

Town Hall

Making the Energy Transition a Poll Topic

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Hyatt Regency, New Delhi

As the largest democracy in the world, the process of India choosing her political representatives, be it for the national or the state assemblies, is undeniably fascinating, and arguably one of the predominant drivers of political will (or lack thereof). The voter's choice of party and person for public office is predicated on their assessment of who will pursue the policies that will result in the betterment of their lives. Given the many competing issues that voters identify as critical, there is limited focus being directed toward the energy transition as a means of improving quality of life. This is because concern about sustainability and climate change is often perceived to be an expensive prerogative of the elite. The truth about the energy transition, however, is vastly different.

The absence of a compelling and coherent narrative about the energy transition, the lack of awareness about how it affects all sections of society, coupled with several half-truths has made policy action on the energy transition a hard sell for the electorate. Despite this, India continues to display leadership at the global stage on utility-scale renewable energy, renewable energy applications for consumptive and productive uses, and on addressing widespread energy poverty by advancing access to electricity and clean cooking fuel at affordable prices. We are also at the precipice of replicating the scale and ambition displayed in the renewable energy sector in the electric mobility, residential rooftop, and energy storage markets. However, **creating depth in these consumer demand-driven markets will require making the energy transition a household issue.** In order to do so, as well as to justify the policy focus and public spending on these sectors to the electorate, it is critical that we build a narrative that effectively conveys the benefits of the energy transition.

The benefits of the energy transition can be categorised as direct, economy-wide, and induced. Direct economic benefits could be in the form of savings be it on electricity bills or on vehicle and fuel spending over the life of an electric vehicle, or in the form of decreased spending on public transport or cleaner cooking fuels. Economy-wide benefits include job creation in these new sectors, reduced procurement costs for distribution companies, as well as technological advances in grid balancing, which could reduce power sector losses and improve service delivery, and energy security for the economy as a whole. Induced benefits include positive externalities, such as reduction in air pollution and reduced healthcare burden on the exchequer due to a reduction in short-lived and long-lasting climate pollutants. If voters understood these benefits, and how these could lead to a betterment of their lives, they would reward actions and make choices that advance the energy transition.

In this context, the town hall hosted as part of Energy Horizons 2019, CEEW's annual flagship event, will discuss the importance and the means to make the energy transition a poll topic. It is designed as a candid conversation between elected representatives to discuss energy matters, to understand how their constituents view the transformations (or not) in energy access and clean energy, and how the same impact their lives and livelihoods.