

A Labour Colony gets Solar Power!

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Written specially for Vikalp Sangam In April 2014 a DC mini-grid system was installed by SELCO India to provide basic energy services to a community of labourers living and working in Baikampady industrial estate, north of Mangalore. The owner of the 75 brick buildings which housed this community decided to install a solar power system, to replace the costly use of kerosene. Extending the grid to each house was impractical due to the informal nature of the settlement.



The need was identified by a local SELCO India Business Associate. The final design included 1.2 kWpk of Solar PV panels, a battery bank and LED based lighting. 60 houses were provided with one 3W LED tube light, and 15 houses with two 3W LED tube lights, as well as power provision for a TV, set-top box and fan. The local Canara Bank Branch financed the project through a loan to the owner, who plans to divide the monthly loan repayment among the residents of the site, and will increase their house rent appropriately. The provision of lighting facilities will greatly improve living conditions in these households, with the large number of school going students being able to study in brighter, better quality lighting and women being able to cook and complete household chores after their work day. Some households will also be able to access the next level of energy services in terms of fans, televisions. A critical aspect is the replacement of expenditure on kerosene. The intervention has helped build trust with the community, providing



an opportunity to address other energy-related

issues.

More significantly, this solution brings in a level of improvement in the rental model for the community, which is now provided basic amenities in addition to the shelter itself (characteristic of house rental models in most contexts). The role of the local landowner in the system also provides an impetus to local entrepreneurship. This highlights a unique aspect of the project which is the already strong collection mechanism in place and the presence of a single entrepreneur owning the entire system. Following the installation, there has also been a keen interest from 1-2 other landowners in the area to establish similar models for their labour colonies. Photo credits Jonathan Bassett, SELCO Foundation Contact: [Surabhi Rajagopal](#)