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Solar Serve News

Dear friends,

“Give a man a fish, and he will be hungry again tomorrow; teach him to catch a fish, and he will be richer all his life.” Although the origin of this proverb is not clear, it helps us to explain what we are doing as Solar Serve. It is more than only making solar ovens or clean cookers, or any human effort to help others. For us it is important that people learn to fish well, so that they can stand strong in life. What a joy if we are able to help people to learn fishing. Here are some stories:



Keeping unaware

Mr. Huy had a honey farm in the mountains, but he could not sell his honey. He was forced to sell it to companies that paid an unfair price while the quality was very good. After he learned the basic principle in running a family business, he became very successful. He gave his honey a name and learned how to sell it. Next year he will double his production. It was so good that he took action, not allowing big companies to keep him unaware of learning to fish.

Optical shop

One of the Vietnamese participants in Malaysia had a lot of experiences in designing and making all kinds of sun and eyeglasses. He was wondering as a former technician if he could be an optician? Through the seminars he realized his talent and strength in the above field. He and his wife now decided to set up an optical shop for eyewear and sunglasses in Vung Tau (Southern part of Vietnam) at the end of this year when they finished their labor contract in Malaysia.



Multiplication

Thien wanted to teach others after he followed a seminar of mentors. After his return to his village he dreamed about setting up a training course for families in order to be more effective in business. He asked the FBT staff if they could come to his village and help him to run a seminar. They agreed and last month the first 14 participants showed up. They were so excited to learn many new things. Thien was also happy when he was allowed to teach at the seminar too. It was a good example of how we could be more effective if we teach participants to become mentors and train others. A great way for multiplication.

Together with their wives

Last month Bich, Phi and Tung travelled to Malaysia for the final phase of the FBT course, which we mentioned in our last letter. This time they decided to bring their wives, which was a very good idea, because they often stay behind when their husbands are gone for days to teach. It was quite an experience. They were taken care by a 70-year-old Vietnamese social worker. She was able to share a lot of her experiences with them. They were so encouraged. This was a good reminder that we should not forget the ones who always stay behind.



Great help

We are thankful for Swiss Create, the business development branch of the Swiss Consulting Group SCG AG. They have given us a really good push to train Vietnamese families. We were visited by Gallus who specializes in project management and training, and who will oversee our FBT training work in Vietnam. It was a privilege to meet him in Danang and to show him around in what has already been established. We were encouraged by his interests and insight on how to make things work, even if circumstances are difficult.

Clean ovens been tested

In Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam there are 60,000 deaths each year, caused by indoor air pollution while cooking with traditional cooking stoves. Together with other agencies we want to reduce these numbers. Therefore the available cooking stoves needed to be tested by SNV for cooking, water boiling, fuel consumption and emissions in comparison with traditional cooking. We passed almost all tests successfully, although the safety test needed to be checked again. The outward part of our oven was still too warm. For us it seems to be normal when the oven becomes warm during cooking, so we are still hopeful that we can pass this test too!





Visit from Sweden

Two friends from Sweden have been interested in our work for years. They decided to visit Vietnam. After exploring the north for more than a week, they finally visited Danang. They were warmly welcomed by Bich and his family and also our staff at our center. They showed a great interest in what we were doing. They took pictures and asked a lot of questions. Tho, the wife of Bich prepared a delicious meal and in the afternoon they had a lovely time with our staff. In spite of their age (above 70 yrs.) and the heat, they enjoyed every minute in Vietnam. It was really a great experience for them (and us).

Sponsor activities

This year a sponsor run was organized in Holland. If individuals or groups were willing to run or walk 2.5 km or more (max.4 laps), they were sponsored by a local bank. Our work in Vietnam was also on the list of being sponsored. A local workgroup has been a blessing for us. They contacted several recycling shops and asked them if they were willing to sponsor our work in Vietnam. A farmer donated bags of flower bulbs. In a very short time the bulbs were sold. Other activities have been organized during the year and we are so thankful for all this support. Although we are a social enterprise, our profit is not always sufficient for all our charity programs. So we are happy with all those sponsor activities and donations!



Update new building

As we reported in our last newsletter, we are planning to build a new facility beside our Solar Serve center. We have been making contacts with several people who can help us with the construction. The contractor who built our Solar Serve center before, has been very enthusiastic. We are now looking for a good and reliable architect. There are also new building procedures, so we are in contact with the authorities. Wages and prices of materials have been doubled during the years. This will be a real challenge for us, but we feel right that in the coming months we should start building. We will keep you informed, so stand with us again!

Another Award

On June 14th our director Bich received together with 19 competitors an award for the outstanding performance in the 'Proof of Concept Competition' for creating and developing new ideas, especially in the area of climate change. It was given by the director of the Climate Innovation Center Vietnam, a government agency supported by the World Bank group, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs of Trade and the UK Department of International Development. A financial donation was promised, but has not been released yet!



Light of the World

During the award ceremony we showed our new solar light. It drew a lot of attention from the media and the delegates. Good suggestions were given in how we should help and benefit the local people. Although this mini-light is designed for one household, it can also be used by fishermen on the river and other situations at night time. The unit is available with a cross or triangle for 500.000 VN dong (22.5 USD) in Vietnam, but can also be used as a sponsoring project for low-income families or minorities in the mountains. Please contact us if you are interested (+84) 919511552.



Finally

There are some other developments that happened in the Mekong Delta, but we keep that for our next letter. Next month we will get two volunteers helping us for a few days, but before that our staff will have a short vacation. This year we will visit Hanoi, Halong Bay and some friends in Haiphong. Two years ago was our last outing. It's not often that we can do something together. So it will be a special time for recharging our (life)batteries.

Thanks a lot for standing with us and we also wish you a nice Summer break.

Greetings,

Solar Serve team

Called to Serve

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