

For Immediate Release

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***Ujjwala Yojana* makes on-ground impact in West Bengal; affordability remains key concern - CEEW study**

Kolkata (24 January 2019) – In 2018, 55 per cent of West Bengal’s rural households used Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) as the primary cooking fuel, up from 15 per cent in 2015, according to the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), which recently published its findings from the second round of India’s largest multidimensional energy access survey. The proportion of rural households using LPG as exclusive cooking fuel also increased from eight per cent in 2015 to 40 per cent in 2018. Using LPG for cooking reduces the health risks due to indoor air pollution caused by using traditional fuels such as biomass, dung cakes, and agri-residue. The government’s Pradhan Mantri *Ujjwala Yojana* (PMUY) has played an important role improving energy access in West Bengal. However, affordability remains the biggest concern.

Further, over the last three years, access to quality power has marginally deteriorated in rural West Bengal. In 2018, even though 96 per cent of rural households in the state relied on grid electricity as the primary source of lighting, over a third of the rural households lay at the bottom of the electricity access ladder due to unreliable and poor-quality power supply. Also, the overall proportion of rural households using kerosene increased from nine per cent in 2015 to 24 per cent in 2018, implying an increase in the prevalence of stacking different sources of lighting in West Bengal.

The findings were published in ‘Access to Clean Cooking Energy and Electricity – Survey of States’ (ACCESS), an independent CEEW study supported by the Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation and the National University of Singapore (NUS). The study, based on a CEEW-ISEP-NUS survey, covered more than 9,000 households, in 756 villages and 54 districts, across India’s six major energy-access-deprived states. Following up on the first round of the ACCESS survey conducted in 2015, The Council revisited the same households in the six states in mid-2018 to evaluate the changes in their energy access situation over the past three years. In West Bengal, more than 1,000 households in over 84 villages from 18 districts were surveyed.

Abhishek Jain, Senior Programme Lead, CEEW and the lead author of the study, said, “The ACCESS study provides a nuanced understanding of the evolution of energy access in rural West Bengal. While connections are no more a challenge in West Bengal, the state’s discoms should focus on dealing with issues of reliability, quality and affordability. In districts like Nadia and Puruliya where households experienced five days of 24-hour blackouts in a month, it is imperative for the discoms to identify areas afflicted by poor maintenance and improve efforts by assigning manpower in these areas.”

Sasmita Patnaik, Programme Lead, CEEW, added, “While access to LPG connections and its use as the primary fuel for cooking has improved significantly in West Bengal in the last three years, the LPG distribution network needs to be strengthened further to achieve the envisaged goal of home delivery for all households. Affordability of LPG also needs to be addressed through targeted subsidies, considering it is a concern highlighted by 97 per cent of the households that did not have an LPG connection.”

State of access to clean cooking energy

West Bengal witnessed a marked improvement in rural LPG connections, which increased from 22 per cent in 2015 to 68 per cent in 2018. Also, the proportion of rural households using LPG in West Bengal that had LPG delivered to their doorsteps increased from 61 per cent in 2015 to 79 per cent in 2018. Households that did not get home deliveries travelled the median one-way distance of two kilometres to procure LPG, marginally lower than three kilometres in 2015.

Of the households that did not have an LPG connection, 85 per cent expressed interest in getting one, according to The Council's study. The Council's study also found that about 51 per cent of rural households that received an LPG connection in the last two years, received it under the *PMUY*.

The Council's study covered the districts of Darjeeling, Maldah, Nadia, North Twenty-Four Parganas, Paschim Mednipur, and Puruliya in West Bengal.

State of access to electricity

In 2018, around 35 per cent of rural households in the state still had either no or extremely poor electricity access. A majority of rural households with poor electricity access experienced a median value of two days of 24- hours black-outs in a month, compared to zero such days in a month three years ago. This deterioration in reliability and gaps in maintenance services have been a key driver for the increased use of kerosene lamps and lanterns – which complement the use of grid electricity – in rural households in the state. The number of low-voltage days also increased from six to nine days in a month over the last three years, causing damage to appliances.

In the last three years, rural households in West Bengal have witnessed a steady duration of power supply of 20 hours in a day. Ninety-one per cent of electrified households received four or more hours of electricity between sunset and midnight, a slight decline from 93 per cent in 2015.

While lack of power infrastructure is no longer a bottleneck for unelectrified households in the state, ninety-one per cent of rural households in West Bengal found the high-upfront costs and steep recurring monthly expenses as key barriers to electricity access.

About CEEW

The Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) is one of South Asia's leading not-for-profit policy research institutions. The Council uses data, integrated analysis, and strategic outreach to explain – and change – the use, reuse, and misuse of resources. The Council addresses pressing global challenges through an integrated and internationally focused approach. It prides itself on the independence of its high-quality research, develops partnerships with public and private institutions, and engages with wider public.

In 2018, CEEW once again featured extensively across nine categories in the '2017 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report', including being ranked as South Asia's top think tank (14th globally) with an annual operating budget of less than USD 5 million for the fifth year in a row. In 2016, CEEW was also ranked 2nd in India, 4th outside Europe and North America, and 20th globally out of 240 Think tanks as per the ICCG Climate Think Tank's standardised rankings. In 2013 and 2014, CEEW was rated as India's top climate change think-tank as per the ICCG standardised rankings.