



EcoSolutions NGO : Providing solar light to remotest villages in India

How it started?

I have a small farm near Mumbai at a place called Karjat. This is only 1 hr drive from Mumbai. During one of my visits to the farm, when it was late in evening, I noticed that there was no electricity and almost all the houses were in darkness. Almost all houses were burning a wick dipped in kerosene to get some light. Few days later, I came across an article, in Times of India newspaper, about five villages near Panvel (which is only half hour drive from Mumbai) and their struggle in trying to get electric connection for last 30 years. About 20 years ago the electric poles were put in place but due to fight between Electricity and Forest department, the villages could not get electricity till date.

I was disgusted at the state of affairs and it made me wonder if half hour out of Mumbai, power situation was so bad, GOD help rest of our country. I also reflected on what use was my IIT engineering degree and international work experience when people in our own country are facing hard times for basic necessities. I decided to act and purchased solar lamps and lit up all the 300 homes at the village near Panvel in a matter of 2 days. The villagers were amazed that finally light had reached them so fast. Since then I have not looked back and I have focused on reaching out to the remotest parts of India where for next few decades electricity will not reach - believe me there are many many such places.

Registering of Ecosolutions NGO

I registered Ecosolutions NGO with the purpose of bringing in high technology but low costs products to the remotest parts of India. The advantage of registration was that people wishing to donate could get tax advantage. Early on I decided not to make the solar products myself but to concentrate on reaching out. Many different innovative products are available in the world but to deliver them in far flung regions of our country is a challenge. We have managed to cover many remote parts of our country by identifying local NGOs and honest villagers who are ready to take our mission forward. This way we try to reduce our travel costs to the minimum.

Benefits of home solar lighting

By giving solar lights to individual homes we have observed the people really take care of the product and use it judiciously. This is unlike the sight of non functioning solar street lamps seen in many villages where government obsession with community good results in crores of rupees being spent on solar street lamps and batteries which do not perform due to poor maintenance and lack of accountability. Also if the home does not have light what is use of having light in the street?

On giving solar light in remote villages we bring direct benefit on Day One to the end user. Many NGOs, who have supported us, tell us that by giving these lights, their other work programs (for example : sanitation, education, women empowerment, etc.) have hugely benefited as many of their programs take a long time to bring results whereas the solar light brings immediate results. Solar light has a direct benefit on reduction of kerosene usage (which produces soot and smoke). It is well known fact that burning of wood and kerosene by poor people is one of the main causes for ill health.

The solar home lighting solutions have made a dramatic difference to the lives of people in villages across India – women folk can cook food in night time in proper light, children can study in the evening hours and men can continue their work in the evenings.

The solar lighting we give costs Rs 900 for Sun King Solo and Rs 1800 for Sun King Pro (manufactured by Greenlight Planet India Pvt. Ltd.). We ensure that the solar lamps we give use LED lighting technology and have the latest generation batteries Lithium Ferro Phosphate (5 year life). This ensures that the solar lamp reaching the hands of the villager has as long a life as technically possible.

How do we locate the remote villages ?

Right from our childhood we know places in India which are inaccessible and they will not have access to electricity. For example; villages in the remote valleys of Himalayas, on the islands in Brahmaputra river, in Sunderbans islands of West Bengal, tribals living in Central India in and around the National parks, in the deep deserts of Rajasthan, the count is endless....

Using Google Earth (freely downloadable software) we zoom down on the area, view the villages as well as count the number of huts in the village. That gives an idea about the number of homes in each village. The satellite images seen using Google Earth software are very good and many times we can also identify the path to reach these remote villages. We use Google search to locate the telephone number and address of local NGOs & Govt. representatives working in those areas and by talking to them on phone we pin point the places which are unelectrified and in desperate need of light.

Once the locations are identified, we send the lamps using transport services from Mumbai to nearby town in that area. Local people then step forward to help us take the lamps to the remotest places and we distribute the lamps.

