



Meerwada

Bringing Renewable Energy to a Remote Village in India

SunEdison solar plant transforms lives with dependable electricity and economic empowerment

Eradication of Darkness



Challenge: Powering a Remote Community

In an era when electricity is taken for granted, it's hard to imagine a place without modern conveniences like lighting, cooking appliances, fans, and reliable communication. However, for the small village of Meerwada in central India, this difficult life was a reality—until recently.

Until very recently, Meerwada's 400 residents were among the billions of people worldwide who lack access to electricity. Located in Madhya Pradesh, the village is approximately 70 km (43 miles) from the nearest town, with no direct roads in. The economy in Meerwada is completely based on farming and cattle rearing. Before electrification, activity came to a standstill when the sun set. Villagers could not see to protect their crops or herds, and children could not study or play at night. Cooking was done over fires fueled by animal waste, and there was no refrigeration to prevent food spoilage or store medicines.

"Our village has never had electricity, we struggled without it," says Daulat Ram, the Village Sarpanch (chief). "Clearance issues with the forest department made it difficult to bring power to our area, so we were always forced to depend on kerosene lamps to light up the dark homes after sunset."

The village of Meerwada needed a way to overcome the limitations of the past and deliver reliable electricity that could transform the lives of its residents.

"Clearance issues with the forest department made it difficult to bring power to our area, so we were always forced to depend on kerosene lamps to light up the dark homes after sunset."

» Daulat Ram, Meerwada Sarpanch

Summary



Location

Meerwada, India

Population

400 people, 70 homes

Challenge

Deliver electrical power to a remote village in central India

Solution

SunEdison solar power plant provides reliable access to electricity for 70 homes

Impact

The day no longer ends when the sun sets. Residents can see to protect their crops and herds at night, charge mobile phones, improve education and seek new economic opportunities

Solution: Clean, Reliable Solar Energy

Working in close cooperation with local residents, SunEdison India built a 14kW solar plant to deliver power throughout the entire village. Construction took only four months. Now the plant delivers power to 400 people in 70 homes.

Today, Meerwada residents enjoy reliable access to electricity. Meerwada is one of the few places in India with this capability, as electrical utilities can be unreliable even in major cities.

Bringing electricity to Meerwada was not only a technical project, but a carefully planned social effort. After failed initiatives by other organizations in the past, it was critical that the SunEdison team earn the trust and respect of the local community.

For weeks, SunEdison worked closely with people in the village to assess their needs, explain the possibilities, and outline the costs. Residents were closely involved in the entire initiative, which gave them a strong sense of ownership.

A council system was arranged, with a representative for approximately every 10 homes. Each representative is a volunteer who considers their participation an honor within the community. To help manage and safeguard the power system, each representative is responsible for tracking payments and helping to protect the system from vandals.

During the installation process, residents participated in electricity safety education. Even children took part in the project, serving as translators and providing assistance to the team.

"The enthusiasm of the children was overwhelming; they are an entire generation excited by new opportunities," says Manik Jolly of SunEdison who led the effort. "At first, the children were most interested in having electricity to study after dark. Now they are also looking forward to music and other possibilities."

On the inauguration day, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, visited the village to participate in the festivities. That night, all the lights were turned on, and children were able to play after dark for the first time. One excited resident happily compared the evening to Diwali, the Indian festival of lights.

Impact: Richer Lives, New Opportunities

The Meerwada initiative is part of the SunEdison Eradication of Darkness program, which aims to light up 150 villages throughout India, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Having a steady source of clean, renewable energy available has had a dramatic impact on residents' daily lives.

The solar plant has set the entire community on the path to prosperity by eradicating darkness and allowing residents to extend their day past sunset. Local residents can hold meetings in the town hall after dark, children can study in their homes, and household chores can be completed before sunrise or after dark.

The electricity is not free; each homeowner pays approximately \$1.00 - \$1.50 per month—the equivalent of what they were paying for kerosene. But kerosene could not scale to power home appliances and modern electronics. Now residents can add fans, refrigerate perishables, and install additional lighting throughout their homes. Without solar energy, none of these conveniences would have been possible.

The new solar plant has also dramatically improved public safety, communication, and education for the people of Meerwada. After dark, the streets are bright with lights. Charging mobile phones is simple, enabling more frequent communication. Best of all, educational opportunities have improved substantially, establishing the foundation for a brighter future for the next generation.

The new facility in Meerwada has become an inspiration for people in neighboring villages who look forward to having electricity one day soon. With SunEdison's help, Meerwada will be just the first step in a continuing march toward progress.

"We are excited by the prospect of providing electricity to remote villages in India, Africa and Southeast Asia that do not have access to sustainable, reliable sources of electricity," says Pashupathy Gopalan, managing director, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Operations at SunEdison.

For More Information

To learn more about SunEdison, visit:
<http://www.sunedison.com>