

FROM SHOPKEEPER TO COMMUNITY 'LIGHT KEEPER'



Vijay Shah, 47
Kashmar Village, Saran District

Vijay Shah, lives with his wife and three children. When he was younger, he worked as a tempo driver, but fed up of spending all his time on the road, he started working with a marriage tent supplier. A few years later, with his family growing, and needing a stable income, he took a loan for Saija finance to open a grocery shop.

Like most villages in Bihar, Kashmar struggles to get regular and reliable power supply. Most inhabitants spend their evenings in the pools of light cast by kerosene lamps. Those who can afford it, pay the diesel generator owner for some electricity in the evenings. "Not everyone could afford to pay Rs. 150 per month for each light. That too, the generator runs only for 3 hours in the evening," says Vijay.

BETTER QUALITY OF LIGHT

In February 2013, through an executive of Saija finance, Vijay got to know about Villgro's EEIP. After attending one of the awareness training workshops, he felt confident that here was a way he could make money and serve the community at the same time. He was most interested in the Solar Charging Station (SCS) option, which was manufactured and installed by TERI. "These solar lanterns are 100 times better than an ordinary kerosene lamp. It gives much better quality of light. It costs lesser, runs longer and doesn't give out toxic fumes. All in all it's a winner," says Vijay.

remaining amount as a loan from Saija finance and placed the order with TERI on his behalf.

'WORTH EVERY PENNY'

When the Solar Recharging Station arrived in Kashmar there was a lot of excitement in the village. Yet, it took time and effort to generate demand. Vijay came up with plan to showcase his product: "At 4 am, I walked out with 10 solar lanterns in my hand towards the village tea stall. Immediately, shopkeepers and farmers who leave home at the same time saw the product and started to ask me about it. I gave the 10 units away for trials. On the same day I got 10 regular customers."

Vijay charges his 35 regular customers Rs. 5 per day for each solar lantern. He keeps 15 remaining solar lanterns on stand-by for one-time customers who may require lights for an occasion or an emergency. He explains, "I am able to charge these customers between Rs. 10 and Rs. 20. These 15 standby solar lanterns bring me more money by the end of the month, than the ones I hire out every day."

Vijay's first customer Mala Devi says, "You can't help but fall in love with this light. It has made such a difference to our lives. We can even work early in the morning, before sunrise. It's dependable. It's completely worth every penny. I can't survive

“Knowing that I will make at least Rs. 6000 a month has given us a sense of security that we have never experienced before. With the grocery store there's no guarantee on how much you will make at end of the month, so we had to constantly negotiate with life.”

EEIP then organised a field visit to Nevada district, where TERI had already sold and installed a few Solar Charging Stations. Any doubts that Vijay had were soothed after he saw the enterprise and met the entrepreneur.

He decided to take the plunge and invested Rs. 15000 from his savings towards purchasing the equipment. Villgro helped him secure the

without this lantern anymore."

The most positive impact has been on the village's children. Most of the children in Kashmar are busy with family chores in the day and end up studying in the evenings with the aid of a kerosene lamp. Vijay says, "Education is key for my community to uplift itself. Now with the clean bright light of the solar lanterns the children are able to study

better. This gives me a lot of joy.”

The business has brought some much-needed financial stability for Vijay and his family. “Knowing that I will make at least Rs. 6000 a month has given us a sense of security that we have never experienced before. With the grocery store there’s no guarantee on how much you will make at end of the month, so we had to constantly negotiate with life.”

Vijay hopes to purchase one more Solar Charging Station this year after he had repaid his loan to Saija. He has also been able to motivate two other entrepreneurs, Manish Kumar and Kameshwar Prasad, to join EEIP. “I am so glad I have been able to encourage two other people join EEIP. It is of course helping them earn a living, but more importantly more lives are getting touched by solar power,” says Vijay.



Vijay Kumar and his wife next to their Solar Charging Station