

Electricity Act (Amendment) Bill 2020 *What's in it for consumers?*

CUTS International organised a webinar “Electricity Act (Amendment) Bill 2020: What’s in it for consumers?” on June 04, 2020, which saw the participation of over 100 people from diverse backgrounds and eminent experts.

In his special remarks, Suresh Prabhu, Former Union Power Minister, highlighted that centralisation would be a good idea for the states themselves, as a more commercially viable sector would lead to more availability of power for consumers, and in turn, greater benefits for states.

The session was chaired by Geeta Gouri, Former Member, Competition Commission of India, who while optimistic about the proposed amendments, stressed on the centralisation of power being proposed in the amendments and the implications of a sector which was set to be a nexus of contracts.

Gireesh B Pradhan, Former Chairperson, Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC), remarked that ‘the way to purgatory is good intention’. However, he questioned the need for a contract enforcement agency, an additional regulatory authority, in a sector which already has existing central and state authorities having overlapping powers.

Shantanu Dixit, Group Coordinator, Prayas Energy Group, put forth the consumer perspective. While he stressed on the need for such amendments he highlighted they are piecemeal in their approach and require a long term perspective. He acknowledged the need for the introduction of subsidies and direct benefit transfers but stressed on the need for effective implementation for their actual realisation.

Ashok Pendse, an eminent Consumer Advocate from Maharashtra, highlighted the example of the state in the context of consumer empowerment in the power sector. He compared private and state utilities and expressed the ambiguity in the concept of ‘privatisation’. He further emphasised that at the end of the day, effective implementation depends on the overall functioning of a utility, irrespective of its characteristics

Ajay Vir Jakhar, Chairman, Bharat Krishak Samaj, put forward the farmers’ perspective and remarked that the cross-subsidisation of farmers at the expense of industries often becomes reflected as an unfair move. He stressed on the need for hyper-localisation of subsidies to improve their efficiencies. He concluded by highlighting the alarming implication of power subsidies on depleting water resources, especially in the context of Punjab.

Ashwini K Swain, Fellow, Centre for Policy Research focussed on the aspect of renewables and advocated for the need of a larger discourse on energy rather than stressing on solar energy and hydro-power. He further questioned the need for multiple policies on renewable energy.

The webinar was concluded by Bipul Chatterjee, Executive Director, CUTS International, who summarised the critical insights that were brought forth by the panel and added another dimension to the sectoral reforms from a business perspective. He highlighted the implication of power costs on the business competitiveness of industries and the need for reforms in that context.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iu4IY53I5Y&t=628s>

Evolving Ecosystem for AI: *Implications for Consumers*

CUTS International organised a webinar on 'Evolving Ecosystem for Artificial Intelligence (AI): Implications for Consumers' on May 15, 2020, which saw a participation of more than 80 participants from different stakeholder groups who were informed by a rich discussion.

The session commenced with opening remarks from Udai S. Mehta, Deputy Executive Director, CUTS International which was followed by a discussion amongst esteemed speakers, Gopal Krishna Agarwal, National Spokesperson, Economic Affairs, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); Amar Patnaik, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha; Gaurav Gogoi, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha; Pradeep S. Mehta Secretary General, CUTS International, moderated by Amol Kulkarni, Director of Research, CUTS International.

The discussion shed light on critical issues around the requirement of consumer centricity in developing an ecosystem for AI. For this, it was emphasised that there is a need for building consumer trust in AI by offering appropriate grievance redress avenues, and also protecting them from

deep fakes, smart spying, privacy violations, among other risks.

The speakers pressed on the need for adequate attention on issues around data anonymisation, data localisation, data ownership, the role of Data Protection Authority under the Personal Data Protection Bill 2019 and revisiting the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy.

It was also highlighted in the discussion that there is a need to build an innovative ecosystem for the evolution of efficient AI, need for nurturing domestic talent, and framing regulations keeping in mind the interests of domestic entrepreneurs, particularly in the IT/ITES sector. For that to happen involvement key stakeholders such as civil society, industry, relevant regulators and government are necessary.

The webinar highlighted the need for evidence-based regulation by employing tools, such as Regulatory Impact Assessment, for balancing the interest of all stakeholders in India's AI ecosystem.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUIH6M2Ex2k&feature=youtu.be>

COVID-19 and Textiles & Clothing Sector in India

On the occasion of the International Labour Day (1st May), CUTS International launched a report on the conditions of labour in India, with insights from jobs in the Textiles and Clothing (T&C) sector. It was a part of its on-going project on 'Strengthening the Discourse on Good and Better Jobs in India', supported by the Ford Foundation.

