



Vibrant India

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Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

A Step Forward in the Direction of Achieving Energy Security and Gender Security

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) is one of the flagship schemes of Modi Government. Under this scheme, the government has pledged to provide five crore Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) connections to the families living Below Poverty Line (BPL). These connections would be given only in the names of women heads of the families that do not have LPG. The scheme is mainly targeting the rural areas, where LPG penetration is still minimal.



The scheme simultaneously addresses number of concerns of the Indian society. This article is an attempt at explaining the significance of the Ujjwala Yojana in the context of contemporary India.

Setting the Ground for the Launch of PMUY

PMUY is one of the steps in the direction of expansion of LPG network in India. Prime Minister Modi has expressed serious concerns about the low penetration of LPG connections in rural areas, and has come up with several initiatives in this direction. One needs to study the PAHAL Yojana and “Give-it-up!” campaign before looking at the PMUY.

Under the Pratyaksh Hanstantarit Labh (PAHAL) Scheme, also known as Direct Benefit Transfer of LPG (DBTL), the LPG subsidy is directly transferred to consumer’s bank account. This scheme was launched in 2013 by the UPA government; but had limited outreach at that time. The PAHAL Scheme was reviewed, modified and re-launched by the NDA Government in November 2014. By curbing the role of middlemen in distributing gas subsidy, the scheme has



put effective control on corruption in the LPG transactions. According to Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas's website, there are 17.36 crore beneficiaries of this scheme, and cash given through this scheme is Rs. 45841.35 crore.

In addition to PAHAL, Prime Minister Modi launched 'Give-it-up' campaign, and appealed the affluent families to voluntarily give up their gas subsidies. The money saved through this campaign was to be used for providing gas connections to the poor. This appeal became very popular in a very short span. Responding to PM's appeal, more than 1.05 crore families have voluntarily given up their gas subsidies, saving up to Rs. 5000 crore. Considerable success of PAHAL and 'Give-it-up' prepared the ground for launching of the PMUY.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

PMUY was launched on 1 May 2015 in Balliya District of Uttar Pradesh. This district was selected for the launch, because district's gas penetration was one of the lowest in country. Till the launching of the scheme, only 8% of the BPL families in Balliya had LPG connections. Prime Minister kicked off the scheme by handing over the gas connections to ten BPL women from Balliya.

Under Ujjwala Yojana, Government has announced that it will provide five crore gas connections in three years, with the budget estimation of Rs. 8000 crores. The Union Budget of 2016-17 allotted Rs.2000 crores for providing gas connections to 1.5 crore families. The threshold of 1.5 crore LPG connections for the current financial year has already been achieved. Government is also giving financial assistance of Rs. 1600 to each family. However, expenses for the stove and refills have to be bore by the households.

According to initial estimation, five crore gas connections will positively affect about 25 crore people. For successful implementation of the scheme, LPG supply chains are developed in collaboration with the State gas agencies. Through these supply chains, approximately 1 lakh jobs can be generated, mostly in the rural areas. It is likely to provide business opportunity of approximately Rs.10000 crore and boost the Make in India campaign.

Union Government is implementing this scheme in coordination with the respective State Governments, which are identifying the beneficiaries with preference given to the SC/ST and other weaker sections of the society.



The states with lower gas penetration are chosen by the Government for this purpose. Till date, 1.5 crore BPL families from eleven states and 645 districts have benefitted under this scheme. Largest number of connections (34 lakh till November 2016) are allotted in the State of Uttar Pradesh.

PMUY is the first large-scale welfare scheme that is implemented by the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. This ministry, which was criticized to be elitist and pro-industry till 2014, has shown great enthusiasm and efficiency in implementing PMUY. This is the striking feature of the Modi Government that it has allotted at least one welfare scheme to each major Ministry, for the purpose of upliftment of poor and the deprived.

Impact of PMUY

India is home to approximately 24 crore households, out of them 10 crore are still deprived of LPG. They use traditional cooking techniques like burning of wood or animal dungs, kerosene or coal. These methods cause indoor air pollution, and are hazardous to health. Studies reveal that open wood fire in the kitchen is almost as poisonous as smoking 400 cigarettes in an hour. It leads to diseases like lung cancer, heart trouble and respiratory disorders. World Health Organization has reported that unclean cooking fuels lead to about five lakh premature deaths in India per year.

Gas is one of the best cooking fuels. Apart from being less hazardous and less polluting, it assures control, reliability and precision in cooking. It is safe and comfortable, because it is easy to switch on and off, and temperature can be adjusted simply by moving the knob. For this reason, Government of India has pledged for providing LPG connections to all Indian households by 2020.

Apart from protecting the health of women and children in villages, PMUY will also save women from lightening Chulhas, searching for wood, or making cow dungs. The valuable time and energy can be invested in other constructive work. Moreover, since the connections are given in the name of women, gas subsidy will also be transferred in their bank accounts. Therefore, this scheme is going to empower women from rural India.



Conclusion

PMUY should be considered as a path-breaking initiative by Indian government, as it simultaneously addresses number of issues and concerns. Firstly, it shall assure energy security to a large number of rural households. The government is pledged to provide steady and affordable supply of LPG to each Indian household. For this purpose, India is trying to expand and diversify the imports of gas, through trans-national pipelines and LNG. Secondly, increased use of cooking gas would lead to less indoor pollution, and less health hazards to rural women and children. Lastly, connections delivered in the names of women and direct cash transfer of subsidy in their bank accounts shall empower women. With easy cooking methods, rural women can progress in other walks of life; thus, addressing the aspect of gender security.



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