



Up In The Air

Three years since the launch of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)- shoddy progress derailed the clean air dream

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With India's infamous air pollution levels gaining traction from the global press and local activists, the Centre, in January 2019, launched the country's first National Clean Air Programme with an intent to improve the country's air quality on a war footing. Goals were set on – key amongst them was to reduce PM2.5 levels by 20% to 30% by 2024 relative to 2017 levels in 132 cities. However, three years since the Program was announced, researchers at the Centre for Research and on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) in their report - "Tracing the Hazy Air: Progress Report on National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)" reveal that progress has been scarce and shoddy. Sunil Dahiya, author of the report and an analyst at CREA, said: "The past two years have been unusual due to the COVID19 pandemic resulting in a halt for industrial and economic activities due to national and regional lockdowns, so a better indicator to track the effectiveness and implementation of NCAP was to track the progress on indicators identified under the programme". The analysis presented in the report is based on information gathered through RTI applications, parliamentary proceedings, reports from other organisations, and publicly available data.

The report highlights that apart from city-specific action plans, no other plans have been formulated under NCAP prescribed timelines; state action plans, regional action plans, and the transboundary action plan still have to see the light of the day. "NCAP and Clean Air action Plans for Cities were dynamic documents which were expected to be updated and made more efficient in controlling the rising air pollution levels with completion of research studies. But, sadly, all timelines for the formulation of state and regional level action plans as well as emission inventory and source apportionment studies have passed, and none of them have been formulated till now," said Mr Dahiya.

The report also highlights that at the end of three years since the programme's launching, out of the targeted 1500 manual monitoring stations to be installed across the country, only 818 are present today. This is up by just 115 stations from 703 in 2019. The progress is even more sluggish in equipping all manual stations with PM2.5 monitoring, where only 261 stations have PM2.5 monitoring facilities.

Furthermore, none of the 132 non-attainment cities has completed their carrying capacity studies. Carrying capacity is the region's ability to accumulate and disperse emissions while maintaining breathable air quality. In 93 cities, the study is either undergoing or at the MoU/proposal stage.

The assessment also highlights that the financing under NCAP has discrepancies and lacks transparency in terms of allocation and utilisation of funds for meaningful actions to reduce the emission of air pollutants.

The report recommends that the NCAP be made legally binding on responsible authorities while setting interim (WHO interim targets) and long-term targets to achieve breathable air equivalent to WHO guideline levels over the next decade. Other recommendations from the report include enhancing

transparency in allocation and utilisation of finances and tracking the indicators through publicly available information under the PRANA web portal developed by CPCB.

With air pollution killing a record number of Indians every year, India cannot afford to treat the National Clean Air Program like just another official document. "Coordination between local, regional, and national government agencies must be fast-tracked while enforcing stringent laws against violators," said Sunil Dahiya.

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Notes:

Table: Various plans and their status

Plans at various levels	Timeline	Status
City-specific action plans	2019	Completed (except for Trichy and Madurai)
Emergency Response System (GRAP)	2020	Ongoing (under various phases)
State action plans	2020	No information
Regional action plans	2020	No information
Transboundary action plans	2019	No information

Various studies under NCAP and their status

Studies	Timeline	Status
Source Apportionment	2020	Completed by only 14 cities, rest in various phases
National Emissions Inventory	2020	Drafted
National Health Profile and Database	2019	No information
Air pollution impact on health and economy	2024	Only two studies done
Joint Studies/Field studies/Pilot scale projects	2019	Joint studies being done for 25 cities, for rest of studies- no information

Carrying Capacity	-	Under various phases
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Activities under air quality monitoring and their status

Activities	Timeline	Status
Augment manual monitoring stations to 1,500	2024	818 present
2-3 average number of CAAQMS	2024	309 present
Satellite-based measurements	2024	No information
Alternate technology for real-time monitoring such as low-cost sensors	2024	No information
Setup 100 monitoring stations network in rural areas	2024	26 present
Mobile air quality network	2024	No information
Augment PM2.5 monitoring stations to all cities under NAMP	2024	262 stations in 121 cities present
Plan for setup of 10 city-super network	2019	Under Process
Plan for setting up an air information centre	2019	Under Process

The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air is an independent research organisation focused on revealing the trends, causes, and health impacts and the solutions to air pollution.

CREA uses scientific data, research and evidence to support the efforts of governments, companies and campaigning organisations worldwide in their efforts to move towards clean energy and clean air. We believe that effective research and communication are the key to successful policies, investment decisions and advocacy efforts. CREA was founded in December 2019 in Helsinki, Finland and has staff in several Asian and European countries. For more information: energyandcleanair.org