Enhancing Accessibility of Rooftop Solar Program

Why in news?

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved phase 2 of the grid-connected rooftop solar programme.

What is Grid-Connected Rooftop solar programme about?

- The Grid connected rooftop solar programme is implemented by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, with a focus on the residential sector.
- The development objective of the Grid-Connected Rooftop Solar Program Project for India is to increase installed capacity of grid-connected rooftop solar photovoltaic (GRPV) and to strengthen the capacity of relevant institutions for GRPV.
- The program environmental objective (PEO) is to achieve reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through the displacement of thermal energy with solar energy.
- The operation supports the government's rooftop solar PV program.

What are the challenges in rooftop solar programme?

- India has set an ambitious target of achieving 40 GW of rooftop solar capacity by 2022.
- However, while there has been progress on rooftop solar installations among industries and commercial consumers, the uptake among residential consumers has been slow.
- Enthusiasm for rooftop solar energy largely comes from those with higher disposable incomes and who live in their own houses.
- In India electricity utilities are not very supportive of consumers generating their own power, as this would impact their revenues.
- Urban residential electricity consumers are still hesitant to consider rooftop solar power for their homes, due to lack of information.
- For residential urban consumers, one of the key barriers to installing rooftop solar systems is that they do not know who to contact to understand the processes to be followed and permissions required.
- There is no single source to access information, evaluate benefits and disadvantages, and examine if any government support (such as a financial subsidy) is available.

- Most of the technical information provided by various sources, including the government, tends to be Internet-based.
- Instead of internet sources a significant majority of consumers seek face-to-face discussions and recommendations from friends and family.

What measures needs to be taken?

- **Awareness -**Objective information must be put out through various avenues, so that it is accessible to all segments of the population and in local languages.
- Information must be made easily available to the consumers on the amount of shadow-free roof area needed for generating a unit of electricity and pricing; operating the system, after-sales maintenance and support; and reliable rooftop solar vendors.
- **Skill Development -**The local electricity linesmen, electricity inspectors, and other nodal officials in the electricity department also have key roles to play.
- Building their capacities to disseminate such information and handle consumer queries and concerns, and providing basic training in billing and metering for solar power can go a long way in improving consumers' experience.
- **Capacity Building** - Information kiosks can be set up in public institutions like banks to offer information on the technology, as well as on practical issues such as guidance on selecting vendors.
- Consumer rights groups, rooftop solar system vendors, and resident welfare associations (RWAs) in larger cities are beginning to organize campaigns and workshops to generate awareness and create a dialogue with consumers.
- However, awareness building sessions need to be socially inclusive and should take place during periods when consumers are likely to be at home.
- The uptake of rooftop solar across economic categories is also contingent on policies that make it more accessible and affordable.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering