



EMBARGOED UNTIL 30 APRIL 2020, 10 AM IST

Indian Leaders Call for Improvement in Rural Healthcare via Solarization of Clinics

30 April 2020: Today, nearly 20 leaders from think tanks, research groups, renewable energy companies, sustainable development organizations, industry associations, and health care services have come together to publish an open letter calling for action, making the case for solarizing all unelectrified sub-centres in rural India, clearly outlining steps needed to get us to that goal.

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis has highlighted several existing systemic gaps in services, especially to the rural poor. Inadequate healthcare infrastructure is one of them. Over 39,000 sub-centres (the first point of contact between primary health care system and the community) serving 230 million people in rural India lack electricity. This severely impacts their capacity to offer optimal health care to patients. Decentralized renewable energy (DRE) can play a significant role in solving this problem quickly and affordably, for less than INR 30 per person in initial capital expenditure.

The letter outlines 4 key interventions that the government can undertake in order to help alleviate the situation:

1. Expanding the programme to solarize clinics, drawing from the example of Chhattisgarh state which has successfully done this;
2. Allocating dedicated funding towards this initiative, which would amount to just 0.6% of the current 2020-21 energy and healthcare budget;
3. Ensuring long-term operations and sustainability by working through existing structures; and

4. Promoting innovation in order to develop more financially viable and energy-efficient medical equipment.

The letter is being sent to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the National Centre for Disease Control, the National Health Systems Resource Centre, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, the Ministry of Power, and Niti Aayog. In addition, the letter is being sent to media houses, international development banks, private foundations and other donors, as well as global renewable energy and healthcare agencies. Read the full text of the letter [here](#).

Quotes from signatories:

“Sustainable health infrastructure that leverages innovative, decentralised and energy efficient solutions will bring huge dividends for health in rural India. Transitioning to renewable energies across healthcare operations will ensure efficient service delivery and improved health outcomes.”

- *Dr. Poornima Prabhakaran, Deputy Director, Centre for Environmental Health, PHFI*

“Rural healthcare infrastructure, particularly the PHCs and sub-centres, is a critical link in ensuring success outcomes envisaged in the National Health Mission. Even as several states continue to lag behind on basic metrics pertaining to maternal mortality or vaccination rates, areas where the PHCs and sub-centres don't have access to grid electricity are particularly under-equipped. The enhancements being planned in the rural health infrastructure in the aftermath of the COVID-19 breakout accords a unique opportunity to direct critical public funding (as also upscale CSR and private funding) towards electrifying the PHC infrastructure rapidly through DRE installations – for around INR 6 billion (INR 600 crores) investment, 40,000 odd currently un-electrified sub-centres and PHCs can have a secure source of power and be equipped adequately for necessary functions.”

- *Upendra Bhatt, Co-Founder & Managing Director, cKinetics*

“Powering rural healthcare infrastructure with decentralised renewable energy is an obvious choice now and in the future. It complements the government's goal of providing clean and seamless energy beyond households. Also, it gives healthcare workers options to access advanced technologies such as tele-medicine, vaccine storage, baby-incubators and many others. COVID-19 is a crisis and an opportunity to accelerate upgradation of rural healthcare infrastructure to a higher level with access to reliable clean energy.” - *Adwait Joshi, CEO, CLEAN*

"Given the realities of changing climate and extreme weather events, achieving energy self reliance through solarization is important for essential services like health. Solarizing rural health centers is a critical step in making our health systems self-reliant and climate resilient in order to protect human life, produce good health outcomes everyday, during a crisis and its aftermath." - *Shweta Narayan, Coordinator, Healthy Energy Initiative (India)*

“There are a lot of similarities between the solutions needed for long term covid relief and climate change. In both the cases the poor face most of the brunt. It's time for us to recognize the role of

sustainable energy in better delivery of health, resulting in a truly inclusive society.” - *Harish Hande, Founder & Chairman, SELCO Foundation*