

Profile: ONergy India

Bringing solar power to rural India



Challenge

One out of four people in India lacks access to electricity, according to the World Bank's Sustainable Energy for All database. Most of them live in rural areas that are too remote to have a grid connection.

Low-income households without access to electricity rely on wood or other biomass for cooking and heating—sources of fuel that are expensive and create both indoor and outdoor air pollution. Adopting clean energy solutions is often difficult, however, because remote areas often lack the after-sales services and infrastructure that make such solutions feasible.



Innovation

ONergy (www.onergy.in) offers solar products to rural people in India. Its best-selling products are solar home systems (SHS) of 20–75 watts, which sell for USD 130–300. Customers pay 20–30 percent of the price as the down payment, financing the remainder with a five-year loan.

In 2014, ONergy introduced several new products, including a 10-watt plug-and-play solar home lighting system (USD 50–90), solar irrigation pumps (USD 2,000–10,000) and solar micro-grids (USD 1,000–50,000). Other innovative products include solar energy-powered TVs, computers, micro-grids, and irrigation systems that are not offered by any competitor in the states in which the company operates. The company has also developed a specific charge controller, which includes a mobile phone charger and shows the level of battery charge remaining.

ONergy develops high-quality products, supports them with a strong after-sales service network, facilitates consumer financing, and develops an ecosystem for sustainable development and rural empowerment. It has created a full-service infrastructure by establishing distribution centers (known as “renewable energy centers”) operated by a network of trained rural entrepreneurs and leveraging existing networks of local NGOs, self-help groups, and microfinance institutions to market its products, raise awareness, and provide financing.

Impact

Since its foundation, in 2009, ONergy has established 18 renewable energy centers, reaching over 2,000 villages. It has set up more than 150 micro-grid systems and installed 40 solar-driven irrigation pumps. Its solar solutions are estimated to have improved the lives of over a quarter million people.

Scaling Up

ONergy is operating in some of the poorest states in India, where energy infrastructure and electricity supply are lacking. Few other energy companies are active in these regions, resulting in massive market potential for ONergy. The poor state of infrastructure in these states is also a challenge,

however. Many people in rural India either do not know about solar solutions (and thus need to be convinced of the added value) or have had a bad experience with solar products and are not interested in trying solar energy again. ONergy works to overcome these barriers by educating consumers about the value of its products.