

Electricity for the household is at the top of the shopping list of rural communities. A house with electricity is a symbol of status. Beyond that, electrical lighting facilitates movement at night inside the house, helps prevent accidents, eliminates the need for kerosene and other combustible materials for illumination (thus avoiding the risk of fire and health-damaging fumes), helps spot poisonous insects and other wild animals that could be a threat to humans, and helps respond instantly to critical situations in case of accidents or illness. Furthermore, illumination of external areas such as the streets and meeting points also helps promote social interaction and a number of after-hours outdoor activities.

Electricity in the house also makes modern means of entertainment a more realistic possibility. The rural telephone system gives people the opportunity to keep in touch with their families in other parts of the world, and to call for help in case of an emergency. Electricity also gives the opportunity to use modern means of getting information and imparting training, using VCRs, satellite links, computers and even the Internet.

23.2.2 Basic Sources of Electricity

With the introduction of the transistor radio and the handheld flashlight dry cells became a favorite means to provide light and entertainment in rural areas. Dry cells can be purchased in many places and are easy to carry. Thus, many rural families spend substantial amounts of money buying them. Transistor radios play an important role in the life of remote communities, not only because they bring music and entertainment, but also because radio broadcasting in many places carry important messages such as warnings of floods, instructions on health practices and other valuable services, such as family to family message delivery. Some countries have even set up radio stations with regional broadcasting in the locally spoken native language or dialect, when it is different from the official national language.

New forms of entertainment, such as portable televisions, VCRs and tape players, have increased the demand for electricity in many rural communities. Because of this, dry cells prove to be expensive and hence many users in rural areas not connected to the grid have resorted to the car battery as the power source for their needs, including home lighting. Car batteries are widely available in rural areas of many developing countries. They are rechargeable, and because of their relatively larger power capacity, they can be applied to a wider variety of services; they last longer and may turn out to be cheaper per unit of service delivered than dry cells. Recharging car batteries, however, requires a primary source of electricity. Where motorcars or tractors are available, people use them to recharge batteries. Otherwise, they are carried over long distances to the nearest source of electricity for recharging. However, batteries are heavy and burdensome to carry, so transport to the point of recharging is sometimes done on the backs of animals and sometimes on the backs of humans. There have been cases of local entrepreneurs setting up micro businesses to offer battery-recharging service. For this, batteries are collected, taken to the point of recharging, recharged and then returned to the owner. This operation however, requires some infrastructure such as roads and means for transportation, not always available in rural areas.

As the economic power of families increases, so does the need for electricity. Dry cells and car batteries are no longer sufficient, so people in many places put political