The first challenge was to develop a financial cum technical package suitable for the rural people. I used my experience with rural people to introduce installment-based payment, which reduced the upfront cost of a SHS and made it affordable at the same cost as kerosene. Rural homes and businesses could escape from kerosene fumes, reducing their monthly energy expenditure, while extending their business hours.

The second challenge was to create good will and gain the trust of the rural people. We focused on creating efficient and effective rural network of engineers and local technicians. We built our engineers as social engineers who went from door to demonstrate the effectiveness of renewable energy technologies. We trained local youth as technicians, thus creating local jobs, gaining community support, as well as ensuring efficient after sales service at reduced costs. Our engineers visited each client's home on a monthly basis and checked on the system for nearly 3-2 years. This created special incentive for timely payment of monthly installments.

This is the era of green technology. Green Energy can do more for a country like Bangladesh.

We were proactive in involving the local community. Local teachers and elected leaders helped us explain the benefits of renewable energy technologies, especially SHS to the rural people. We trained solar users especially women on taking care of their systems. We developed special programs including scholarships for rural school children.

Once the villagers became aware of the multiple benefits of a SHS, the system sold itself. Increased sales meant decreased overhead costs, which helped us to provide further credit options to the rural people. We also started assembling solar accessories such as charge controllers, invertors, mobile phone chargers etc, and this further reduced costs.

Our success attracted policy makers, and a program was taken up through Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (IDCOL) to initiate and scale up similar models in Bangladesh around 2002-3. This was a personal milestone, as well a milestone for the renewable energy sector in Bangladesh. SHS registered exponential growth after the advent of IDCOL with the number of service providers, suppliers, manufactures multiplying. Bangladesh gained the capacity to manufacture all solar accessories expect for the solar panel.

However, what makes me most happy is making rural women an integral part of our success story. We successfully created green jobs for rural women by training them at rural based technology centres. I designed and set up such 45 centres to train roughly 5,000 rural women technicians. These women are successfully assembling solar accessories such as charge controllers, invertors, and DC-DC mobile chargers in their villages.

We have created decent jobs for women right in their villages, protecting them from dowry, torture, illegal immigration etc. Our women technicians are earning Tk. 5,000 to Tk 8,000 to take care of themselves, as well as their families. We have succeeded in creating a mechanism to take renewable energy to the villages through our women. Our rural women have the potential to become solar ambassadors and ambassadors of women empowerment in their communities.

The Power of Green Energy

This is the era of green technology. Green Energy can do more for a country like Bangladesh. We have only tapped into the potential of individual SHS.

We have huge unmet needs -- education, health and enterprises are hampered because of lack of power. Our coastal people are suffering badly because they lack access to clean water, improved housing and early warning systems.

Green energy can help us in these areas -- it