil Nadu Solar Energy Policy;
2. Identify new opportunities in a changing consumer culture with new media channels;
3. Scope-out a possible communication and awareness creation strategy to accelerate Consumer Category solar energy deployment in Tamil Nadu.

2. PAST PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

TEDA is the key public agency for the promotion of the Consumer Category solar energy in the State. TEDAs' promotional activities in the past included the use of both digital media and traditional media channels (Refer to Table 1). This chapter attempts a brief summary of TEDA's promotional activities for Consumer Category solar energy in the past.

Web



The most actively used medium to create public awareness and share critical information are its two websites: www.teda.in and www.tedaprojects.in/TEDA/. The teda.in website has a very good Google engine search ranking. It features a section for tender submissions, vendor enlisting, and a solar PV capacity determination tool for consumers. This tool allows consumers to understand project feasibility and helps them to take decisions on solar capacity required. According to the results displayed on a micro-site at tedaprojects.in 19,000 visitors have been browsing this website since 2017, the number of unique visitors was not available. Considering that Tamil Nadu has a population of 72 million, potential for more visitors is likely. It is unclear why two websites were developed as both sites have similar content, making it difficult for the user to navigate the sites and finding the desired contents.

Social Media Channels



TEDA has taken a reserved approach in using social media as a communication tool. It has a Facebook page, a Twitter account and a LinkedIn account. For all these social media platforms a total of only 5 posts

could be found, four of them on Twitter and one on Facebook. In 2018 for example TEDA took advantage of Facebook to bring awareness to a younger demographic – school and college students, by announcing a running event and a summer internship program. TEDA is on Twitter, although its latest posts date back to 2011. The tweets mainly promote the use of RE and invite viewers to participate in the green movement. Some posts by their collaborators and news channels credit them, raising a minimal awareness through that platform. The LinkedIn, page however does not show a single activity so far. As of June 2020 the TEDA Facebook account has 4 likes, its Twitter accounts has 101 followers and its LinkedIn page is currently an unclaimed page and therefore not active.

Traditional Media Channels



Advertisements and articles in newspapers by TEDA could be found for the year 2018, primarily announcing existing subsidy schemes for rooftop solar or an internship program.

Overall, the above communication attempts remained focused on few channels of communication. Regular promotional activities and awareness campaigns utilizing other options available from the large spectrum of marketing resources and media channels can be explored.

Table 1. TEDA's promotional activities by communication channel

Channels	Nos.	Details
Website	2 websites	1. www.teda.in 2. www.tedaprojects.in/TEDA/
Print Media	4 articles/ announcements	1. Rooftop Solar subsidy: http://teda.in/switch-to-rooftop-solar-30-central-govt-subsidy-per-installation/ 2. Solar Warriors Summer Internship program in 2018 (in Tamil): http://teda.in/solar-warriors-2/ 3. India's Green Power House voices Tamil Nadu's successful efforts and invites bids for RE projects (in Tamil and English): http://teda.in/indias-green-power-house/ 4. Rooftop Solar subsidy (in Tamil and English): http://teda.in/switch-to-rooftop-solar-today/
Social Media	5 posts 3 nos social media channels	1. Past promotions on Facebook (latest post 2018): https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Government-Organization/Tamilnadu-Energy-Development-Agency-922108677913851/ 2. Past posts on Twitter by TEDA (latest post 2011): https://twitter.com/GEV_TEDA?lang=en

Source:(TEDA, 2011), (TEDA, 2014), (TEDA, 2018a), (TEDA, 2018b), (TEDA, 2018c)

3. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION FOR CONSUMER CATEGORY SOLAR

A strategic and regular communication effort can substantially contribute in meeting the State's Consumer Category solar energy target by sharing appropriate information about ongoing solar energy schemes, available capital subsidy and environmental and economic benefits of solar energy. This chapter explores a possible macro-level communication strategy that, if adapted and modified to an evolving landscape, could contribute to an increase in installed solar energy capacity in Tamil Nadu.




Figure 1. Strategic communication process



3.1. Strategic framework

In order to meaningfully and sustainably connect to the key stakeholders for the Consumer Category solar, a strategic communication plan is recommended. The IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum Methodology provides one possible framework that can be adapted by TEDA. It has specifically been developed for government decision making. The methodology can be easily adapted for other contexts and a modified version has been produced for a research context. This methodology defines 5 distinct engagement strategies; inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower (refer to figure 2).

