Light Every Birth: solar suitcases for maternal health care

Description of the project: We Care Solar addresses global maternal-newborn health by providing reliable and renewable electricity to power the lighting, communication, and medical devices essential for obstetric care. Around the world, clinicians struggle in near-darkness to provide lifesaving care in facilities lacking electricity. The “Light Every Birth” initiative has brought solar suitcases to public health facilities throughout African, Asian and Latin-American countries, equipping over 4,000 maternal health centers. The 12-volt DC solar electric system includes medical lights, headlamps, a fetal heart-rate monitor and installation hardware. This initiative facilitates timely, quality care for women and newborns in last-mile health centers; it is a model for gender-sensitive energy transition.

Climate impact: We Care Solar suitcases replace fossil fuel sources of lighting, such as candles, kerosene lanterns, oil wick lamps, and diesel fuel generators, reducing carbon dioxide formation, improving air quality, and removing the risk of fire. After deploying more than 4,000 solar suitcases in partnership with NGOs and UN agencies, about 40,000 tons of CO2 emissions could be reduced. By providing solar energy, the initiative is making rural health centers a model of renewable energy for communities.

Gender impact: Foremost, the initiative improves life chances for women and newborns in regions with persistently high maternal and neonatal mortality rates and low rates of energy access. Due to the lack of female solar installers, a “Women Solar Ambassador” program was launched to develop training materials showcasing women as installers and to promote women trainers for capacity-building on solar installation and maintenance. An educational program encourages more girls to enter STEM fields.

Scalability / replicability: The solar suitcases as well as educational and capacity-building programs can be rolled-out in more areas. A best practice guide for scale-up has been developed in this regard. A replicable model includes sharing decision-making with local agencies, creating steering committees with key stakeholders, training local technicians and healthcare workers in solar maintenance, providing ongoing technical support, and ensuring eventual handover of the programs into local and national governments.

Game changing rice culture empowers rural women to ensure food security in South Odisha

Description of the project: Pragati Koraput works with over 8,000 ethnic women farmers in Koraput District, India, to ensure climate resilient nutritional food security. Activities include training on water saving System of Rice Intensification (SRI) for rice and millets, organic crop diversification with access to indigenous stress tolerant seeds, farm mechanization, and organized collectives for market access. The project has enhanced women’s position as change agents in the family and community. It has also increased the communities’ understanding of climate impacts on agriculture and the importance of proper conservation and use of resources for climate resilience.

Climate impact: System of Rice Intensification (SRI) creates aerobic soil conditions through shallow and intermittent irrigation, which contributes to better crop yield and food security, drop in production costs, and reduced freshwater consumption (~40%). This remarkable water management system in rice paddies, as well as reduced use of chemical fertilizer have resulted in substantial methane reduction, with significant mitigation and adaptation impact.

Gender impact: Thanks to the training and mentoring activities, confidence and self-esteem have risen in the mind of 8,200 women beneficiaries from 315 villages. The initiative has created space for the women to participate in local, state and national forums. They take leadership roles in communities to discuss and act on climate issues impacting their lives. They motivate peers to adopt innovative technologies for resilient agriculture. Men in the villages acknowledge their significant contribution, which is transforming the gendered power relations.

Scalability / replicability: SRI has the potential to involve many more farmers across the region as it is a methodology with proven results. Replicating SRI organic practices can have far-reaching positive impacts on a large scale, such as increase in food production, releasing the financial burden on farmers and promoting a more sustainable economy, with improved nutritional food security. Applying the principles of SRI in other crops and crop diversification will revive biodiversity and protect soil and water quality.