

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PRADHAN MANTRI UJJWALA YOJANA (P.M.U.Y.) – A STUDY OF L.P.G. REFILLS

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Abstract

Empowerment of women is closely linked with the country's energy economy and this goal is driving investments in the entire value chain. As a measure towards empowerment of poor women in the country who are bereft of access to clean cooking gas, the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas has launched Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) in the form of a social movement, enabling social change and irreversible empowerment of women. The scheme PMUY in the aspect of assessment of the economic part & its enumerated statements with economic thoughts classified into socio-economic factors that deal with occupation, income, health, education and economic points, consumption and demand based on rural aspects of PMUY scheme. It is a major step Towards Social Inclusion by providing Free LPG connection to every BPL household. The purpose of the scheme is to bring affordability to the poor for use of cleaner fuel, reduction in air pollution and improving health and sanitation. Around 41% of households in India are still using fossil fuels for cooking which causes air pollution and health hazard. From the study, it is seen that the accessibility to cleaner fuel and affordability is the key issue for the rural poor. This scheme is also fostering women's empowerment and living healthy society. The shift towards the use of cleaner fuel may ultimately lead to passing on a clean environment to the next generation.

Keywords

PMUY, LPG, PNG, BPL.

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Introduction

Empowerment of women is closely linked with the country's energy economy and this goal is driving investments in the entire value chain. As a measure towards empowerment of poor women in the country who are bereft of access to clean cooking gas, Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas has launched Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) in the form of a social movement, enabling social change and irreversible empowerment of women. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) aims to safeguard the health of women & children by providing them with a clean cooking fuel – LPG, so that they don't have to compromise their health in smoky kitchens or wander in unsafe areas collecting firewood. In order to provide clean cooking fuel to every poor households especially in rural areas, the Government had launched "Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana" on 01.05.2016. The scheme originally envisaged the distribution of 50 million LPG connections to women below the poverty line. Later, it aimed to provide LPG connections to eight crore women by March 2020. However, this target was achieved seven months prior, in September. Identification of prospective beneficiaries under PMUY has been expanded by including other categories in addition to SECC list. To achieve the enhanced target, the scheme will now also cover all SC/STs households beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) (Gramin), Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), Forest dwellers, Most Backward Classes (MBC), Tea & Ex-Tea Garden Tribes, people residing in Islands/ river islands having no LPG connection.

Need for PM Ujjwala Yojana

In India, LPG connections are concentrated in urban and semiurban areas, with most connections in middle class and upper middle class households. Due to limited access to LPG, low-income households routinely use fossil fuels such as coal, kerosene and timber as the key sources for cooking; however, these sources are largely associated with serious health hazards including indoor air pollution, which is responsible for causing acute respiratory illnesses, pulmonary and lung diseases. According to the WHO, ~5 lakh deaths in India can be attributed to use of unclean cooking fuels, wherein a majority deaths were due to non-communicable diseases such as lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Through the PMUY scheme, the govt. aims to maximise the reach of LPG connections to low-income and below poverty line (BPL) households and thereby, reduce their reliance on fossil fuels. Apart from ensuring universal coverage of LPG connections in the country, this scheme also empowers women and their health by reducing

drudgery and the time spent on cooking. It will help generate employment for rural youth in the supply chain management of cooking gas.

Review of Literature

(Devi, 2017) documented a study to assess a broad range of issues and challenges confronted by the PMUY in India. It recommended for the enhancement of LPG in India, build an adequate mechanism to recognize worthy recipients and develop a strong supply and distribution channel to ensure a continuous supply of energy to all households. (Pillai & Ammal, 2017) conducted an economic assessment of PMUY and highlighted the main observation that the role of energy is very significant for the economic development of the country. The socio-economic factors, namely, education, income, occupation, and health, are essential growth indicators for PMUY. Such socio-economic dimensions positively influence the import, consumption, and demand needs of the country. (Gould & Urpelainen, 2018) the study depicted that fuel cost and fuel stacking are problems in the growth of the adoption of LBG in rural India. The findings also suggested that users and non-users positively perceive related to LPG for cooking. (Swain & Mishra, 2019) The study's findings indicated that positive associations exist among education and the amount of subsidy available to households in Odisha villages. Above mentioned, literature highlighted a vital observation that still a need is there to precisely assess the PMUY by taking into consideration the socio-economic status of women in the rural sector of India. There are limited studies that analyze the effectiveness of the PMUY scheme in this context. Therefore, the current study attempted to examine the impact of PMUY on women empowerment in rural India. The study also framed a new conceptual model to enhance the effectiveness of PMUY.

