

INTERVIEW

## Prepaid Metering Can Definitely Boost Collection Efficiency Of Discoms: Tata Power

Venugopal Pillai September 17, 2021



Tata Power has begun smart meter deployment in Mumbai, in a first for India's Maximum City. In this exclusive interview, we have **Sanjay Banga**, President - Transmission & Distribution, Tata Power, discussing the Mumbai smart metering effort in detail. Tata Power has always been an active proponent of advanced digital technology and is deepening its smart meter deployment in its other licensed areas like Delhi and Odisha, he notes. While maintaining that India definitely stands to benefit from deployment of prepaid energy meters, the country will profit the most if the power distribution ecosystem becomes more responsible and accountable, asserts Banga. An interview by Venugopal Pillai.

It was nice to know that Tata Power initiated smart metering in Mumbai with 10,000 installations so far. What is the overall plan?

Well, this number has now gone up to 20,000 smart meters. We planned to reach 50,000 meters by March 2022 and by March 2023, we want to cover all our consumers in Mumbai who are consuming more than 200-300 units (kwh) of electricity per month. We will, however, exclude consumers whose energy consumption is generally always low.

What is the basic difference between a conventional meter and a smart meter, and what is the primary rationale behind the smart meter rollout in Mumbai?

The basic difference between the currently-installed conventional meters and smart meters is that a smart meter offers two-way communication. The electricity consumption pattern is known. On the basis of this information (on electricity consumption), we have started providing consumers with valuable tips on energy conservation and created value for a consumer by suggesting how the consumer can optimize his energy consumption.

For instance, during the first COVID wave, in April and May 2020, there were many issues about reading of meters and delivering of physical bills. In June 2020, when actual billing was done, the bill was found to be high.

In smart meters, there is no need to take manual reading. You can in fact get near real-time data. These meters also have another useful feature - they can work in prepaid as well as postpaid mode. If a consumer is not paying his dues, the meter (supply) can be disconnected remotely. There is no need to visit the premise and physically disconnect the supply. This is exactly how things are happening with mobile telephony.

Speaking of Mumbai, all consumers are "paying" consumers. That is why the commercial loss level is very low—less than 2 per cent, in the case of Tata Power. In general, while smart meter deployment in India is more towards bringing commercial discipline, in a case like Mumbai, it is more as a means to create value-addition for the consumer.