Figure 2. Stages of Communication with increasing impact on decision making process





	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
 Goal	To provide all stakeholders with objective information.	To obtain feedback from stakeholders on challenges faced by them and propose optimal solutions.	To work with stakeholders to understand their priorities.	To partner with the appropriate stakeholders throughout the decision-making process including development of alternatives and identifying preferred solutions.	To place decision making power in the hands of the stakeholders.
 Message	We will keep you informed.	We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns.	We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the decision making.	We will look to you for your expertise and advice, and incorporate it into our decisions as far as possible.	We will implement what you decide.
 Example	This can be achieved by being as inclusive as possible of all the entities that are related to the energy sector in some way or the other. Like through the TEDA website, social media platforms, emails, newspaper announcements etc.	This can be done through interviews, surveys and interactive workshops.	For this purpose, workshops and surveys can be used.	A step by step discussions and online forums for exchange of information can be very helpful.	By way of polling, open forums and discussions for suitable alternatives can help implement decisions that benefit all stakeholders.

Adapted from: IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum

3.2 SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis pertaining to the communication efforts made by TEDA was undertaken (refer to Table 3). Key strengths of TEDA are its central position as a nodal agency to MNRE in channeling subsidy for rooftop solar program, its strong network with the solar installation segment and the solar industry at large, its capacity to influence policy formulation, and its expertise to design solar programs for the public and the private sector, including educational institutions. Weaknesses identified are primarily the lack of leveraging on existing and new media channels, and a consistency in communication efforts. Opportunities are seen in unlocking new communication channels, collaborations with other organizations that share the same goal of increasing the installed capacity of Consumer Category solar in the state, and a rise in awareness among citizens about climate change. Threats are primarily seen in uncertainties about future solar energy policy formulations and solar market trends.

Table 2. SWOT Analysis for TEDA's communication efforts.

 Strengths	 Weaknesses	 Opportunities	 Threats
<p>Serves as a nodal agency to MNRE and channels Central Financial Assistance for solar energy and is therefore best equipped to make a significant impact in the Consumer Category solar.</p> <p>Wide recognition as a key agency that promotes solar energy in Tamil Nadu.</p> <p>Strong network with in solar industry, including the installation and manufacturing segment. Plays a central role in solar policy formulation and designing solar programs for public and private sector.</p> <p>Multiple communication tools established (offline and online) to engage a range of stakeholders.</p> <p>Track record in bi-lingual communication (Tamil and English).</p>	<p>Not having yet utilized the full potential of traditional and new media channels limits its communication reach.</p> <p>Lack of consistency in public awareness and promotional campaigns.</p> <p>Possibly missing a dedicated and professional communication team.</p> <p>Lack of market and consumer behavior research to inform policy making and development of solar programs.</p>	<p>Unexplored communication channels that can be taken advantage of.</p> <p>Collaboration with other stakeholders that share the same goal of accelerating Consumer Category solar in the State to find synergies and coordinate promotional activities.</p> <p>Collaboration with other stakeholders on R&D and market research to leverage these finding through strategic communication efforts.</p> <p>Rising awareness in the public about climate change related issues increase receptivity of a large consumer base to consider solar.</p> <p>Engage with Government Departments and Public Sector Organizations to advance Consumer Category solar.</p>	<p>Change in Government of Tamil Nadu priorities and solar energy policy that may affect Consumer Category solar.</p> <p>Changes in solar energy market trends.</p>

Source: Based on an analysis by Auroville Consulting

3.3 Set communication goals and objectives

For accelerating the deployment of Consumer Category solar energy, effective and efficient communication strategies that accompany solar energy schemes and program designs will be required. For TEDA's communication to be effective and efficient, goals and objectives are to be defined along with an action plan. Identifying key stakeholders for Consumer Category solar energy, stakeholder segmentation and involving these stakeholders is recommended.

TEDA has had a number of communication materials going out over the years through various media channels; steps such as streamlining the same and re-evaluating the overall communication goals and objectives can be helpful to improve the reach and effectiveness of its communication efforts. Below are suggested goals, objectives, stakeholder identification, media channels and communication actions. These may help address a diverse spectrum of stakeholders for the promotion of Consumer Category solar energy.

Goals

- Empower consumer to adopt Consumer Category solar;
- Ensure a wide spectrum of citizens are appropriately informed about solar energy;
- Involve a wide spectrum of citizens in developing a conducive environment for solar energy in the State.
- Make solar energy a citizen movement;

Objectives

The objectives maybe divided into internal objectives, i.e. operational objectives for the TEDA team, and external objectives, i.e. engagement objectives with stakeholders.

