

contexts



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Bangladesh, among the world's most densely populated countries, boasts a population of 130 million people squeezed into an area the size of Wisconsin. In 1976, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funded a feasibility study on rural electrification in the country that was carried out by NRECA and Commonwealth Associates of the United States. The next year, the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board was established with electric co-ops, called Palli Bidyut Samaties (PBSs), serving consumer-members. Just as in the United States, a democratically elected board governs each PBS, while day-to-day operations are run by a general manager overseeing employees.

A total of 70 PBSs make up Bangladesh's rural electrification network. Peak demand reaches 1,755 MW, exceeding the 1,200 MW available.

"We manage the gap through load management—and with rolling blackouts staggered on different days," acknowledges Majumder. "We are also introducing energy-efficient compact fluorescent lightbulbs to make the best use of our resources, using geographic information systems tools, doing more engineering and planning, and studying environmental issues."

Efforts to bring electric power to rural Bangladesh are supported financially by USAID and with NRECA technical assistance. "Personnel from more than 120 NRECA member co-ops—including line workers, engineers, and accountants—have volunteered to install poles, string lines, connect meters, and set up financial operations in the nation," reports James Ford, NRECA country director.

STEPPING FROM DARKNESS INTO DAYLIGHT

Since NRECA International Programs first helped bring electricity to rural Bangladesh in south Asia more than 30 years ago, the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Program—modeled after its U.S. counterpart—now provides power to more than 40 million consumers, many of them farmers

turning on lights for the first time.

"Electrifying farms has had a huge social and economic impact," Habib Ullah Majumder, chairman of the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board, explained during a recent visit to NRECA headquarters in Arlington, Va. "We have installed 206,000 irrigation connections with electric pumps. They operate from midnight to 8 a.m.

Electricity has allowed us to improve irrigation and greatly increase food production, including a third rice crop annually, and make our farmers more self-sufficient."

Another 6.2 million residences and nearly 900,000 commercial and industrial accounts in the country have been hooked up. More than 32,000 miles of lines carry energy to 46,000 villages.