Unelectrified Households in Electrified Villages

What is the issue?

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- Prime Minister recently announced that all inhabited villages in India now enjoy electrification.
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- But a household level look highlights several disparities and thus needs deeper attention.
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What is the claim?

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- As of April 1, 2015, the official count of unelectrified villages was around 18,000.
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- But recently, PM announced that all inhabited villages now enjoy electrification.
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- It signalled a significant milestone in the country’s development.
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- It is an achievement that will raise aspirations in the remotest districts.
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What is the concern?

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- The existing definition to declare a village electrified is coverage of a mere 10% of households.
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- This is, along with the common facilities such as schools, panchayats and health centres.

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- However, these broad-based statistics fail to bring out several disparities.
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- These include:
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i. the actual number of households in villages that have power connections
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ii. number of hours they get reliable power
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iii. the per capita power that rural and urban Indians consume
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What is the actual electrification scenario?

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- Millions of homes still lack this vital resource in India.
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- Rural household electrification has a wide range across States, from 47% to 100%.
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- The average hours of power supplied in a day to rural areas also varies widely among states.
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- It ranges from 11.5 in Mizoram, 17.72 in Uttar Pradesh and 24 hours in Kerala, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu.
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- Thus the claim of electrification loses validity with these small scale statistics.
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- Even with supportive Central schemes, the Power for All 24x7 goal with a deadline of April 1, 2019 is far from realistic.
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What are the challenges?

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- These anomalies are often the result of infrastructure deficits and

administrative inefficiency.
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- There is a clear divergence between the per capita electricity consumption between rural and urban India.
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- Thus, improving access and equity would be the twin challenges to be faced.
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- The falling cost of renewable, decentralised sources such as solar photovoltaics represents a ready solution for rural India.
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- However, evidence from States such as Maharashtra highlights the challenges in this.
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- It made an early claim to full electrification 6 years ago relying partly on solar power.
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- But it witnesses theft, damage and lack of technical capacity and the hurdles therein.
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What could be done?

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- A hybrid solution i.e. scaling up of both grid-connected and standalone solar systems in appropriate areas would be a way out.
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- Augmenting conventional sources of electricity, with a clear emphasis on rooftop solutions for cities could be taken up.
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- Cheaper renewables will enable differential pricing for households in remote areas.
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- This would be a key determinant of wider social benefits of electricity.
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- In all, rural electrification in India and affordable power to every household needs sustained policy support.
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Source: The Hindu

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