

Financially Solvent Utilities for Improved Energy Access

Energy is at the heart of achieving many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—from eradicating poverty through access to healthcare, education, and economic growth to combating climate change through clean and green energy. Access to electricity, thus, goes hand in hand with sustainable development and improved well-being. Yet, an estimated 660 million people around the world (mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa) lack access to electricity.

Low energy access can be attributed to varied reasons but most of all to the financial stress of the utilities due to inadequate revenues, non-technical losses, and electricity tariffs that are lower than the costs incurred on supplying energy. The pandemic has further exacerbated the situation with utilities having suffered a revenue loss of USD 400 million and USD 240 million in India and South Africa, respectively, due to enforced lockdowns. The United Nations' High-Level Dialogue on Energy estimates that an annual investment of USD 35 billion will be required to make clean and affordable universal energy access (SDG 7) by 2030 a reality. For this, the financial solvency of utilities is a prerequisite.

In this regard, Indian think tank the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP) and Southern Voice—a network of 51 think tanks from Africa, Latin America, and Asia—are organising a closed-door discussion during the UN Global Goals Week (17 September to 26 September). The virtual discussion, to be held on **22 September 2021 (3:30 to 5:30 p.m. IST)**, will bring together researchers, policymakers, philanthropists, and other important stakeholders to deliberate on the following:

1. What challenges do utilities face in expanding energy access to all?
2. How has COVID-19 impacted the utilities' revenues, and what measures should be taken to overcome them?
3. How can utilities become operationally efficient and financially sustainable in the long run and translate the 2030 energy access plans into effective delivery on the ground?