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Smart Grid networks in emerging markets: Keeping consumers at the core

The variety of national energy challenges, regulations and industry structures globally means that there will be no single approach or indeed timing for countries to deploy smart grid technologies and solutions. In many emerging markets including India, a new kind of energy consumer is emerging and this group is the one who is increasingly defining the future of their country's energy marketplace. These consumers are becoming more mobile, more connected via social media and more conscious of their energy needs. They now expect more from their energy experience than just keeping the lights on. Utilities have to make the choice about where and how quickly they will transition from the traditional and classical approach to smart technologies.

Smart grids will allow utilities to keep their consumers at the core by enabling them to develop differential pricing and real-time monitoring to help optimize costs and improve revenues. For example, in areas of power shortage, utility companies have the flexibility to provide power to individuals who can pay a higher tariff for preset periods and conversely utility companies can manage and control the use of subsidized power by some economically weaker sections of customers.

Smart grids will also enable consumer inclusion in utility operations. For instance, utility companies can integrate urban micro-grids, independent of government control and run by communities themselves in major cities. Utility companies will also be able to offer value-added services to individual, corporate and institutional consumers seeking to manage their own power consumption.

The fundamental requirement to keep the consumer at the core of evolving policies and regulation requires a step-by-step design and implementation of intelligent solutions, tailored to fit specific needs. It is only through implementing smart grids in these countries, including India, can utility companies become intelligent service providers that meet the needs of their consumers – customers who expect reliable supply, clean energy, responsive service, new facilities and cost efficiency from their utility company.