



## EDITORIAL: INDIAN EXPRESS

**GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMIC**

**TOPIC: CLIMATE INVESTMENT**

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## FAILURE OF CLIMATE INVESTMENT — WILL MILLIONS CHOKO ON SMOKE?

**It's time for India's National Clean Air Programme to place health at the centre. This would entail clean energy shifts to fossil fuels (LPG) in the residential sector that can reduce net climate warming**

### Air Pollution Crisis During and After COP 29

- As COP 29 concluded in Baku, India's National Capital Region (NCR) experienced a familiar seasonal decline in air quality, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) consistently exceeding 400, signifying “severe” levels.
- The 2024 *Lancet Countdown* report highlights the urgent need for reducing fossil fuel dependency and advocates for health-centric approaches in climate finance. These approaches should prioritize public-health interventions that reduce air pollution exposure through clean energy transitions.

### Air Pollution Beyond NCR and Winter

- The problem of air pollution extends far beyond NCR and the winter season, with varying sources and intensities observed across the country.
- The *National Clean Air Programme* (NCAP) must broaden its scope by reassessing sectoral priorities and embedding health considerations at its core.
- A strategic shift towards clean fossil fuels, like LPG in the residential sector, is vital for achieving energy equity for vulnerable populations and attaining national air quality standards.

### Severe Health Impacts of Household Air Pollution (HAP)

- Exposure to household air pollution (HAP) from solid cooking fuels has been scientifically linked to numerous acute and chronic health issues in both adults and children.
- Health impacts include chronic respiratory diseases, lung cancer, cardiovascular conditions, high blood pressure, low birth weight, child pneumonia, and developmental delays in children.
- Inefficient burning of solid fuels on open fires or traditional chulhas in poorly ventilated homes leads to dangerously high levels of harmful pollutants such as PM2.5, black carbon, and carbon monoxide.



## Household Air Pollution (HAP) and Ambient Air Pollution (AAP)

- While NCR remains the focal point for ambient air pollution (AAP) under NCAP, rural populations endure insidious and persistent health-damaging exposure to HAP, which has largely been overlooked.
- Until recently, the scale and contribution of HAP to AAP were underestimated. New emission inventories reveal that the contribution of HAP to state-level PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions ranges from 4% in Uttar Pradesh to 17% in Maharashtra.
- Across India, residential biomass cooking-fuel use emerges as the dominant contributor to emissions, even in regions with relatively cleaner air.

## National Contribution of Biomass Combustion to Air Pollution

- Recent granular models by the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MOEFCC) estimate that residential biomass combustion accounts for about 30% of PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions nationally, with significant variations across states.
- Eliminating biomass combustion could reduce ambient PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels below the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) in most districts, providing widespread health benefits.

## Challenges in Transitioning to LPG

- The use of LPG as a cooking fuel is sometimes criticized for being inconsistent with global decarbonization and fossil fuel phase-out goals.
- However, biomass fuels negatively impact the climate in two ways: non-renewable biomass harvesting and the emission of short-lived climate pollutants, such as black carbon, which is nearly 1,000 times more potent than carbon dioxide in atmospheric warming.
- Transitioning to LPG significantly reduces emissions of harmful pollutants and provides health co-benefits by addressing both HAP and AAP.

## Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY): A Critical Initiative

- The PMUY program has expanded LPG infrastructure, ensuring access to nearly 99% of households in India.
- Recent studies demonstrate that providing free LPG ensures sustained adoption and virtual elimination of solid fuel usage, even among economically disadvantaged households.
- Strengthening PMUY by increasing subsidies and financial support would help poor communities transition entirely to LPG, reducing air pollution and associated health risks.

## Global Implications of India's LPG Transition

- Global climate finance has been hesitant to support near-term transitions from biomass to LPG, despite the potential for immense health and climate benefits.





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- Ignoring LPG transitions risks leaving millions in developing nations exposed to health and energy inequities, perpetuating unjust transitions.

India's experience demonstrates that transitioning to LPG is not only feasible but also cost-effective, as highlighted in a recent World Bank report on addressing air pollution in South Asia.

## Call for Immediate Action

- India has a unique opportunity to lead a public health-focused intervention targeting household air pollution through LPG adoption.
- Addressing household emissions offers the quickest route to reducing overall air pollution exposure, with significant health and climate benefits.
- Strengthening initiatives like PMUY with increased financial investments can enable India to set an example of sustainable, equitable, and health-centered energy transitions.

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