

When Ideas Flow, Villages Grow

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Introduction

Today, we have developed our world to the extent that everything we have is but a click away. A lot of credit for this progress goes to Benjamin Franklin and the phenomenon known as Electricity. Electricity has become a necessity of our life, one without which you could survive but not grow to your full potential. Everyone in Pakistan knows how it feels like to be without electricity but no one feels it as acutely as the people from the rural areas.



According to International Energy Association about 31% of the population of Pakistan lives without electricity. We – the people of the city – carelessly use electricity without taking into consideration the environment and the people who live without it. The use of non renewable resources to generate electricity not only deteriorates our environment, it is also unsustainable. Other possible options like wind, solar, tidal and hydropower energy need to be explored further. It is not just for the government to think about only, rather people on individual family scale need to rethink their lifestyle options and adapt to a more earth friendly living.

Off-grid System as an Alternate Source of Generating Electricity

As the term suggests, off - grid means not being connected to the main grid system. Considering the situation of Pakistan today, off – grid system is more a necessity than substitute. If the government is not able to provide electricity for whatever reasons, people can't just sit and wait for someone to come and improve their situation. Even in Quran it is mentioned that God only helps those who help themselves therefore the initiatives need to be taken by the community to do something about this state of affairs.

A successful example of it can be seen in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, where Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in collaboration with the people of the community installed hundreds of micro-hydroelectric plants. It not only provides them with electricity but also channels water which helps in irrigation of land and becomes a source of fresh water.



Data Collection

Being from Hafizabad, I interviewed people from my neighborhood to see if they knew about low electrification rates or off-grid systems. The table below shows the results for the 25 interviews.

People aware of off-grid system	People unaware of off-grid system	People aware of rate of rural electrification	People unaware of rate of rural electrification
10	15	8	17
40%	60%	32%	68%

I found it surprising that many of the people living here did not know about the low electrification rates but quite some people knew of solar power. This was due to the media hype about the solar park project. People here want to know more about alternative sources because of load shedding and comparatively expensive electricity. It is a cause of quite some distress amongst the community therefore I think we need raise awareness in the rural areas so that they an equal chance to better themselves.

Creating Awareness

“Union is strength”

My friends and I tried to experiment with the options we had for creating awareness. We pooled in our resources and bought some small solar panels. Then we went to the villages around Hafizabad and gathered people. We explained to them with the help of leaflets, banners and pictures, the process of acquiring these panels, their life and the process by which they work. People were sufficiently enthused with the idea so we asked them to pass on this idea to three people they knew who would further forward this idea to 3 people they knew and the word would spread around (idea taken from the movie Jai Ho).

We also created a Facebook page so that it would provide a platform for likeminded people to come together and work for the betterment of our rural community.



Impact

After a few attempts at convincing people that it is a safe investment, 60% of the people agreed to buy the said technology in the near future. I am happy to say that two people of the group we talked to, **DID** buy them recently and were satisfied with the result. Having been satisfied they spread the word around which inspired even more people to seriously think about investing to improve their quality of life. We are also happy to acknowledge that there is no better marketing policy than the review of a satisfied customer so we hope more people will benefit from this technology.

Our group was appreciated by many people and some people even gave us mementos to memorialize the event. Having said that I would also like to add that not everyone accepted our information, as we are younger than them in age and width of knowledge but we were not deterred. We talked to those who were more open and let those who did not agree with us see the proof of our success.

Reflection

Having gone through this process, I feel that I have contributed my time, knowledge and effort to a worthy cause. As they say “charity starts at home”, this whole process has taught me to make my living more environment friendly, more sustainable and it has also given me hope for the future.

HOPE is the place where you want to go

HOPE is the person you want to know

HOPE is the feeling that carries you through and

HOPE is the future for me and for you.

So keeping a positive outlook and making every possible effort we would lead our villages to a brighter future.