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## Feature Story: 31 May 2012

### URA Launches its Public Education Program

Since early April, when the Utilities Regulatory Authority (URA) called on communities to invite us to talk about electricity and water services, our staff has held three sessions with various organisations in Port Vila.

The sessions are part of the Authority's Public Education Program (PEP), which aims to educate and inform the public and consumers on a range of issues related to electricity and water supply services in Vanuatu.

The program also allows people to ask us questions and learn more about the Authority's work. All the presentations and the conversations that follow are in Bislama.

Soon after our invitation was published in the newspaper, the staff from VIPA, Irririki Resort and Youth Challenge International invited us to talk to their group. We held three separate sessions during April and May 2012 at the venues provided by the inviting parties.

During these sessions, the presenters focused on educating and informing the participants about their monthly electricity bill, and the related issues such as the billing cycle and the tariff. Other topics will be presented as well in the future, based on what participants asked for in the evaluation form they filled at the end of each session.

The sessions turned out to be an excellent opportunity to share the Authority's knowledge, but we also learnt a lot from the conversation with the participants.

Despite the fact that Ni-Vanuatu have been consuming electricity and paying their bills for many years, the Authority discovered that many consumers did not actually know what they were paying for.

Some of the attendees did not know what an electricity bill looked like because they share meters and pay a fixed monthly charge to their landlord for their electricity consumption.

Participants at all the PEP sessions were reminded that the more electricity they consumed, the bigger their electricity bill. Every time you switch on a light, use an appliance or charge your mobile phone, you consume electricity that you have to pay for.

Customers can manage their electricity costs by monitoring their consumption through the meter. By identifying their monthly energy consumption on their electricity bill and noting down their daily

consumption from their meter, customers can better understand their consumption behaviour. This then gives them the opportunity to control their electricity consumption and monthly bill.

As we anticipated, high electricity costs in Vanuatu was a common issue raised in all three sessions. The presenters explained to the participants that the Authority was responsible for setting the maximum price for electricity.

When setting the maximum price, the Authority ensures that the price is affordable to consumers but at a level that can sustain the operation of the electricity utilities. It also has to take into consideration the laws of the country and the Vanuatu Government's energy strategy.

The presenters also emphasised that most of the electricity in Vanuatu is produced by diesel generation. Diesel contributes to over 50% of the overall cost to produce electricity. Therefore, electricity price mainly depends on the world market price of diesel, which we do not have any control over.

Towards the end of each session, participants were introduced to the customer issues resolution process that is currently being implemented by the Authority. Some participants approached us afterwards with specific issues related to their electricity accounts. We were happy to assist them and direct them in the path to resolving their issues with the utilities.

The Authority is hoping to organize more PEP sessions in Port Vila, Luganville, Malekula and Tanna. Interested parties or communities can contact the URA on (678) 23335, by email to [rmarum@ura.gov.vu](mailto:rmarum@ura.gov.vu), or in person at the office of the Utilities Regulatory Authority ground floor VNPF Building Port Vila.

**Written by Romney Marum  
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### **About the Utilities Regulatory Authority**

The URA was set up under the *Utilities Regulatory Authority Act No. 11 of 2007*. The Authority acts independently of the Government and its primary purpose is to increase access to safe, reliable and affordable electricity and water services, and to protect the long-term interests of consumers throughout Vanuatu. In the electricity sector, the Authority monitors the concessions operated by UNELCO in Malekula, Port Vila and Tanna; and Vanuatu Utilities and Infrastructure Ltd (VUI) in Luganville. In addition, the Authority manages consumer disputes and advises the Government on matters related to electricity and water. It also reviews tariffs under the rules of the Concessions Agreements and relevant legislation.

### **Contact Information**

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