The report was launched through a Webinar on 'COVID-19 and Textiles & Clothing Sector in India', where eminent speakers from the industry, academia and research organisations deliberated on the challenges being faced by workers and enterprises in the T&C sector and the way forward, in a post-pandemic economy. More than 50 stakeholders participated in it.

The underlying idea of the webinar was to discuss and discern structural issues faced by the T&C sector in India.

The discussion focussed on the following major points:

- Present status of jobs in different components of the T&C value chains in India
- Possibilities of ensuring the sustainability of enterprises with adequate wages and social security for workers

- Way forward for the economic resilience of enterprises and socio-economic resilience of workers post COVID-19 pandemic

The webinar highlighted the need for a better-informed discourse on the well-being of labour as well as enterprise through directed measures to mitigate supply-side distortions, including those related to higher wages, improved social security and skill-based employment generation, amongst others. It also stressed the need to view labour as human capital.

In his concluding remarks, Pradeep S Mehta informed the participants that as a part of this project CUTS International has also undertaken extensive field research on labour and enterprise welfare aspects of the food processing sector in India. It will be followed by similar work in construction and gig economy sectors.

<https://cuts-ccier.org/pdf/flyer-webinar-covid-19-and-textiles-and-apparel-sector-in-india-may-01-2020.pdf>



Advocacy

CUTS Comments on Strategy for National Open Digital Ecosystems

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) had released a 'Consultation White Paper' on the 'Strategy for National Open Digital Ecosystems' (NODE). CUTS International submitted its response to the questions posed in the paper.

NODE proposes to build a platform for collection and sharing of data from the Central and state governments and private players in an interoperable manner for building better public service delivery and fostering innovation with the available data. To this, CUTS responded by highlighting the need to take a top-down approach for implementation and enforcing such platform on users, without which the purpose of achieving scale will be futile and counterproductive. Citizens, users, and other stakeholders should be involved from the beginning in the development of such platforms.

In addition to generating awareness and building their capacity, there are concerns about product design, user-friendliness which must be taken into account and the users must be able to customise the platforms as per their needs and convenience for use without any external support.

CUTS also cautioned on the risk of centralisation of NODE, which can lead to concentration of powers and lack of accountability and emphasised on the need to promote decentralisation, for enabling innovation, competition, partnership and user-friendliness. Additionally, the comments also highlighted the challenges to be addressed in building NODE such as skill development, improving quality of data, cybersecurity, existing infrastructure and connectivity limitation.

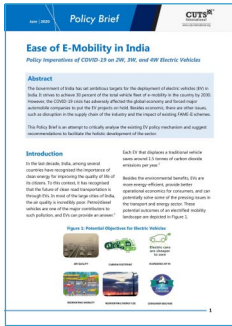
Furthermore, CUTS recommended achieving end-user adoption through handholding for last-mile and inexperienced users, raising awareness, on-boarding and feedback mechanism.

<https://cuts-ccier.org/pdf/submission-to-ministry-of-electronics-and-information-technology-on-strategy-for-national-open-digital-ecosystems.pdf>



Publications

Ease of E-Mobility in India *Policy Imperatives of COVID-19 on 2W, 3W, and 4W Electric Vehicles*



India's transition to electric mobility has the potential to not only reduce oil imports, address air pollution, and help meet India's climate commitments but can also spur the growth of new industries and job opportunities. To this end, the Indian government has launched the FAME schemes under the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan, for the deployment of electric vehicles (EV) in India. However, in the wake of COVID-19 crisis, there are various issues and challenges that the sector faces.

This Policy Brief is an attempt to critically analyse the existing EV policy mechanism and suggest recommendations to facilitate the holistic development of the sector. It assesses key challenges such as the global disruption in the supply chain, dynamic Consumer behaviour, lack of optimal charging infrastructure and the existing FAME-II scheme.

<https://cuts-ccier.org/pdf/policy-brief-ease-of-e-mobility-in-india.pdf>

Fintech: A way Forward for Inclusive Financial Growth



This policy brief sheds light on the optimum and ethical use of technology solutions for greater digital financial inclusion. In this regard, it assesses the key challenges such as constraints to adoption of digital financial tools, privacy and data protection issues concerning sensitive financial data and increase in online fraudulent practices along with lack of adequate consumer redress mechanisms in this sector.

