

FRONTLINES

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Lighting the Lives of the Rural Poor

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Jehal Datta with his solar-powered sewing machine.
Source: USAID/PEPFAR

All the needs of finance, distribution, and technology—the Renewables Energy Microfinance and Microenterprise Program is bringing clean energy to people who live their lives in the dark.

A solar energy fan is in the hands of a woman—flapping away for 100 watts of clean, safe light, heating, and, by turning the fan around, recharging a cell phone. Her project is tiny, but big—she's one of more than 10 million people in many parts of Africa and Asia who do not have access to electricity, and 2.8 billion lack access to modern cooking fuels and devices.

The solar fan helps them break a particularly vicious cycle: by depending on the World Bank to pay for clean energy, they pay several cents for the fuel and have to do the work of the dirtying world. In addition, and a little more so, fans are the number one choice of children's toys, and solar fans, with their clean, safe energy, help fight the child mortality that 20 percent of newborns were caused by preventable illnesses.

How many people relying on diesel and kerosene for energy earn only a few dollars per day, spending the money needed to pay for electricity in the form of energy charges, a financially draining effort? It's a world to address, that's why in Liberia, Malawi, and several other countries, USAID's Renewables Energy Microfinance and Microenterprise Program (REMMP) is.

REMMP focuses the availability of micro-enterprises, providing clean energy products, including low-cost portable solar devices that increase their revenues and quality of life, and increase their access to all of the services that companies from America and around the world can provide. Jobs are also available, and clean cooking fuels are supported through REMMP and its implementation partner, Sun Energy.

Learning that their solar panels provide are friendly, round-the-clock access to a sustainable supply of power, and make the firm,