Press release

Four years of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) shows slight improvement in air quality but India still breathes polluted air

DELHI, 10 January 2023 — Four years since the introduction of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) - India’s first national policy on curbing air pollution - air quality has improved in 49 out of 131 cities in FY 21-22, compared to the previous year. While cities like Allahabad, Lucknow, Varanasi, Srinagar and Moradabad have shown improvements in PM$_{10}$ concentrations of more than 50 µg/m$^3$ others like Vasai-Virar, Durgapur, Byrnihat and Kala Amb showed deterioration of air quality by similar concentrations (50 µg/m$^3$).

On the other hand, only 38 of the 131 cities - that were given annual pollution reduction targets under MoUs signed between State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs), Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and CPCB or MoEF&CC- managed to meet the targets for FY21-22.

On the fourth anniversary of the NCAP release, a report released by the research group Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) highlighted that although the committees and framework for implementing, monitoring and review of actions stipulated under NCAP have been formulated, their functioning and transparent information sharing with the public remains opaque reducing the effectiveness of such measures at the State level.

The report further highlights that only 37 out of 131 cities have completed the source apportionment studies which were supposed to be completed in 2020. Almost all of these reports still lack public availability and no city action plan has been updated with new findings of the report as it was envisaged in the NCAP when it was launched in January.
2019. The National Emission Inventory is also yet to be formalised in the country which had to be completed by 2020.

The report also stresses that India will be required to install more than 300 manual air quality monitoring stations per year under NAMP to reach the NCAP goal of 1,500 monitoring stations by 2024. This is a tall ask as only 180 stations were installed over the last four years. Commenting on the findings, Sunil Dahiya, an analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air said, “India has an extensive network of ambient air quality monitoring stations installed by industries as stipulated through various regulations and environmental clearance process, we should make use of that infrastructure and use the data for air pollution regulation. Data from industries should be made public and integrated with government air ambient air quality monitoring which will not only help increase public air quality data availability but will also enhance the accountability of the industries forcing them to operate the stations efficiently. This will also enhance calibration, data quality and operability of air monitoring stations by industries.”

According to the report, India still lacks integration of air quality management plans with already established tools like, air quality forecasting, continuous emission monitoring systems, decision support system, source apportionment studies and emission inventories that are run by different administrative agencies. The report recommends that a future roadmap for NCAP will need to include expediting the identification of airsheds in the country to formulate and implement airshed-based air quality management using a sectoral emission load reduction-based approach with transparent data sharing on progress and planning under the programme.

Adding to the report findings Sunil Dahiya said, “It is good to see actions both at institutional strengthening and implementation levels. The country is making progress towards resolving the air pollution crisis but the severity of the situation demands more urgent, efficient and systematic solutions. India needs to move to a sectoral emission load reduction based approach for air quality management as it is only the reduction in consumption of polluting fuels and efficient pollution control at the source that will improve air quality in the long run.”

He also added that “With increasing evidence of impacts of air quality at lower pollution levels and WHO tightening its guidelines for ambient air pollution while India is in the
process of reviewing the ambient air quality standards, the revision committee should discuss the notification of varied ambient air quality standards or guidelines based on the background air quality levels for different airsheds and stove towards minimal ambient air pollution.”

**Contact:**

Sunil Dahiya  
Analyst  
Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA)  
[sunil@energyandcleanair.org](mailto:sunil@energyandcleanair.org)  
Mobile- +91 9013673250