

Clean Cooking: Way Forward For Empowering Women For Better Health, Livelihood & Empowerment

SEWA's Two Million Sisters Request Gas Cylinder On Ration Card For Poor Women & Carbon Credit For Contribution In Reducing Emissions

Last month, the UN High Level Dialogue on Energy 2021 took place wherein the role of rural women in sustainable environment through promoting use of clean energy was widely discussed. Recently, climate change week was also celebrated where climate change and solutions were widely deliberated upon. In the backdrop of these events, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) gave voice to adoption of clean cooking by rural women as part of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SEWA leaders underscored that adoption of clean cooking can be given a fillip if it is linked with livelihood generation.

Sisters discussed how globally it is believed that cooking using wood pollutes the environment and also makes women vulnerable to eye and lung damage. Sarojben of SEWA said that they are leading a 'green movement' wherein they have facilitated gas connections to 15,000-odd sisters. An average woman leader has ensured some 2,000-3,000 women get gas connections under government schemes.



Sarojben proposed that if 2 million SEWA women in India join hands for 'clean kitchens' and clean cooking methods, they can immensely contribute in cutting down carbon emissions. "If factories and industries can be given carbon credits to reduce emissions, it is time women too are

granted incentives for cutting down on emissions by adopting clean cooking," says Sarojben.

Sisters proposed that a national policy should be formulated to give carbon credit or similar incentives to gram panchayats, mandals and women planting trees and adopting clean energy in the kitchen and thereby promoting greenery, clean air and less exploitation of natural resources

Discussing the challenges faced by rural women in villages, Sarojben, Deenaben and Bhavnaben said that no women likes to cook in a smoke filled kitchen but women who got gas connections worry over availability of gas cylinders and its higher price.

"If one has to buy wood fuel, the monthly expense would climb to Rs 600-700/month. For women belonging to socio-economic weaker sections, it would be great if the gas cylinder is made available on a ration card just like sugar, rice and kerosene!" said Sarojben.

Veenaben and Sarojben proposed that clean cooking can be linked with livelihood generation for better results. "Non-availability of gas cylinders in villages prohibits women from completely junking chullahs using wood as fuel. If women's saving co-operatives in villages are allowed to run a gas agency, women can earn through sales and service of gas cylinders and gas stoves respectively. It would become a win-win situation as women will get easy access to gas refill and they can generate income too," said Sarojben.

Deenaben said that rural women have been urged to bring a social revolution where instead of spending big bucks on weddings, women are advocated to give their daughters gas stoves and connections for hassle free clean cooking.

Earlier, a national report on ` `“Unpacking Behavior With Clean Cooking Adoption in India” by Tata Trust, Global Alliance on Clean Cooking and Sambodhi was released earlier this year by union science and technology secretary Renu Swarup. On behalf of 2 million members of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) spread across 18 states, five major aspects to strengthen adoption of clean cooking in India were presented.

- Many times, access to clean cooking is not available.
- Time-sensitive investment is needed to facilitate the transition of women towards clean cooking. The investment should be according to the needs of the women.
- Adoption of clean cooking can be expedited by linking clean cooking with SDG, especially health and education SDG.
- Capacity building and training for adoption of clean cooking is needed.
- Necessary capital investment for adoption of clean cooking is needed



It was suggested that clean cooking is an opportunity to strengthen women empowerment and organization. Clean cooking interventions can positively influence the critical link between chullah, home and ownership for women and reduce the risk of not just accidental fire but floods, cyclones and other natural disasters.

There is an enormous need for chullahs and modified cooking stoves. It was suggested that skill schools on chullahs and clean cooking technologies need to be set up at local levels to expedite adoption of clean cooking.