



Lighting up low-income households

Thrive Solar is an Indian social enterprise serving low-income households and communities by providing safe, reliable and affordable electric lighting – an essential tool of development. Beginning as a non-governmental organization (NGO), Thrive Solar is now a growing company with a community empowerment business model. It received its first funding from Oikocredit's Indian subsidiary Maanaveeya in December 2014.

Thrive was established in 2001 by public health management specialist Dr Ranganayakulu Bodavala ('Dr Ranga') under the name Volunteers for Rural Health, Education and Information Technology. Within a few years Thrive had

set up a campus on 20 acres of rural land with residences, laboratories and workshops near Hyderabad.

Access to energy

Six hundred million people in India lack

Country information

Country name

Republic of India

Major cities

New Delhi (capital) 25 million;
Mumbai 20.7 million; Kolkata 11.8 million;
Bangalore 9.7 million; Chennai 9.6 million;
Hyderabad 8.7 million (2014)

Population

1,236,344,631 (July 2014 est.)

Population below the poverty line

29.8% (2010 est.)

Languages

Hindi and English (official languages),
Bengali 8.1%, Telugu 7.2%, Marathi 7%,
Tamil 5.9%, Urdu 5%, Gujarati 4.5%,
Kannada 3.7%, Malayalam 3.2%, Oriya
3.2%, Punjabi 2.8%, Assamese 1.3%,
Maithili 1.2%, other 5.9%

Literacy rate (adult population)

74%



proper domestic lighting. Many live off grid, and households with electricity connections often experience power cuts. Evening study and home working are difficult. By 2004, Thrive had recognized access to energy as a key development need and began distributing off-grid solar lighting as a safer, healthier and cheaper domestic alternative to kerosene.

Thrive won the 2006 World Bank Development Marketplace Award and received a US \$ 173,000 grant to provide solar lighting products to 10,000 rural





Eight hundred schoolchildren in Ukhrool district, Manipur State, received Thrive solar lamps.

Photo: Thrive Solar

► families. In 2007, Thrive Energy Technologies was incorporated as a private limited company, becoming Thrive Solar Energy in 2013.

While Thrive the NGO continues to engage in social activities, Thrive Solar provides residential solar photovoltaic (PV) lighting in villages. Its 'One Child One Light' initiative supports children's right to education by supplying a clean, portable, rechargeable and low-cost solar light-emitting diode (LED) study light to thousands of low-income families. Thrive Solar has also supplied affordable solar lighting for rural households in Africa.

Manufacturing, innovation and fair employment

Thrive Solar operates three manufacturing plants in India and one in Kenya. It has developed innovations in solar panel making, plastic casing, battery mounting, street lighting and village energy kiosks. With its own vehicle fleet, nine regional offices and a large dealer network in India, three branch offices outside India and dealers in 12 other countries, Thrive serves both domestic and export markets.

One of the company's factories, on the site of India's National Institute of Rural Development in Rajendranagar, near Hyderabad, is powered mainly by roof-mounted solar panels. Here a mainly female workforce assembles and packs solar lamps and energy units, using imported components, for distribution and

sale. The company employs more than 300 people in total, 70% of them female to help more women gain economic independence. Working conditions are good, and employees receive on-the-job training.

Clients and partners

Thrive Solar's clients include 140 NGOs, 10 microfinance institutions (MFIs) and 10 trusts worldwide. In India it has partnered with Allahabad UP Gramin Bank to provide loans to beneficiaries of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to buy good quality LED lights at subsidized rates.

In Puttapaka village, known for its unique tie and dye style of sarees, Thrive Solar has supplied government subsidized solar lighting units to 150 handloom weaver families. Villagers formed groups to decide democratically which households should receive the lamps, prioritizing those with lowest incomes. The weavers' productivity has now increased, and their eyesight is less under strain when they work.

Thrive Solar's future plans focus on expanding its manufacturing capacity across India and bring even more light to low-income people. "The social mission of Thrive to bring light into the lives of poor in India and beyond Indian borders will be facilitated by the support of Oikocredit. To put it briefly, it would literally be Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya, leading from darkness into light", said Dr Ranga.

More information

Maanaveeya & Thrive Solar

Maanaveeya, Oikocredit's subsidiary in India, approved a loan to Thrive Solar of INR 40 million (approximately € 0.53 million) in December 2014 to supply solar home-lighting systems and other products.

Oikocredit's approach

Oikocredit is one of the world's largest sources of private funding to the microfinance sector. It provides credit to small businesses through intermediary microfinance institutions across the developing world. It also provides credit directly to trade cooperatives, fair trade organizations and buys stakes in small to medium enterprises (SMEs).

Oikocredit offers its investors a triple return: social, environmental and financial. In addition to earning modest financial returns, investors are secure in the knowledge that their money is being used to fight poverty, promote fair trade and respect our planet's natural resources.

Social performance management is a priority for Oikocredit. Measuring and demonstrating social return on investment is essential, as we strive to know that our investments lead to positive change in the lives of disadvantaged people. In particular, we aim to increase our reach to rural, agricultural communities and are committed to women's empowerment.

Oikocredit's close proximity to its clients and market knowledge through its network of local staff is at the foundation of its work. With a positive track record spanning 40 years, we know that finance for development works.