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Solar Serve News



Dear friends,

For 15 years we have been doing charity work and since 2006 we are also running a social enterprise. It was not always easy to work with products depending on the environment. It was sometimes very hard to change the mindset of people. We learned a lot. The turn came when we included the clean cookstoves in our work. It became a good alternative in combination with the parabolic cookers. It improved people's health, finances but also the environment. This is one of the reasons why we kept on going after 15 years. And thanks to you, that we have never felt alone.

Considerations

At the moment we have been approached by organizations, individuals and groups from many countries to cooperate with them, but till now nothing came from the ground definitely. We know there are many things to take into consideration, but in the meantime we need to keep on going. It's not always easy when you run a small social enterprise and try to do charity work with the profits of the enterprise. We would love to see the above organization and groups taking clear decisions, so we can maintain employing disadvantaged people and helping people with our products.

Helping the Bru minority

We have given friends the opportunity to support low income families with our products. One month ago we drove a full truck of clean cookstoves to the mountains. They were all sponsored and for two days we supplied the Bru minority and helped them with cooking. It felt like we have given them many cups of water on thirsty souls. They were so happy and for us it was very rewarding to help them. We took pictures and sent them to the sponsors. They were pleased and thankful that they could help them with their support.



Approved and test

In one of our last letters we told you that SNV asked us to make a smaller clean cookstove with an affordable price for the poor. It took some effort but we came up with a smaller one ([see video clip](#)) and after some testing, the stoves were approved and certified by SHEER. They also chose another cookstove made in the north and asked a minority group in Thanh Hoa province to test both clean cookstoves for more than a month. After that SNV will make an assessment in order to know which cookstove will be the most suitable. Now we are waiting for the results.

More possibilities

In the meantime we still have 200 sponsored cookstoves to be given away. We already contacted some minorities and now we are preparing it with the local authorities. Sometimes it requires a lot of organization with the people in charge. We also need to consider what we should do when they live in very high mountain areas. Our truck is capable to do our local work in the countryside, but using it for the mountains requires more power to climb steep roads. The engine has to run full capacity when the truck is fully loaded. Maybe we should consider another truck in the near future. Any advice is welcome!!

New Video clips

We published three new video clips on our Youtube channel. Maybe you have seen the [first one](#), and the [second one](#) is a Vietnamese translation. The [third one](#) is our latest and is a very short video clip made in one of the houses of the Bru minority. They were so happy to receive the clean cookstoves that one lady decided to cook a meal for our staff on her new stove. The kitchen is always in the middle of the Bru home, so it is important that the stove does not produce a lot of smoke and that it is easy to use. Enjoy watching the videos and please feel free to share them with your friends.



Honest student

A student in Danang found a bag with almost 700 euro, two saving books with a value of 56,000 euro, and several phones. A woman, who had sold her parent's house that day, lost it after she drove on her motorbike through a small alley. When the student called the woman, she was very afraid that he wanted to blackmail her and took two police officers with her. She quickly learned that the Christian student was very honest and even refused a reward. Many newspapers wrote about this student and the fact that there are still honest people in Vietnam. A great testimony of someone who lives out what he believes.



Safety and hygiene

We asked our workers to stop working for a short gathering. We decided to teach them a short course of safety and hygiene. You will understand that this is necessary when you walk through our factory where safety is really required. We used information from a book which is also used successfully in the north. Everyone participated well, especially when they had to memorize the 5 S which helped them to improve safety, work efficiency, productivity and ownership. It was received well and now the workers understand more clearly that safety and hygiene are a very important part of their work.



Spot welding

Welding the inner parts of our stoves has been difficult and a long process. After researching better methods, we bought a spot welder that can 'meld' two pieces of metal together very fast. A large current is driven through two copper electrodes and concentrated on a small spot, which clamp (melt) the two sheets together. It saves a lot of work, energy and time. We are very happy with our new equipment. It improved the quality of our stoves and now we are also able to make many stoves in a reasonable time when there is a large demand.

Replacing bad parts

Our large sliding door needed to be repaired after eight years. Small plastic parts were breaking off which made it difficult to open and close. It was hard to find a company who wanted to repair it, and when we found one, they gave up soon because of some difficulties. But it needed to be done before the typhoon season. Finally we found a young man who was willing to help. He even bought metal parts for replacing the plastic ones. We promised to help him, so in one day all workers worked hard to get the door down and replaced all the parts. At the end of the day we reinstalled it and now it slides perfectly again.



Internet problems

There have been problems with the internet connection this year. Already three times in the last five months we could not communicate with the outside world clearly. The connection slowed down, so important things could only be done in the middle of the night when people were sleeping. There is a 20,000 km cable connecting Southeast Asia with the US mainland laying at the bottom of the sea and they do not know clearly if it was damaged by a vessel or even by some sharks. If your mail has been bounced back lately, this could be the reason. Learn to be patience like us ☺ !!



Good impression

In our last letter we told you about Mario, a Swiss consultant. He came to visit us in Danang when we were teaching a class of young students. We are using his teachings and methods and it was great that he was able to share a short time with the students. He enjoyed his time in Danang very much and was encouraged when he visited the companies of several students he taught before. Generally, he had a good impression and was encouraged. He also said to the club of small business owners in Danang that their (role) model was very good and should be applied in all Asia.

Interesting contacts

The Middle East came very close to us when we got a visit from a businessman from Kuwait. He got to know us through the internet and visited us in Danang. He was very interested in using our cleanstoves for many refugees in the Middle East. Another request came from a group of businessmen in Nepal who invited sealed bids to supply 10,000 portable stoves for the disaster areas in Nepal. This request came too late and we were not able to complete all the necessary documents and information in time, but they invited us to bid for the next load.



Sponsor activities

This year there were some activities arranged by volunteers in order to support us. Several of them were jumble sales and flea markets. Don't think about big sales, but it was very rewarding, especially when a lot of disabled children came to visit their stand. This year another sponsor walk & run was organized. For accomplishing each km a certain amount was supported by a bank. Later on they found out that the bank had made a mistake by mixing up another group, so the volunteers had to transfer money back.



Finally

One of our new workers left when he had some family problems, although he loved to work with us. Other workers applied but we have been careful in accepting new people when we are still waiting for future orders. Maybe you did not know but many organizations around the world made an effort in helping around 100 million households with clean cookstoves and cleaner fuel by 2020. This is also one of our goals. It keeps us going also with other products and projects. What a challenge and it is great to be a part of helping people!



Greetings,
Solar Serve team

Called to Serve

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