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From issue: **Energy in the Americas** (Summer 2013)

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Clean, Cheap Energy

by

[Mari Hayman](#)

Do-it-yourself alternatives that poor people can afford.

While clean energy sources are gradually becoming more affordable, wind turbines and solar panels are still prohibitively expensive for much of the world's poor. To fill the demand for cheap, alternative energy, a number of do-it-yourself innovations that cost next to nothing have popped up across the globe. They require little technical expertise to use, and could provide a lifeline for low-income households.

Take, for example, the “solar bottle bulb”—a plastic bottle filled with purified water and bleach that is used as a makeshift light bulb in the Philippines. Though the bulbs only work during daylight hours, they offer poor families a cheap, renewable energy source and generate as much light as a 55-watt bulb. Since 2011, the MyShelter Foundation has promoted the *Isang Litrong Liwanag* (“Liter of Light”) project, which trains residents to make and install the bulbs themselves and aims to light 1 million homes by the end of 2015.

SOCCKET, a soccer ball that stores kinetic energy while getting kicked around to power everything from cell phones and batteries to LED reading lamps, is another example of do-it-yourself energy. When the soccer ball is in motion, a pendulum mechanism inside generates energy that is stored in a lightweight lithium ion battery within the ball. After the game is over, electronic devices can be powered by plugging into a socket on the ball. According to SOCCKET co-creator Jessica Matthews, it's a fun and effective way to generate electricity. Thirty minutes of soccer can provide about three hours of LED light, and thousands of the balls, which retail for around \$100, have been distributed to developing countries in Africa and Latin America through Matthew's for-profit social enterprise, Uncharted Play, which is planning a retail launch this fall...



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