For addressing these challenges the brief gives recommendations to increase digital financial literacy, adopting transparency and accountability measures in 'fintech' applications for privacy protection and to build stronger frameworks for consumers

which are more cost effective and user friendly.

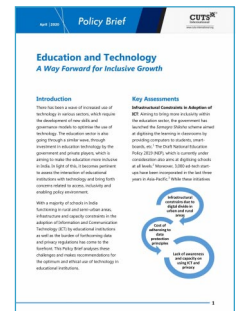
<https://cuts-ccier.org/pdf/policy-brief-fintech.pdf>

Education and Technology: A Way Forward for Inclusive Growth

This policy brief sheds light on the optimum and ethical use of technology in educational institutions. It assesses key challenges such as constraints to adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools in the education sector, transition cost of adopting data protection principles for educational institutions and lack of awareness and capacity for using technology in the education sector.

For addressing these challenges the brief gives recommendations to increase infrastructural capacities of educational institutions, to revise the draft National Education Policy to bring in more inclusivity and to build capacity and awareness for adopting education technology tools with the help of civil society organisations.

<https://cuts-ccier.org/pdf/policy-brief-on-education-and-technology-way-forward-for-inclusive-growth.pdf>

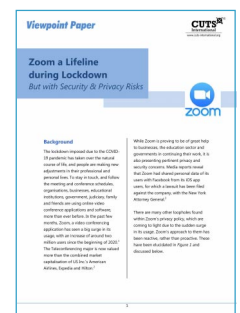


Zoom a Lifeline during Lockdown But with Security & Privacy Risks

The paper highlights the problems of 'Zoombombing', lacunae with data collection and sharing protocols within Zoom's privacy policy, and risk of information intercept without end to end encryption.

Considering these risks and the utility of Zoom in the current times, the paper gives practical recommendations for participants and hosts of the meetings to utilize Zoom's features in a way that these risks are minimized. It also suggests Zoom to revamp its privacy policy and incorporate additional features to make Zoom's experience more user and privacy friendly.

https://cuts-ccier.org/pdf/ViewPointPaper-Zoom_a_Lifeline_during_Lockdown_But_with_Security_and_Privacy_Risks.pdf





Representations

- Shubhangi Heda attended the webinar on 'Post COVID-19 Digital Order', organised by Observer Research Foundation on June 11, 2020.
 - Prashant Tak attended a webinar on 'The Future of Work in India' organised by UK India Business Council on June, 03, 2020. The purpose of the webinar was to gauge the impact of COVID-19 on India's skill landscape and discuss the focal points of skill development in the post-COVID-19 scenario.
 - Ujjwal Kumar attended a webinar on Competition Law and Blockchain organised by the Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (School of Competition Law & Market Regulation) on June 03, 2020.
 - Udai S Mehta and Ujjwal Kumar participated in a webinar on Competition Law and Policy During and in the Aftermath of COVID-19 organised by the Istanbul Competition Forum on June 02, 2020.
 - Ujjwal Kumar was one of the resource persons for a five-day online certificate course on 'Consumer Law' during May 27-31, 2020, organised by Chair on Consumer Law at National Law University Delhi, established by Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, India. He spoke in a session on '*Contemporary Regulatory and Consumer Concerns in E-Commerce in India*'.
 - Aman Raj participated in the webinar on 'Proposed Electricity Act Amendment 2020' by SunSource Energy. The webinar focused on the market felicitation through the tariff framework focusing on tariff rationalisation, consumer interest and energy.
 - Ujjwal Kumar attended a webinar 'With 5G here now, what's next for the Internet of Things?' organised by Qualcomm on May 12, 2020.
 - Ananya Saroha participated in the webinar 'Market Definition in Digital Market' organised by IFIM Business School at Vijaybhoomi University on May 07, 2020.
 - Udai S Mehta participated in the webinar "COVID- 19: Leveraging the gig economy" organised by Ola Mobility Institute on April 30, 2020. He participated in the panel presenting the consumer's perspective.
 - Udai S Mehta and Ananya Saroha attended the Global Member Connect Series organised by Consumers International on April 28, 2020.
- The purpose of the call was to discuss the impact of COP 26 on energy systems which was scheduled to happen in November 2020 on consumers and how the consumers assess to energy is impacted by COVID-19.
- Prashant Tak attended a webinar on 'Migrant Workers in COVID-19 Times' organised by India Greens Party on April 25, 2020.
 - Aman Raj participated in the webinar on Recharging India's Electric Mobility Ambition One year into the FAME-II Scheme organised by Auto tech Review on April 23, 2020.
 - Anurag Mishra, Sarthak Shukla, Trinayani Sen, Aman Raj and Ananya Saroha attended the full day E-conference on 'Clean Energy and Clean Transportation on the Earth day' organised by India Energy Storage Alliance and Emerging Technology News on April 22, 2020.
 - Kapil Gupta and Sumanta Biswas participated in a webinar on 'Cyber Threats and Frauds during Work from Home' organised by Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), Rajasthan State Council on April 17, 2020.
 - Trinayani Sen and Aman Raj attended a webinar on 'EV Leaders Big Talk: LongTerm Success or Permanent Blow' organised by EMobility+ on April 17, 2020. The objective of the webinar was to discuss the future of the electric mobility industry in a post-COVID-19 scenario.
 - Aman Raj participated in the webinar: Responding to a Health Crisis using a Public Health Approach: A COVID-19 Case Study organised by ILSS Online on April 11, 2020.
 - Sarthak Shukla and Trinayani Sen attended a webinar on 'Impact of COVID-19 on Distributed Renewables' organised by Bridge to India and WWF India on April 09, 2020. The objective of the webinar was to discuss the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on the different components of the distributed renewables value chain.