Internal objectives

- Develop a communication budget in collaboration with the communication and the finance team;
- Formulate and agree on the overall communication goals, objectives and the strategic framework;
- Define clear roles and responsibilities of communication team;
- Assessing current communication materials;
- Capacity building of TEDA's communication team;




External objectives

- Adapt a consumer centric communication strategy;
- Create an interactive system for stakeholders to exchange information and ideas, and to participate in discussions about Consumer Category solar energy;
- Develop an effective dissemination strategy with appropriate media channels and communication activities targeted specifically at each stakeholder group;

3.4 Stakeholder identification

The challenge faced by TEDA is to develop communication and promotional activities for a wide range of stakeholders which includes – ‘an individual, group, or organization, who may affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision, activity, or outcome of a Solar project’(TEDA, 2018a). The first step is to ensure that all stakeholders are being considered is to identify them, to understand their interests and influence, and to identify best suited communication channels to reach them. Listing stakeholders and defining their interests in and influence on the solar energy development provides clarity and helps in developing clear communication activities (refer to Table 4).

Table 3. Stakeholders’ interests and influence

 Stakeholder	 Interests	 Influence
Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Requires information about solar schemes, availability, capital subsidies, net metering application process.Reliable information sources for solar capacity sizing, technology options, vendor and installer options.Availability of assessing service quality of installers.Ease of receiving quotes from multiple installers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Public opinion may influence Government priorities and solar schemes in the State.Purchase decisions by consumers influence market trends.
Government departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Requires information about impact of solar programs, emerging technologies and new market design, and financing tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Formulates policies, solar programs, gives directives, provides subsidies and determines consumer electricity tariffs.
TANGEDCO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Requires information about impact of solar programs, emerging technologies and new market design, and financing tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Influences policy making.Key agency for net metering agreements.
Financial Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Requires information about market trends, technology reliability, policy landscape for risk assessment and loan product offering design.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Influences uptake of Consumer Category solar through availability and accessibility of attractive loan offerings
Educational institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Requires information about impact of solar programs, emerging technologies and new market design, and financing tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Shapes the mind-set of the next generation of leaders, thereby influences the long-term consumer culture.
Solar Industry (manufacturers, project developers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Requires information about solar schemes, public tenders, net metering application process etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The quality of services it provides is key in creating trust in Consumer Category solar systems.
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Requires information about solar schemes, availability, capital subsidies, and net metering application process.Uses information on achieved vs. set targets, success stories etc.Requires information about impact of solar programs, emerging technologies, new policies and regulations etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Contributes in shaping public opinion, there by influences Government decisions and consumer choices.
Civil Society organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Seeks information about policy, solar programs, and are interested in data for research and consumer engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Contribute to shaping public opinion and influence policy and solar program design.








3.5 Communication channels

The purpose for which publicity and advertising is required helps determine the target audience and the communication channels. Choosing the appropriate communication channels, based on how the target audience or stakeholders receive information, creates more impact. In context of Consumer Category solar energy, TEDA’s promotional activities may include inviting bidders or vendors, advertising solar skill development training programs, informing institutions about research grants, , creating awareness on the benefits of solar, and sharing information about ongoing solar schemes and success stories. TEDA is constantly interacting and partnering with stakeholders, thus using the communication channels that are suitable for each stakeholder can make these collaborations more engaging. Available communication channels for reaching out to the stakeholders include:

- Website/internet
- Social media channels
- Mass media channels
- Print media channels
- Other: (convening, round tables, campaigns, exhibitions etc.)

Table 4 below indicates which communication channels could be most appropriate for each of the identified stakeholder group.

Table 4. Communication channels by stakeholders

 Stakeholder	 Promotional Mediums
Consumers	<div>Website</div> <div>Social media</div> <div> Instagram for age group: 20 to 40</div> <div> Facebook for age group: 40 to 60</div> <div> LinkedIn for professionals in the solar industry.</div> <div> Twitter for age group:30 to 50</div> <div> YouTube for all age groups</div> <div>Mass media</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">SMS notificationsRadio & TVMass emails</div> <div>Print media</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Newspaper advertisements</div> <div>Other</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Events and exhibitionsCampaigns</div>
Government Departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">LettersDiscussion tables and face to face meetings
TANGEDCO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">LettersDiscussion tables and face to face meetings
Financial Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">LettersDiscussion tables and face to face meetings
Educational institutions and Civil Society organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">WebMass- emailsDiscussion tables and face to face meetingsExhibitionsCampaigns
Solar Industry (Manufacturers, project developers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Web (for tenders, projec management, announcements etc.)Mass-emailsDiscussion tables, face to face meetings
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Press releasesWeb
Civil Society organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Letters and emailsDiscussion rounds and face to face meetings

3.6 Communication activities

Below are some suggested communication activities that TEDA may consider taking up. The activities are listed along with referencing to the stage of communication as per the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum Methodology, preferred target group and media channels, estimated cost, suggested priority level and possible evaluation methodology for assessing its effectiveness.

