

Press Release

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Milestone for Solar lamps achieved in India

Free Solar study lights for 1.6 million school children in poor villages

Chhattisgarh State decides to distribute free solar lights to 1.3 million poor households instead of continuing subsidies for kerosene lamps / quality light replaces subsidies for fossil fuels

The government of Chhattisgarh State in central India decided to provide free solar lights to all households in off-grid villages. 1.3 million poor families will benefit from this scheme. In addition, 1.65 million school children will receive solar study lights for their studies. The scheme is funded with savings from reducing subsidies: because the solar lamps replace kerosene lamps that were so far the only source of light, the state will save on providing discounted fuel for these lamps. The savings will break even over the investment cost within less than a year. The people are saving too on kerosene that they could not really afford. The new lamps provide at least five times more light and have a life span of ten years minimum. This success is achieved by THRIVE Energy from Hyderabad, trusted technology partner of *green energy against poverty*.

According to the latest census data from 2011, at least 1.3 million people in Chhattisgarh have no access to the electricity grid – mostly people from indigenous background, the so-called Adivasi. Even with this grim situation, Chhattisgarh is still above other states: on a national average, 44 per cent of the population in India depends on kerosene due to unavailability of the grid; in Bihar, the rate goes up to 89 per cent. For remote villages in 95 tribal dominated village blocks,

electrification would be especially difficult due to the terrain and cooperation with forest departments. Moreover, the grid in India is not reliable and notorious for black outs. Going for decentralised power generation instead of extending the grid is a smarter option. Small solar panels will charge directly the batteries of portable solar LED-Lamps. This approach will also make subsidies for kerosene redundant. The public distribution system in India provides per month 4 litres of kerosene to each Family, but this covers only half of the actual requirement. The subsidies amount to a total of 2.5 billion Rupies or 35 million EUR per year. Given the total investment of approx. 30 million EUR for the solar lamps, the project will break even within less than a year. During the 10-year life span of the lamps, they help saving costs that neither the state could really afford nor the poor that were previously dependant on kerosene. The project will be implemented within a year after the tender process is completed.

Most important for the Director of THRIVE Energy is not that his company has initiated a large and prestigious project, but that he achieved an important break through: he showed that it is better to invest in modern technology than to continue outdated subsidies. "I worked for nearly three years with the Chhattisgarh Government to banish kerosene fuel so that the Government saves money and the poor people get quality LED lights", says Ranga Bodavala. "This fulfils a dream that all people have access to good light, since it is the first time that a full state goes solar". According to his estimates, the children in the state will have 1.5 billion hours of extra study time without smell in their nose and throat or irritation of eyes. Their parents will have 2.7 billion extra working hours for house work and income generation like basket making, mat weaving etc. 150 million litres of kerosene will be saved annually and emission of 384,000 tons of CO₂ avoided. By providing solar lights to everyone in the state without grid connection, the state government makes a break through in replacing outdated kerosene lamps with modern solar lamps on a large scale.

green energy against poverty in Bonn is also very happy about this success. "We always believed in this technology", says Dr. Sabine te Heesen, CSR manager of the organisation in Germany. "Our technology partner THRIVE does not only produce high quality lamps, but works very hard to deploy them and improve the living conditions of the poor". However, despite this success, much still needs to be done: other states in India are still subsidising kerosene, and the projects by *green energy against poverty* in Calcutta are still in need of donations for equipping school-based "Solar Clubs" with more solar study lights.

A portable solar lamp provides sufficient light for a full room and costs about 15 EUR while a solar study light for school children costs 5 EUR. *green energy against poverty* continues to collect donations for projects with solar lamps.

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