Advocacy through Media

Avoid fragmentation of 5G technology standards while bridging the digital divide

Economic Times, June 10, 2020

By Pradeep S Mehta

It is important to support the TSDSI in its endeavour of innovation for bridging the digital divide. However, it is imperative that its technology is harmonised with global technology standards, else it runs the risk of doing more harm than good, with respect to 5G in India.

<https://cuts-ccier.org/avoid-fragmentation-of-5g-technology-standards-while-bridging-the-digital-divide/>

Consumers trust is the key to adoption of artificial intelligence

Economic Times, June 01, 2020

By Amar Patnaik and Udai S Mehta

Artificial Intelligence (AI), believed to be the most important innovation after electricity, is an integral part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). While the global AI market rose by 154% in 2019, it is predicted that 80% of emerging technologies will be based on AI by 2021.

<https://cuts-ccier.org/consumers-trust-is-the-key-to-adoption-of-artificial-intelligence/>

A tale of disconnected dots: The regulatory algorithm behind Electricity Amendment Bill 2020

Economic Times, May 24, 2020

By Pradeep S Mehta and Sarthak Shukla

The Ministry of Power recently floated an amended version of the Electricity Act, after consecutive unsuccessful attempts to introduce changes in 2014 and 2018. Hailed as sweeping structural reforms by many, the proposed amendments have recently been subject to resistance by many states, including opposition by Tamil Nadu, Telangana and even Bihar, an ally of the Central Government.

<https://cuts-ccier.org/a-tale-of-disconnected-dots-the-regulatory-algorithm-behind-electricity-amendment-bill-2020/>

Close Regulatory Cooperation Will Be Needed For Proper Scrutiny of the Jio-Facebook Deal

The Wire, May 20, 2020

By Pradeep S. Mehta & Udai S. Mehta

When PM Narendra Modi declared a 21-day national lockdown from March 25, and later extended it till May 3, he forgot to mention that India's infamous regulatory quagmire was immune to it, and actually acts as sand in the wheels of economic progress.

<https://cuts-ccier.org/close-regulatory-cooperation-will-be-needed-for-proper-scrutiny-of-the-jio-facebook-deal/>

COVID-19: Should Competition Law Enforcement For Some Sectors Be Temporarily Suspended in India?

The Wire, April 16, 2020

By Pradeep S. Mehta and Udai S. Mehta

Over the past few weeks, the coronavirus has grown from being just a problem for China to a global one, hitting the prevailing global supply chains very hard and causing major economic disruptions amidst an uncertain future. This provides the perfect opportunity for India to take stock of how to proceed with economic governance so as to ensure ease of running business and maintenance of existing jobs.

<https://cuts-ccier.org/covid-19-should-competition-law-enforcement-for-some-sectors-be-temporarily-suspended-in-india/>