

1. The benefits accrued on account of Saubhagya scheme should be utilised to address the issue of clean cooking fuel once and for all. Examine. (250 words)

**Answer:**

**Background:-**

- India has been gradually succeeding in the provision of basic needs to its citizens from safe drinking water, to food security, to schooling. Access to electricity for all is now nearing completion, with about 1,25,000 villages and over 50 crore people having gotten access over the last decade. All remaining households in the country are expected to get electricity by 2020.

**Saubhagya scheme:-**

- Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana –“Saubhagya” aim is to ensure electrification of all willing households in the country in rural as well as urban areas here.
- Under the scheme, government will provide free electricity to all households identified under Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) data 2011.
- The one of the expected outcomes of the Scheme is as follows:
- Environmental upgradation by substitution of Kerosene for lighting purposes

**Benefits accrued on account of Saubhagya scheme:-**

- Saubhagya does not envisage any subsidy for electricity consumption. That is, consumers will have to pay the bill as per their utilisation.
- The government said that the scheme will ensure a substitute to kerosene. By substituting kerosene use in rural areas it would save import expenditure.

**Steps taken to provide access of clean cooking fuel and issues:-**

- According to some estimates, there are about 5 lakh avoidable deaths every year as a result in India. In addition, there is the impact on overall air pollution, which affects the health of all.
- Most of the indoor pollution impact is on women so clean cooking fuel is essential for them .
- **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:-**
  - The below poverty line (BPL) rural households are being given a cooking gas connection and a cylinder for free.
  - **Issues with Ujjwala yojana:-**
    - Unlike urban areas where there usually is home delivery of the gas cylinder to the consumer, in rural areas the consumer is required to go to the dealer to collect the gas cylinder, and this needs at least half a day, which is a real additional cost.
    - The related issue is the one of affordability. The refill rate, according to some sources, is only two to four cylinders in a year, against the estimated needs of nine refills in a year.
    - Further, the creation of a distribution network to cover all the rural households is a gigantic task, with petroleum companies having drawn up investment plans of Rs 30,000 crore to develop the needed infrastructure.

**Benefits accrued on account of Saubhagya scheme should be utilised to address the issue of clean cooking fuel in the following ways :-**

- It is an alternative, immediate and cheaper option to that of extending LPG cooking gas supply to cover all the rural households.
- The electricity network has already been expanded to cover all the villages, and all the remaining households are being electrified with additional central financial assistance under the Saubhagya scheme.
  - These electrified rural households can be encouraged to use electricity for cooking which is already the case in many developed countries.
- Electric induction stove is cheaper than a gas stove. Bulk procurement by EESL (Energy Efficiency Services Limited) should drive down prices significantly, going by the past experience.
- The required investment in improving the electricity distribution infrastructure would be lower and can be done faster than for LPG.
- The actual cost of using electricity for cooking is similar to that of gas.
- Whereas the cost of electricity is relatively stable, the cost of LPG goes up with the rise in oil prices as well as with the depreciation of the rupee.
- With increased capacity utilisation from the existing plants and generation from the new plants in the pipeline, the additional demand for cooking could be met without much difficulty.
- The state governments could choose between a mix of cross-subsidy and direct subsidy. This is both manageable as well as affordable.

**Conclusion:-**

- From a gender perspective, this deserves the highest priority due to the transformation in the health and the quality of life of rural women that would be brought about as a result of this step.

## **PRACTICE QUESTIONS**

**Answer the following Questions**

1. Critically analyze whether the 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' initiative would help India address the growing interstate and inter district disparities? (250 words)
2. The aim of creating a truly unified NAM with an efficient price discovery mechanism is still a far-fetched dream. Critically examine. (250 words)

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