Research Methodology

The research is descriptive and exploratory in nature where empirical study has been made about the poor, backward and marginalized society, their economic and social inclusion by government plan and schemes. Attempt has been made to clarify on the understanding and workability of PMUY. The benefits flowing from use of cleaner fuel by social inclusion of BPL families through this scheme has also been analyzed. The researcher has relied on the reports, news and survey for descriptive analysis. Since the introduction of PMUY scheme.

Objective

1. The objective of study is to explore the social inclusion of poor and marginalized BPL families through the government scheme popularly known as PMUY.

2. To identify the relationship between PMUY and socio-economic factors of women empowerment and its impact in the rural sector.
3. To propose a conceptual framework for future research to enhance the effectiveness of PMUY.

Significance of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

- **Health:** Research showed that people using solid biomass frequently suffer from headaches, nausea, chronic bronchitis and many skin diseases. Indoor air pollution and acute respiratory illnesses caused by it were observed in most rural women.
- **Women empowerment:** Ujjwala has empowered women and protected them and their families through the use of clean burning fuel by helping prevent a significant number of acute respiratory illnesses and other ailments.
- **Safety:** Women going to the forests for collecting firewood are also often exposed to health and safety issues, even sexual harassment at times. This is considerably decreased as a result of the LPG connections.
- **Economic empowerment:** Release of LPG connection under this Scheme shall be in the name of the women belonging to the BPL family enabling the subsidy provision in the women's account. Also, using LPG saves time for women as they do not have to collect solid fuel and then use it for cooking, with this cooking time can be effectively used in other economic activities. Women in many villages formed self-help groups to indulge in community economic activities in their free time.
- **Environment:** There is a definite positive impact on forest cover and the environment from stopping the use of firewood.
- **Youth employment:** It will also provide employment for rural youth in the supply chain of cooking gas. Employment in the logistics and maintenance services are an additional benefit..

Progress Update

Initially, the scheme was targeted to issue 50 million LPG connections until March 2020. This number was later revised to 80 million households to accommodate new families under the updated identification criteria.

As of July 2019, 82.1 million KYC applications were cleared and 79.6 million connections were issued under the PMUY programme.

- In 2019, 78% PMUY beneficiaries refilled their cylinders

- 63% beneficiaries who refilled their cylinders took four or more cylinders
- In 2019, the average consumption of PMUY beneficiaries was three LPG cylinders per annum
- Since its rollout, >317 million refills have been delivered to PMUY beneficiaries

Latest Updates

Union Budget 2021 Outcome

The Finance Minister, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman announced the extension of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana to cover one crore more households

A Comptroller and Auditor General's report notes that in 2015-'16, households with LPG connections were using an average of 6.27 cylinders in a year. But after the scheme was launched, the number of cylinders used on average had come down to 5.6, the data shows.

The results of the report were stark. Of those surveyed, 86% said they had not shifted from biomass to LPG because the price of installing a connection was too high. Almost the same number – 83% – said the price of refills was too high. The long waiting time to get a refill for an empty LPG cylinder was the second-highest reason for those wary of adopting LPG. Gram-panchayat level surveys found that in a fourth of the panchayats, users had to wait for more than 15 days on average to get a cylinder refilled.

Key Challenges of the Scheme

The government faced the following challenges while implementing the PMUY scheme:

- **Identification of poor households:** This was the key challenge in allotment of free LPG connections, as there was a lack of authentic data that could help identify poor households with 100% accuracy. Though the government used the SECC-2011 data, it was reported that many deserving households were left out during the field work.
- **Misuse of the SECC data:** It was noted that a few affluent households were also listed as BPL households in the SECC-2011 data and therefore, it became challenging to validate the authenticity of every data in the SECC database.
- **Safety awareness among beneficiaries:** As most beneficiaries were from poor and illiterate backgrounds, they had limited awareness about the safety requirements for cooking on an LPG stove.

