

One million solar lamps light up Africa

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SolarAid reached a milestone on 25 March when it sold its millionth solar light in Africa, proving that a charity can use business-based solutions to bring about large-scale social change. SolarAid's aim is a mighty task - to eradicate the kerosene lamp from Africa by the end of the decade.



Priscilla and her son in Zambia with a solar light. These lights are bringing clean, safe, affordable lighting to homes for the first time. (Image: Patrick Bentley)

Chief executive Steve Andrews explains that SolarAid's social enterprise, SunnyMoney, sold its millionth solar light to families without electricity in rural Africa, bringing clean, safe affordable lighting to their homes for the first time. "This not only means that over six million people are now benefitting from free renewable power; it also sets the foundations for an emerging solar market that will provide access to life-changing technology for millions more to come."

SunnyMoney has grown from selling fewer than a thousand solar lights a month in 2010 to an average of 50,000 each month this year. This remarkable growth reflects the huge need for affordable, accessible and trusted energy solutions for the 110 million households in Africa that are not connected to any electricity grid. Portable pico-solar lights and mobile phone chargers are proving a popular investment for families who otherwise burn up to 25% of their income on costly, polluting kerosene to light their homes.

Andrews says that innovative community-based approaches have been key to sparking the growth that is necessary for building a sustainable market solution: "In the last year, we have worked closely with teachers who act as solar advocates to raise awareness, instil trust and create channels for solar lights to be purchased in rural villages. Once people see a neighbour's light shining bright, demand grows. We then engage local agents to stock and sell solar products."

SolarAid tells the story of shopkeeper Sally Kayoni in Bomet, Kenya who now sells over 200 solar lights each month. Kayoni no longer sells kerosene, saying: "After I started selling these [solar lights]... there was no one asking for kerosene anymore."

More cash in the house

While agents like Kayoni will profit from the growth of the solar economy, customers like John Kuriuki are also benefitting. By cutting their kerosene spend, his family saves 300 Kenyan shillings every week. That's about \$180 (R1 921.90) a year - and nearly 25% of their annual income. Kuriuki says: "My kids don't cough now; they are safe and study well... I use the savings on buying food and paying my kids' school fees."

Through the one million solar lights, an estimated \$235,000 (R2509,142.00) is being saved by families every day and children are gaining three million extra hours of study time every night. This is helping Africa's youth work towards a brighter future.

"As SunnyMoney continues to grow in Kenya, Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania, each country enterprise will become financially self-sustaining and generate surplus revenues that will be recycled back into the charity. This will support SolarAid's fundraising, enable country expansion and their research, policy and advocacy work that will help accelerate this solar revolution to its ultimate goal: the eradication of the kerosene lamp from Africa by 2020. Sales of another million lights and two new country programmes are planned in the coming year," Andrews says.

"SunnyMoney's soaring sales [are] by no means a job done. But it sets us on our path to proving an alternative to the fossil fuel dependency that damages our planet while locking millions into a cycle of poverty. When I founded SolarCentury, and we pledged 5% of our annual profits to set up and then help fund SolarAid, I did so in the hope that other companies would copy such a model. Now SolarAid and SunnyMoney have reached this milestone of one million solar lights, company founders can see how powerful this kind of business-based aid can be.

"I hope they will be inspired to copy us. The world would be a much better place if they did, in numbers. We hope that our business model for tackling climate change and poverty can set a precedent worldwide for a new kind of renaissance company, whose business will never compromise its social goal."

Watch the thank you clip here from SolarAid

Turning a profit

SolarAid is a London-based international charity that believes in business-based solutions to poverty and climate change. SolarAid was founded in 2006 by solar company SolarCentury to explore and create clean, safe, affordable energy for all. SolarCentury established SolarAid by making a long-term commitment of donating 5% of annual company profits. In 2008,

SolarAid created a social enterprise called SunnyMoney to run its on-the-ground operations in Africa. SunnyMoney uses an innovative distribution model to sell solar lights in rural off-grid communities currently dependent on costly, toxic kerosene for lighting. By building a sustainable market for solar products, SolarAid and SunnyMoney aim to eradicate the kerosene lamp from Africa by 2020.

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