

Culture of energy evaluation 'missing' in India

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India is committed to electrifying 40 million homes this year to attain the goal of delivering electric power to all of its 1.3 billion people. It also has plans to install 75 gigawatts of renewable energy as part of

commitments made under the Paris Agreements.

But there's a missing link to these ambitious pledges that could help bring about a just [energy transition](#). India, like many other developing countries in the Asia Pacific region, lacks an effective [energy](#) evaluation program, say experts.

At a webinar organized 29 June by Energy Evaluation Asia Pacific (EEAP) experts identified challenges to mainstreaming energy evaluation in this vast and diverse country and offered suggestions on how to overcome them.

Vibhuti Garg, India lead at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, pointed to how India's much-vaunted plan to provide clean cooking fuels to households went awry due to poor targeting. Relatively richer sections of the population cornered the subsidies with the intended beneficiaries burning biomass along with cleaner fuels, according to studies, she said.

India is not devoid of agencies that carry out energy evaluation and these include the Comptroller and Auditor General's office, which audits government receipts and expenditure, said Aditya Chunekar, fellow at Prayas, the Pune-based energy group that promotes public awareness around [energy projects](#). Customers and consumers need to understand how programs and projects are doing and how different socioeconomic groups are impacted by them, he said.

In 2001, India set up a Bureau of Energy Efficiency which was mandated to develop energy efficiency policies and strategies. But the Bureau has been criticized for being ineffective in such areas as remedying massive losses of electricity at the supply end, attributed to powerful players in the system.

Chunkekar pointed to the practice of projects being evaluated by consultants on terms of reference which worked to limit their independence. Evaluations made are often filed away with no attempts made to refer to them when it comes to new projects, he said, adding that there were often no provisions for mid-term corrections.

"For evaluation to be seen as credible, evaluators need to be independent of the agency implementing the energy programs and policies," said the webinar's moderator Edward Vine, energy efficiency scientist and affiliate at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, US.

Similarly, said Vine, evaluators need to be involved in discussions with stakeholders—such as states, unions and industries—as part of a feedback loop to gain their trust and to inform "influencers" at the community level about the impacts of programs and policies at different levels.

According to Vine, EEAP could play a critical role in the evaluation of energy policies and programs in India, including through webinars to help develop and promote a culture of evaluation. "EEAP could compile and distribute [best practices](#) on evaluation and help disseminate this information to all stakeholders," he told SciDev.Net.

"In summary, evaluators in India will need to work with government at all levels to accept evaluation outcomes and the lessons learned so that better programs and policies can be adopted."

Provided by SciDev.Net

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