

Rent-a-roof policy can give residential solar energy the push it requires

The [Centre is planning a rent-a-roof policy to support its ambitious](#) plan to generate 40 gigawatts (GW) of power from solar rooftop projects by 2022, MINT reported this week. The government's solar power target is 100 GW; of this 60 GW is expected to come from ground-mounted, grid-connected projects. If the new policy comes through, solar developers — these companies provide end-to-end service to those interested in installing solar systems — can rent rooftop space, fit it with solar panels, and feed the power to the grid. If the policy takes off, householders will not have to bother themselves any more with the time-consuming, bureaucratic nitty-gritty that precedes the installation of panels.

India offers a big opportunity for solar energy. Its 750GW potential is driven by roughly 300 sunny days a year, with an average solar radiation range of 4-7 kilowatt-hours per square metre. Despite this, and attractive fiscal incentives, households haven't exactly taken to solar power. As a result, financial incentives are not being utilised and consumers are not availing significant potential savings on their electricity bills, even as the burden on electricity distribution companies to meet power demand from the grid is growing. A Greenpeace analysis shows that all the major metros are far from meeting rooftop solar targets as laid down by state governments and the ministry of new and renewable energy. This is despite a significant national incentive in the form of a 30% capital subsidy, and a range of state incentives and schemes.

The success of the rooftop solar is critical for India which is faced with the challenge of decarbonising its electricity sector and tackling air pollution, some part of which is caused by coal-fired power plants generating electricity. A Global Burden of Diseases report says air pollution accounts for 1.2 million deaths every year, and costs India 3% of its GDP.

Large solar plants require land, lots of it. Therefore, it is important that policies support rooftop and decentralised solar power generation, both off grid and on. The proposed policy could empower the solar energy industry to focus on households; it also gives every home a chance to be energy independent. However, it cannot magically transform the sector unless other issues are addressed.

For one, people must be better apprised of the benefits of solar power (for instance, the government must give solar the same push it gives to Swachh Bharat Abhiyan); and the perceptions that households will have to make a huge upfront investment or that solar installations will make rooftop space unusable have to be removed. These may sound like small issues, but can work as deterrents when households take that leap of faith.

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