

ExpertSpeak

Getting it Right about Green Energy

Udai S. Mehta Associate Director, CUTS and **Gaurav Shukla**, Research Assistant, CUTS write on the importance of adapting to renewable energy. They also highlight the findings of a survey by their organisation on the awareness of clean energy in India

The renewable energy industry in India is evolving fast as globally high crude oil prices and dwindling domestic coal and gas resources have brought the issue of energy security under focus.

As the scope of clean and 'green' energy is expanding, certain mistaken notions linked to renewable energy are becoming clearer. A recent survey conducted by CUTS International as part of an on-going project, Demand Side Management & Renewable Energy in India: Capacity building of CSOs, which was implemented in West Bengal and Gujarat, has revealed encouraging results. More than 680 consumers out of 1,000 respondents expressed their willingness to shift to renewable energy sources and were ready to pay an extra amount up to five to ten percent, if provided with uninterrupted and reliable electricity supply. This was a significant finding, as it is a popular misconception that Indian electricity consumers are cost sensitive and not willing to pay extra for improved services.

The willingness to pay is linked to the level of awareness, which was quite impressive. More than 90 percent respondents have heard of renewable energy or clean energy. Out of this 90 percent, close to 100 to 94 percent of the respondents, respectively in Gujarat and West Bengal, were aware of solar

energy. The awareness on wind and hydro energy was less compared to solar energy, that showed a distributive pattern of renewable energy resources. Gujarat has more potential than West Bengal for wind energy; therefore, awareness level in Gujarat was 18 percent more than West Bengal. Similarly, awareness of hydro energy in West Bengal was 38 percent more than the awareness level of Gujarat. The survey strengthens the argument that solar energy has become a synonym of renewable energy and thus, there is a need to create more awareness about other sources of renewable energy.

Further, the issue of climate change has become quite important and the CUTS survey revealed high awareness among the respondents on climate change. It is interesting to note that while the media, academia, etc. are trying to challenge and debate the validity and implications of climate change, 85-90 percent respondents in both the states accepted that climate change is happening and that it will affect the evolution of future generations. 79 and 64 percent in Gujarat and West Bengal respectively, considered it as the most important issue compared to other contemporary issues which the world is facing today.

Thus, it is quite evident from the survey findings that majority of the respondents were aware of issues such as climate change, renewable energy, etc. Despite high level of awareness regarding renewable energy amongst people, why are renewable energy and energy efficiency not getting the expected growth so far in India?

It has been observed that there is a wide gap between awareness and



Udai S. Mehta speaks on...

practice across all the stakeholder categories. Policies and regulations are being framed without any inputs from the consumers. There seems to be a general lack of motivation among consumers to adopt RE and EE. EE tends to cost a fraction as compared to setting up of new power plants, but unless proper incentives and market mechanisms are put in place, it would be difficult to expect majority of the consumers to adopt RE and EE.

The survey clearly indicates that though India has made impressive strides in generating awareness and perception towards clean energy, the real challenge lies in maintaining this momentum and concentrate on deployment in the years to come.

Civil society organisations could play a vital role in the transition towards sustainable energy. They can ensure that regulators take steps to implement ambitious clean energy programmes and ensure transparent and socially beneficial clean energy development in India. ■