Using this methodology we are systematically covering different remote regions of India. Now we have a network of NGOs all across the country and work is going on simultaneously in many different places to light up villages all over India. Often I personally go to monitor and review the progress of our work.

Sustainable model of distribution ? - Not really - But we will get there - one day....

In the early days of my work, I was going around and giving solar lamps completely free to people living in villages with no light. Since that time we have matured and are now taking partial money from the villagers. This has helped us to rotate the donation money we receive and with the same limited money we are able to reach out to many more homes.

We do not have a fixed financial model and depending on poverty levels we vary the money which we will collect from the villager. For the smaller solar lamp which we give, which costs us Rs 900, we sometimes take Rs 500 and at other times we have to settle for Rs 200 or Rs 100 or even free. While it may sound crazy - one should not forget that the places which we are reaching out are some of the remotest in India. In these places there is no source of livelihood for the people and most of the villagers depend on subsistence farming for survival.

One thing is clear - we will not leave the destitute, women with children and old people, who cannot afford to pay anything, to live in darkness.

I need your support to move ahead at a faster pace...

We have lit up nearly 30,000 homes in the remotest parts of India. It must be noted that it is not just the number of lamps given but where we have given which matters. We reach out to those locations which will not get electricity for next few decades....

In our fourth year of work we have now reached a steady distribution of more than 1000 lamps per month and we dream of reaching 10,000 lamps per month this year itself. It depends on our source of funding which I am confident that based on our work quality and reachout to remotest parts of India will activate good donors to come forward.

It is my belief that many people want to donate but are wary of how the money is going to be used by the NGO. Once the donors are satisfied, money will keep coming. Also very important is good word of mouth reference.

If you are PASSIONATE, DREAM and ACT then your mission will succeed. I urge everyone to participate with us on this joyful journey of lighting up homes all across India. Help us by donating to our cause and by spreading information about our work among your friends.

Remember the words of Mother Teresa : "In this life we cannot always do great things but we can do small things with great love".

Contact information

Yatendra Agrawal, B. Tech (Mechanical Engg.) from IIT Bombay (1984)
Founder & Trustee of EcoSolutions NGO
Mobile 91-9869182356 ; Landline 91-22-27820978
Address: 46/4, RCF Row-houses, Sector 6, Vashi, Navi Mumbai 400703, INDIA

Website: www.ecosolutionsngo.org

email: yatendra.agrawal@ecosolutionsngo.org

Bank details for Ecosolutions:

Electronic payments in Indian Rupees can be made directly to Axis bank Account in name of "EcoSOLUTIONS"

Axis Bank : B-6, Lajpat Nagar - II , New-Delhi - 110024, INDIA.

A/C no: 126010100281263

IFS code - UTIB0000126

Checks in INDIAN Rupees should be written in name of "EcoSolutions" and posted to Yatendra Agrawal, 46/4, RCF Row-houses, Sector 6, Vashi, Navi Mumbai 400703, INDIA
(EcoSolutions has 80G approval from Income Tax and donations get 50% tax benefit)

Checks in US Dollars should be written in name of "EcoSolutions Foundation Inc.". and posted to Peter Lane, 2787 Ridgecrest, Southlake, TX76092 , USA
(EcoSolutions is registered in USA as a 510 (3)(c) and all donations are tax exempt)

Photos



Benefit of using solar light over kerosene light



Comparison of home solar lighting systems with traditional lighting



Reaching out to remote locations in Arunachal Pradesh



Trying to reach an island in Sunderbans, West Bengal



Tribal family on the islands of Brahmaputra river in Assam using latest generation of solar light, Sun King Pro, provided by Ecosolutions.



Typical village hut on the islands in Brahmaputra river, Assam



Sun King Solar light in use in a tribal hut on Sunderbans islands of West Bengal



Typical village hut in Sunderbans islands, West Bengal



Reaching out to women



Reaching out to children