Action 1

Establish regular information sharing with consumers

Introduce weekly information sharing on Consumer Category solar and related topics on social media channels such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram. This may include information about solar schemes and subsidies, updates on installed capacities, feature champions that recently installed rooftop solar, and acknowledgments on TEDA's and its staff achievements. Featured content may need to be designed slightly different for each social media channel.

IAP2 stage of communication: Inform

Target group: Consumers

Tools: Social Media channels (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter)

Cost: Low

Priority: High

Evaluation: Increase in followers, number of views, likes etc.

Action 2

TEDA field engineers to hold awareness campaigns

TEDA has field engineers employed in each district. This is a valuable resource that can be leveraged for communication efforts. Field engineers can be trained to give presentations at schools, housing societies or NGOs about the benefits of Consumer Category solar energy, existing solar schemes by TEDA, application processes for these schemes and interconnection processes. Additionally, TEDA field engineers may visit rooftop solar installation from past solar schemes and record interviews with the owners by mobile phones. These interviews can be features on the TEDA's social media channels.

IAP2 stage of communication: Inform and Consult

Target group: Consumers and educational institutions

Tools: Awareness campaigns

Cost: Low

Priority: Medium

Evaluation: Number of people reached/participated

Action 3

Solar energy training programs for State Government Departments

Organize annual solar energy and energy conservation training programs for State Government Departments and State Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). These programs can also be utilized to better understand how to facilitate Consumer Category solar energy programs for these entities and to involve these agencies to develop a solar energy strategy.

IAP2 stage of communication: Involve

Target group: State Government Departments and State Public Sector Undertakings

Tools: Training and focused group discussions

Cost: Low

Priority: Medium

Evaluation: Number of departments and organization represented

Action 4

Collaborate with Banks and financing institutions

Banking and financing institutions that currently provide loans for Consumer Category solar energy maybe invited for focused group discussions. The objective could be to explore how the available current loan offerings can be communicated to a wider audience, if the current offerings are adequate and whether these offers are accessible to the majority of the consumers.

Target group: Banks and financing institutions

Tools: Focused group discussions

Cost: Low

Priority: High

Evaluation: Number of organizations represented

Action 5

Empower local urban bodies to transit to a solar energy future

Coordinate with corporations, municipalities and local urban bodies to inform about the financial benefits of Consumer Category solar energy. These bodies can be engaged in developing implementation and financing instruments that empower them to transit towards solar energy.

IAP2 stage of communication: Empower

Target group: Corporations, municipalities and local urban bodies

Tools: Convenings and roundtable discussions

Cost: Low

Priority: High

Evaluation: Number of entities reached

Action 6

Empower consumers to make informed decisions for solar

Develop an web-based application that provides consumer with a one stop interface for: Calculating appropriate solar energy capacity, receive multiple quotations from solar installers and be able to make informed purchase decisions, schedule rooftop surveys with solar installers, rate and review the quality of services provided by installers, apply for capital subsidy schemes, get information about loan offerings by banks and commission for the installation of a solar system.

IAP2 stage of communication: Empower

Target group: Consumers

Tools: Web-platform

Cost: High

Priority: Medium

Evaluation: Number of orders, users

Action 7

Partner with Civil Society Organizations for public awareness creation

Develop a network with Civil Society organizations to raise public awareness of citizens on Consumer Category solar energy. Through these partnerships TEDA may gain access to community centers, self-help groups and cooperatives.

IAP2 stage of communication: Collaborate

Target group: Civil Society Organizations

Tools: Awareness campaigns, training and focused group discussions

Cost: Low

Priority: Medium

Evaluation: Number of attendees

Some of the suggested activities may be cost intensive, and the right budget for it to be effective may not always be available. Thus, TEDA may consider selecting the means according to the availability of physical resources, human resources and financial resources – the three key resources that determine the choice and mix of promotional campaigns.

3.7 Evaluation

Our world is constantly changing new technologies and communication means are emerging and may give way to new processes for engaging. Regular evaluation of the programs and means deployed will be put in place to ensure continuous learning process. It is recommended to have a monthly evaluation of the communication efforts and activities. All communication team members and external contributor may participate in the evaluation process. The following questions may be used as an evaluation template:

- Are we communicating as we should?
- Are we meeting our communication objectives?
- Are we communicating the right information? The information that our stakeholders need?
- Are we communicating in timely manner?
- How can we communicate more consistently in both forms (visual presentation) and substance (message)?

4. CONCLUSIONS

TEDA has made attempts in the past to promote solar power through limited mediums, but there are opportunities that are not yet explored, which have potential to increase the reach to all stakeholders. There is a diversity of available communication channels today. Choosing the communication channels that are most appropriate for the identified target audience will increase the reach of each communication effort and thereby help in achieving the State’s Consumer Category solar energy target of 3,600 MW by 2023.

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