



How to achieve 24x7 power for all

Posted at: 03/04/2019

Three steps to help rural India overcome electricity poverty and reap immense socio-economic benefits

- Almost every willing household in India now has a legitimate electricity connection.
- The household electrification scheme, Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana, or Saubhagya, has been implemented at an unprecedented pace.
- More than 45,000 households were electrified every day over the last 18 months.
- The efforts under Saubhagya have come upon decades of hard work preceding it.
- The enactment of the Electricity Act, in 2003, and the introduction of the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana, in 2005, expanded electrification infrastructure to most villages in the following decade.
- But the rollout of the Saubhagya scheme, in 2017, gave the required impetus to electrify each willing household in the country.
- However, over the last year, several engineers and managing directors in electricity distribution companies (discoms), their contractors, State- and Central-level bureaucrats, and possibly energy ministers have been working at fever pitch.
- Discom engineers have evolved in their attitude, as we saw during our on-ground research — from one of scepticism to that of determination.
- Their efforts to meet targets even included crossing streams in Bihar on foot with electricity poles, and reaching far-flung areas in Manipur, through Myanmar, to electrify remote habitations with solar home systems.

Beyond connections

- Despite such massive efforts, the battle against electricity poverty is

far from won.

- The erection of electricity poles and an extension of wires do not necessarily mean uninterrupted power flow to households.
- By tracking more than 9,000 rural households, since 2015, across six major States (Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal), the Access to Clean Cooking Energy and Electricity Survey of States (ACCESS) report by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), has highlighted the gap between a connection and reliable power supply.

Vital steps forward

- In order to achieve 24x7 power for all, we need to focus on three frontiers.
- First, India needs real-time monitoring of supply at the end-user level.
- Second, discoms need to focus on improving the quality of supply as well as maintenance services.
- Finally, the improvement in supply should be complemented with a significant improvement in customer service, which includes billing, metering and collection.
- Electricity is the driver for India's development. As we focus on granular monitoring, high-quality supply, better customer service and greater revenue realisation at the household level, we also need to prioritise electricity access for livelihoods and community services such as education and health care.
- Only such a comprehensive effort will ensure that rural India reaps the socio-economic benefits of electricity.

The Hindu

