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Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Energy

Rapid Grid extensions via fossil fuels and nuclear energy is not really solving the primary issue - reduction in poverty. The issue of poverty is complex and there is a very strong linkage between poverty reduction and decentralized sustainable energies. For example simple provision of electricity will not eradicate poverty - there has to be a holistic thinking - one that decentralized energy forces one to think and implement. there are strong example of linkages between decentralized access and poverty - while climate change solutions become an added benefit.

There are proven sustainable models and processes that link sustainable energies to poverty alleviation. But they do get lost in the large picture because of lack of understanding of the grassroots problems that exist among the underserved communities. That needs to change if we have to tackle poverty in a more systematic way – decentralized sustainable energies like solar, biomass, biogas, small wind etc do provide those solutions.

To alleviate poverty, we all know one needs to increase incomes. To increase incomes, one needs to create income-generating activities in the un(der)served areas. Many of the income generating activities require access to reliable energy. Contrary to the popular economics and policies, it is not advisable to wait for centralized energy solutions to provide that particular economic impetus. Inefficiencies, hidden subsidies, poor implementation and lack of transparency have never been properly factored while comparing centralized versus decentralized energy options. Also one needs to factor in the loss to the world well being on not (or delay in) providing the poor with reliable energy. The result is very evident – the large numbers of poor have remained poor with no options of avenues for increasing their income or their quality of life. The cost is not only enormous but is often neglected.

Skilled seamstresses cannot upgrade their manual sewing machines to electric machines, trained poor welders do not have options to open welding shops, silk weavers lament the unavailability of reliable electricity, higher heating bills (because of inefficient housing) eat into incomes etc and the list goes on. Decentralized options of providing them energy at their doorstep exist today and can be implemented provided one thinks of a solution in a holistic way. A sustainable solution can be provided if the technology, value of the technology, finance, and market linkages are spoken about in the same breath.

Small interventions like solar lighting solutions to replace kerosene lamps for village vendors can lead the poor away from expensive present day options, thus leading to savings, increased number healthy working hours etc. These are just couple of examples but there are thousands of such simple, small interventions using sustainable energy that can directly lead to better quality of life and increased incomes for the poor – and many of these solutions or interventions can cross country borders.

Many of the solutions and models of business, for the problems mentioned above, need to be scaled up and replicated. Eradication of poverty leads to a healthier living world with a stable social structure – an important element in today's world.