PROJECT RESULT / CASE STUDY

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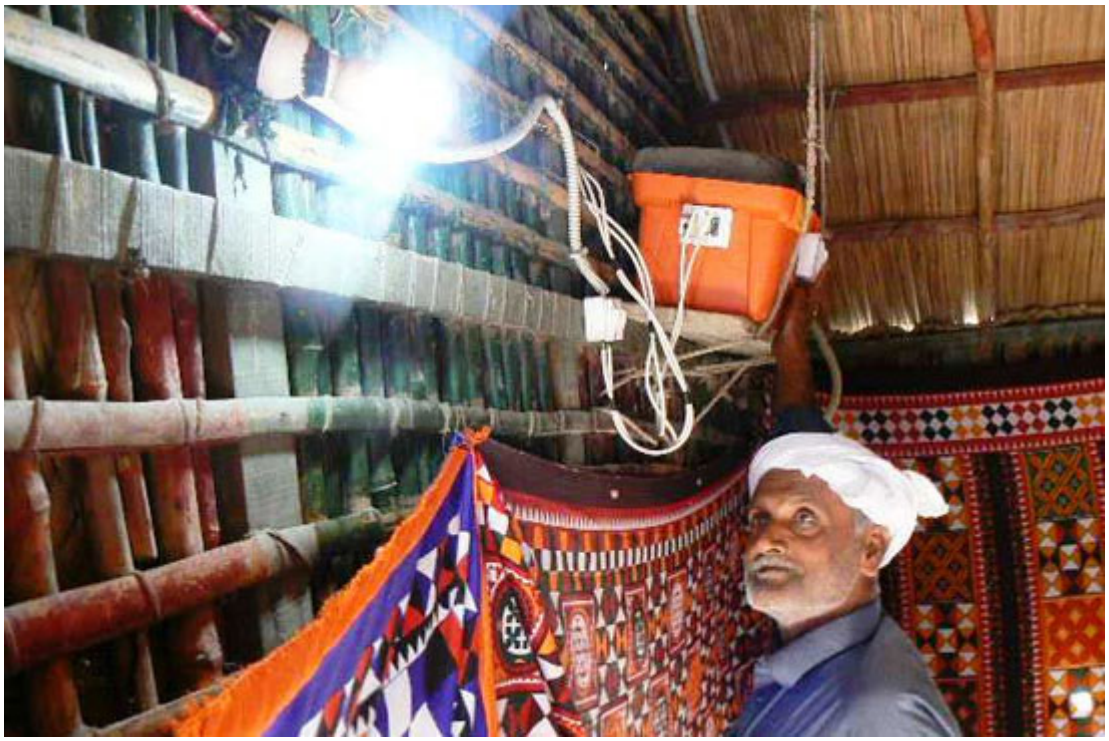
Providing Electricity to Pakistan's Remote Fishing Villages

The fisherfolk of the Indus Delta in Sindh Province finally have electricity to light up their homes, and their lives.



Fisherman Mohammad Yousuf, 64, switches on a solar powered light in his home in Hayat Jat in Pakistan's Sindh Province. Photo by M. Ismail Khan/ ADB

Thatta, Pakistan – Solar power has provided more than light to the modest home of Ibrahim, 35, a fisherman in the coastal village of Hayat Jat in Pakistan's Sindh Province. It also provided him with a better family life.

'The project has succeeded in raising productivity and incomes, and in providing the residents of eight of the poorest coastal subdistricts with access to basic amenities.'

"Our day starts early in the morning before our children wake up," he says. "We return home late to find our children asleep again ... . But now, thanks to the light in my home, things have changed. I can sit up and talk with my wife at night, while she knits shawls and my children play."

Hayat Jat - 98 kilometers east of Karachi - is one of many fishing villages that straddle the delta in Pakistan's Sindh Province, where the Indus River flows into the Arabian Sea. Although rich in marine life and mangrove forest, the region is among the poorest in the country. The villages that dot the delta's rough and arid terrain have never had electricity, mainly due to high installation costs and low economic returns involved in connecting the scattered villages to the grid. Frequent storms and cyclones that would blow down electricity polls also complicated the situation.

Generating incomes, opportunities

To address these issues, and to reduce the poverty in vulnerable coastal communities, in 2007 ADB provided a loan of $41 million from its concessionary Asian Development Fund for the Sindh Coastal Community Development Project. The project has succeeded in raising productivity and incomes, and in providing the residents of eight of the poorest coastal subdistricts

with access to basic amenities such as solar power, fresh water, toilets, water tanks, cyclone-resistant school buildings, flood protection embankments, and new roads and bridges.

"Community participation and ownership have been the cornerstones of the project's approach," says Muhammad Umer Memon, project director. "The staff conducted an extensive analysis through consultation and research before initiating dialogue with the targeted villagers to establish community organizations. The community organizations then prepared and implemented village development plans based on their specific priorities and on a cost-sharing basis."

> "We can now charge our mobile phone batteries at home. Before, we had to spend an entire day hiking to the nearest town and then pay to recharge our phones."
> - Ibrahim, 35, fisherman

So far, the project has organized 760 community organizations in 703 villages, representing almost 20,000 households and more than 22,000 members. Of those, 47% are women. Each target village was entitled to choose one small-scale project worth up to PRs700,000 (about $7,600). The community organizations have planned and implemented 540 small-scale schemes under the project, and 105 schemes financed by other donors.

"The community organizations have also developed a pool of skilled technicians who are playing a critical role in maintaining the new infrastructure and services, including the solar lighting system," says Umer.

Going solar

At Hayat Jat, the community organization decided its priority project was solar lighting. Each house in Hayat Jat now boasts a solar panel that can light three 10-watt fluorescent bulbs for 8 hours under normal weather conditions. The average lifespan of the solar units are 10 years, but batteries have to be replaced after 2 years. One solar unit costs around PRs 22,000 (about $230).

The expense is worth it for the villagers of Hayat Jat, and 161 other villages that have implemented the scheme. Less money is now spent on buying kerosene and candles. Mobile phones are now charged at home for free. "Before, we had to spend an entire day hiking to the nearest town and then pay to recharge our phones," says fisherman Ibrahim.

Villagers also report that since the lighting was installed theft has gone down, and productivity has gone up. Women now work into the night repairing fishing nets and preparing the day's catch for sale at the market. Meanwhile, the fishing boats now carry portable electric lights that allow them to spend longer on the water.

Life is also a little less precarious at Hayat Jat. Spiders and snakes that previously crept and slithered into people's homes under cover of darkness are now quickly spotted and swept outside before they can do any damage.

"We sleep on the floor. Without electricity, poisonous creepers would bite my children," says fisherman Mohammad Yousuf, 64. "But the room light keeps my family safe from venomous insects, and the subsequent cost of treatment in case of snakebites.

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