- **Unavailability of documents:** In addition, many deserving households did not have mandatory documents such as ration card and *Aadhaar* card.
- **Limited reach of LPG distribution:** In some parts of the country, LPG distributorships could not be established due to law & order issues or it being a forest area. Households in those areas are still disconnected with the scheme and are unable to have access of cleaner cooking fuel.
- **Behavioural and awareness issues :** Most PMUY beneficiaries have become used to smoke and do not see adverse health effects. Female beneficiaries have become complacent cooking on traditional chulhas and accepted it as a part of their lives.
- **Issue of refill and affordability:** Refilling of LPG gas connections saw a fall in refill from 35000 in 2016-17 to 13000 in 2018. Also, several complaints of affordability was raised as a reluctance of adoption was shown. While the number of LPG connections across India has increased by an impressive 16.26% since the scheme was launched, the use of gas cylinders increased by only 9.83%. PMUY beneficiaries have to incur a full day's loss of wages to refill cylinders, as most LPG retailers in rural areas do not provide doorstep delivery.
- **Inactive and corrupt uses:** Many inactive accounts were identified, with some accounts bearing false beneficiaries using LPG for commercial and profitable purposes.
- **Irregularities & corruption:** Without a comprehensive institutional framework like DBT (direct tax benefit) in place, it can lead to corruption and irregularities.

Conclusion

Based on these numbers, the scheme has not only recorded high adoption, but also emphasised that service utilisation is high. Moreover, LPG coverage increased from 61% before 2016 to 94.7% in 2019; this showcases that the scheme has been widely accepted by the people and enabled many households to access clean cooking fuel. The PMUY has not only achieved women empowerment and reduced health hazards, but also boosted the manufacturing sector by increasing consumption of cylinders, stoves, regulators, hose pipes, etc.

There are also signs of reducing the use of conventional cooking fuels by women in domestic use, leading to fewer carbon emissions, LPG connection under the PMUY has advantages for the women in terms of environment-friendly cooking food, provided opportunity employing additional time for guiding children and entertainment, carrying out sewing works, and grow plantation and vegetation at

premises, women are no more required to fetch firewood for cooking food. Such benefits made women in villages socially and economically empowered. The women are also getting involved in other financial decision of the family like ordering for LPG refill, maintaining bank account for subsidies etc.

The policy is good in its intention and initial implementation; it needs restructuring and allotment of funds to finance the gas stove and other expenses borne by the beneficiaries. It is important to note that Ujjwala 2.0 which was started in 2021-22 had a target of 1 crore beneficiaries for the migrant workers in specific. Thus, this doesn't require them to have address proofs and at the same time it also pays for the installation cost of the gas stove. It is high time that the government starts giving out subsidies on time, keeps the prices on a minimum average without major fluctuations and pay the outstanding amount to the OMC companies.

The path to women empowerment in a diverse country like India is a gradual process, with degrees of inequality varying from one region to another. Rural India is more hard-hit in this aspect and suffers from the many negatives that it brings. It is, therefore, important to focus on a holistic, well-thought out, and far-sighted policy that focusses not only on the accrued benefits of empowerment to women, but to entire households. Hence, the policy needs various interventions and effective usage of policy instruments to achieve its stated goals within the stipulated time.

“We need to ensure that we are able to subsidise refills and that rural households are able and willing to pay for them,” said Swati D’Souza, associate fellow with The Energy and Resources Institute, who has researched the subsidies and costing of LPG in India. “This enhances their health and quality of life, as well as urban air quality. It is a social investment.”

To arrive at an accurate assessment of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna, experts say, merely counting the number of new gas connections cannot be the only yardstick.

Recommendations

- Massive safety campaigns should be carried out and an incentive-based system should be brought in for those beneficiaries who have undergone adequate safety measures.
- Efficient creation of a database to be made in order to avoid any discrepancies and duplication of names. The benefits associated with the minor beneficiaries should be shifted to the name of adult females.
- The idle funds in the CSR category should be immediately used and outstanding dues should be cleared.

- The subsidies should be delivered to on time and these should be increased proportionally to the increase in the LPG prices
- There have been multiple delays of more than 365 days which have been observed in more than 4.3 lakh connections. It should be ensured that OMCs do not delay the process and if any sort of delay happens, the OMCs should be penalized.
- The government should invest more in the awareness and information campaign which can encourage beneficiaries to continue usage of LPG which can lead to an overall increase in the number of refills countrywide.

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