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A smart village which runs on solar power

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HYDERABAD: At Chhotkie village deep inside the Satkosia Tiger Reserve at Angul district of Odisha, 150 homes have access to electricity and have well lit street lights. This is despite the village not being connected to the state or national electricity grid.

Chhotkie village is what experts at International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid-Tropics (ICRISAT) call, a smart village where off-grid power supply exists through the set up of solar power plants or by using hybrid renewable energy sources for power generation. "The entire set up is automated," claims Ameet Deshpande, engineering manager with Sun Moksha, a clean energy solutions company based out of Bengaluru.

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"During day time, when there is less utilisation of power, the software in place diverts power to support micro enterprises in the village and in the evenings the power is diverted to power households and streetlights," he said. The 150 homes are powered by solar panels generating 30 kilo Watts of power daily. "We set the whole thing up with a budget of one crore rupees sponsored through the corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding," he added. Experts from ICRISAT believe, what was achieved at Chhotkie village is a viable model for a smart village. "In India, where two thirds of population lives in around 6,00,000 villages, empowering villagers to create income generating enterprises can lead to improved food security, education and health, and to participatory democracy," said Sir Brian Heap, special advisor to the smart village initiative. The smart village initiative is a three year project headed by Cambridge and Oxford universities, evaluating ways to provide off-grid energy options for development of rural villages and knowledge transfer around the globe. "Access to reliable energy will be a key catalyst to transform agriculture from subsistence to commercial enterprise, especially for youth," said Dr David Bergvinson, director general, ICRISAT. Experts urge framing of policies that increase awareness among multiple stakeholders, from farmers to decision takers about the availability of off-grid energy technologies and their benefits.

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