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Solar Serve News

Dear friends,

Here we are again. Sorry that we skipped our last letter, but one of our staff was absent for several months. In Solar Serve we all have our responsibility and it is good that we can use our talents. Creativity is needed when we meet new challenges. The last few months we have been working together with several other agencies, organizations and social enterprises. It was good to work together. We also received some training and now we are able to pass it on to others. Here are some of the latest stories.



Benefits for hill tribes

Last year we supplied a number of cooking stoves sponsored by foreigners and Solar Serve. A leader of a hill tribe liked our stoves so much that he decided to support one hundred families more with his own money. For us this was a sign that our cooking stoves met the requirements. It was wonderful to see their enthusiasm. Another leader received our cooking stove and wanted to order 20 more and later changed the number to 50. Although the trip to the mountains was difficult and dangerous, we were very encouraged!

Together with World Vision

World Vision is a relief and development organization. Last year they supported several hill tribes in Central Vietnam with clean cooking stoves. At first they checked several convenient cooking models from the north and also our model. We were very pleased when they chose our stove as the most practical one. When a bigger one was required, we were able to come up with a more suitable design. They accepted our new model and from that time on we have been supplying them lots of cooking stoves.

620 families were blessed

The end of last year we worked again with the above-mentioned organization in supplying 620 families with smaller and bigger cooking stoves. They were handmade in our factory. We were under pressure but we reached the deadline. It took courage to push the official paperwork, but finally we loaded our truck with all the cooking stoves and drove to the mountains. Our first job was to train the people in using the stoves. It may be simple but they are often excluded from new developments. The training lasted two days in two villages. It was very rewarding.



Smaller but same capacity

Poor people think that our stoves are still a little bit expensive, although we kept the price as low as possible. We asked several agencies to sell them for us. Although people were enthusiastic, they did not want to take the risk in losing money. This is a general trend among poor people who do not dare to buy something new if it has not proven well. We were challenged by an organization to design a cheaper one, but with the same capacity. We came up with a smaller one and are waiting for the results of an official test in Hanoi. If accepted, it will be a breakthrough.



Sponsoring with syrup waffles

For a number of years we were using a projector for our power point presentations, but after a while the screen showed lines through the pictures. We tried to repair it and also we explored the internet for solutions, but it was not possible to fix it. A support group wanted to help us and decided to sell delicious syrup waffles in support for a new projector. A few months later we received their support and were able to buy a new Sony projector. It is great and can be connected to our single solar panel when there is no electricity. We are so happy with it!

Funny by accident

Another blessing came from a Dutch recycling shop last summer. They decided to support 100 families in three villages near Hoi An. One of our staff received the money in January during his visit to Holland. A funny accident happened when he put his raincoat on the table. One of their staff mixed it up with their recycling things and placed it for sale in their shop. She was very embarrassed when she found out her mistake, but was still able to intercept the raincoat before it was sold. We all had a good laugh!



Example to follow

For several years we received business training from Mario Brühlmann, a Swiss consultant. He has been encouraging us to use his book and methods for teaching others. Last month we invited 20 students and small business owners to our center in Danang and trained them. It was well received and the second training session will follow soon. Mr. Mario will visit our second course and also some businesses. His book is called: 'The Ten Commandments for Entrepreneurs' and is officially translated in Vietnamese and available in Vietnam.

Social Insurance

As a social enterprise we have to follow new regulations. The last few months we have done a lot of paperwork in order to meet the requirements of a new social insurance law. The new law will require employers and workers to pay premiums for social insurance. Workers will also get paid leave for illness, pregnancy, work accidents or occupational disease, in addition to pensions for retirement. For workers with contracts under three months we have to follow those regulations too. This new law can be a big challenge for us and many small businesses.

Storehouse finished

In our last letter we told you about the construction of a new storehouse near our center. It is 8.2m wide and 21.5m long. There is a separate room at the back for someone to live as a guard at nighttime. Now we have finished the gate, doors and windows and are very happy to have a place to store our goods and even our truck. Because of increased storage space, we can keep on building more cooking stoves and cookers. At the moment we are making 1000 cooking stoves and this can change suddenly when there is an increase in demand.



Testing Moringa tea

The moringa trees outside our center are now producing new seeds. This will be great for the future. Tea samples were sent for testing all over the world. Till now we have received only positive answers. We are still exploring the possibilities of starting a small business (maybe with others), but this is not always easy. If you want to know more about the benefits of this moringa tree you can explore links on the internet like: <https://leafpower.wordpress.com/moringa-benefits/>

New workers and job training

We hired two new deaf workers and a student who is studying International Studies. He asked to do his internship at our center. He is translating documents as a temporary job training till the end of April. An internship is mostly done by college or university students. The purpose is to provide a meaningful learning experience for the student. By doing this a student can determine if he has an interest in a particular job, create a network of contacts or gain school credit.



Lam Chuong Chien



Inspiring children

In Saigon we met an old lady who made moveable caterpillars from paper. We used her idea and made 60 of those colorful caterpillars at a youth club. They loved it and after a while the whole room was filled with the caterpillars, moving over tables, chairs and floors. In an age of computers the children had not lost their love for small things. This year they had sponsored our work. In making the caterpillars it inspired them to do better. The next day one young man was able to inspire his family and collected a lot of euros in a short time. His grandparents were very proud of him!

Finally

It is always good to get some visitors or emails from a far country. Sometimes it is like cold water to a thirsty soul. You can do the same by sending emails or visiting friends. We don't think about long letters or a long visit. Last year for example two Dutch girls came to visit us only on a Saturday afternoon. It was great and we had good fellowship with them. So don't feel hesitant if it is only a short visit. That often fits very well. Thanks again for your interest for all these years!



Greetings,
Solar Serve team

Called to Serve

More information: www.vietnamsolarserve.org/ or write to: solarserve@yahoo.com