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NEEDS EFFECTIVE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SOLAR WATER PUMP NETWORK

Our policymakers will have to create an effective regulatory framework for the development and installation of a widespread solar water pump network. It will be largely beneficial if our farmers are made aware of the many benefits that come along with the adoption of solar water pumps as well. Policymakers can also incentivize the use of solar water pumps, so farmers are more encouraged to make the switch, believes ***Ashish Khanna****, President, Tata Power (Renewables), part of $145.3 billion Tata group and a leading player in the electric utility space. In conversation with* ***Manu Tayal****, Sub Editor, Saur Energy International, Khanna shared his views exclusively on solar water pumps sector, its bottlenecks which the sector is currently dealing with along with its future growth opportunities. Following are the excerpts from that exclusive interview.*

Q India being an Agrarian country and you being a solar water pumps manufacturer, what scope do you see in the next few years in India?

With more than 50% of the population directly engaged with agriculture, it is safe to say that India is primarily an agrarian society. The agriculture sector alone contributes to nearly 18.33% of India's electricity consumption. Currently, there are an estimated 26 million water pumps for irrigation purposes in the country, nearly 38.5% of which run on diesel. The remaining 16 million installed irrigation pumps are connected to the electricity grid. Unfortunately, developing a grid system is an expensive affair, particularly because most rural villages are located too far from grid lines. Solar water pumps can help address these concerns. With solar water pumps, farmers have access to high-quality power that can be available throughout the day. These water pumps can be transported in pieces and reassembled at the preferred location for installation. We see a lot of scope in the next few years particularly because our solar water pumps are a more sustainable alternative. It is also an efficient and convenient solution for grid-isolated rural areas. They are also a more cost-effective alternative. Our solar water pumps are a low-cost solution that enables farmers to spend more time increasing their income by growing crops, instead of ferrying water from miles away.

Q Are there any challenges/ difficulties do you face these days in acceptance of your product line of solar water pumps?

Farmers need to be made aware of the benefits of solar water pumps. Even today, farmers are highly dependent on rain. They need to be educated about the benefits of solar energy and solar water pumps. Cost is one of the major challenge initially, as it is high, but most, if not all, can be recovered over the course of time. In addition to this, solar water pumps are vulnerable to theft.

Q How solar water pumps can revolutionize India's farm sector?

Our farmers rely heavily on the monsoon for watering crops, but an effective irrigation system like solar water pumps can help increase crop yields by four times. Solar water pumps today have emerged as a clean and reliable source of water. Firstly, unlike conventional irrigation pumps that run on fuel, solar water pumps run on solar energy, which can be accessed throughout the day.
This way, farmers will not be required to depend on fuel, which is also expensive. Secondly, the maintenance costs for solar water pumps are much less, with a long operating life, as opposed to conventional irrigation systems. These photovoltaic pumps are easy to transport and install and are more cost effective. Solar water pumps can help save time and increase productivity as well. Farmers will no longer have to struggle for water. Additionally, it can open doors for new jobs, particularly in the rural areas. Women and children will benefit largely as well. We are well aware of how they walk miles each day for clean drinking water. Installing solar water pumps can address this issue and bring them respite.

Q The government's ambitious target to initiate wide-spread usage of solar pumps is a positive indication of the growth of the solar pump industry, what more do you expect from the Indian policymakers in order to further boost the sector?

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is actively working towards deploying 30,000 solar water pumping systems every year, for agricultural and irrigation purposes. Our policymakers will have to create an effective regulatory framework for the development and installation of a widespread solar water pump network. It will be largely beneficial if our farmers are made aware of the many benefits that come along with the adoption of solar water pumps as well. Policymakers can also incentivize the use of solar water pumps, so farmers are more encouraged to make the switch.

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