



Until recently the Mokgatlhe family in Kgope, a remote village situated 50 kilometres west of Botswana's capital, had been using firewood to light and heat their home.

This practice, used by 80% of Botswana's rural population, has led to the destruction of countless acres of forest.

After purchasing their own home solar system, however, the family's world changed overnight. Instead of worrying that the battery powering their light may run out, Mrs. Mokgatlhe focuses on making sure her children go to bed on time.

"It is a changed world for them," she said with a smile. "They even spend more time reading and finishing their school work these days," added her husband.

The family now hopes to buy an upgrade to their system that will power a television and a radio.

The introduction of solar power in Kgope is the result of efforts by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), in partnership with the Government of Botswana and local communities, to provide eco-friendly energy access throughout the country.

Known as the Rural Electrification Programme, this initiative was undertaken in response to Botswana's urgent call for alternative fuels and a means of reducing carbon emissions. It targets poor and female-run households, offering them efficient energy devices at affordable prices.

As part of the programme's pilot phase, solar-powered heating systems and lighting appliances were introduced to some 88 villages that are off the country's main electricity grid. And in Kgope village, the local development committee is running an energy kiosk that sells solar lanterns, wood-saving stoves and hot bags - specially designed bags that keep food warm and thereby reduce cooking time on stoves.

This pilot phase of the programme will be used to resolve any minor problems before being replicated throughout the country and integrated into the national electrical grid, promoting renewable energy use throughout Botswana.

*Original article and photo by UNDP*