Light in a Suitcase

Nurse Latia Virgilio from Namahaca Health Centre in Mozambique explained that during the month of June, she delivered 184 babies-- two thirds of them during the night. In order for Latia to have light to deliver babies she had to use the light of her cellphone, held in her mouth so as to have two hands free for the delivery.

PWRDF is responding to the needs of Latia and other nurses and doctors at 30 clinics in rural Mozambique through a partnership with Global Affairs Canada and an organization called We Care Solar.

Founded by an Obstetrician/Gynecologist and a solar energy expert wife and husband, California-based We Care Solar exists for one purpose: to help babies be born safely. To that end, they developed the solar suitcase, which can quickly and easily be installed in health clinics to provide power to lights and other devices important to safe deliveries.

With a solar suitcase on site, staff will be able to use both hands to deliver babies by the light of bright bulbs overhead rather than holding a flashlight in their mouths.

PWRDF is working with our partner EHALE in Mozambique to install solar suitcases in rural health clinics that don’t have any electricity. EHALE is working with the Mozambiquan Ministry of Health in this project, creating a partnership between the government and civil society that will ensure the solar suitcases are well used, well maintained, and effective tools.

Over the next four years of the All Mothers and Children Count program, the 30 clinics will benefit from the installation of solar suitcases. Each of the clinics delivers over 50 babies each month—some deliver as many as 200!

Each suitcase is literally a case- dust- and water-proof. The case is mounted inside the clinic, and a solar panel is attached to a roof section that receives plenty of sunlight. In Mozambique, morning sun is more reliable than afternoon, so east-facing roofs are preferred. Three hours of sun will provide enough power to run two lamps all night long. Additional sunlight can be used to charge other devices (AA and AAA batteries, a hand-held fetal Doppler unit used in examinations, cell phones, head lamps and more).

We Care Solar and PWRDF conducted a training session over the summer in Mozambique, training 11 local people (four from EHALE and seven from the Ministry of Health) to install and maintain the suitcases. The trainees learned not just how to install the units, but how to train the health care staff in the clinics in their maintenance. This will help to ensure that the solar suitcases are functioning for years to come.