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Solar Serve News

Dear friends,

It has been very hot in Danang with daily temperatures between 35 - 38°C (95°F-101°F). Our new building has a flat roof so temperatures are rising during the day inside the building, but not too bad with a fan. Weather forecasters are expecting a stormy typhoon season with 15 typhoons and tropical depressions. Three to four typhoons are likely to hit Central Vietnam, where Danang is located. We are not depending on the forecast but remember us. Here is our latest news.

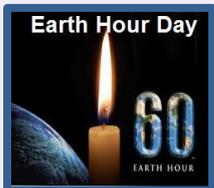
Da Nang, Vietnam

37° C

Partly Sunny

Updated as of 11:30 AM

Feels Like: 41° Wind: 15 km/h Visibility: 10 km
Barometer: 1006.00 mb Humidity: 50% Dew Point: 23°

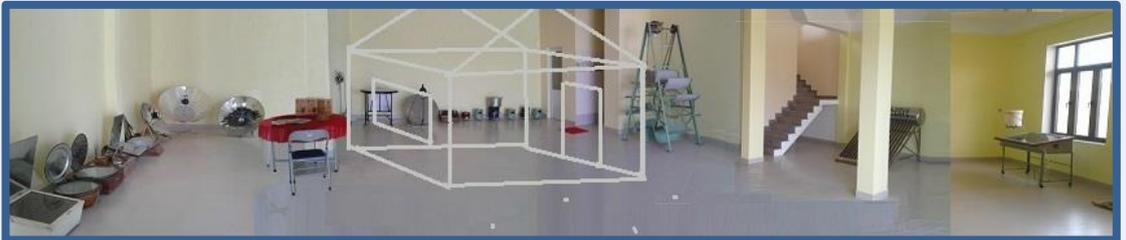


Being useful but postponed

We received an order of 100 solar lamps a few days before Earth Hour Day. In Hanoi they wanted to walk around the Hoan Kiem lake with our solar lamps during this hour in order to give more attention to energy saving. It was a great idea but unfortunately, they could not afford the costs and the idea was postponed. But when we were teaching in the mountains and heavy weather caused a power cut, our solar lamps were greatly appreciated and we were able to finish our teaching.

The finishing touch

In the third week of May our new building was finished. We had electricity, the toilets worked well and our workers did the final touch by making a fence in front of the building. We repaired all our products we had made the last 20 years and displayed them all over the building. A bamboo cottage will be built where visitors can see how everything is used. We hope to attract visitors who are interested what we are doing. We will also use the building for research and designing new products. So if you have time, come to visit us! It is easy to find when you travel from the airport to the Marble mountains or Hoi An.



New challenge

The next 18 months we are planning to make around 9000 clean cookers and distribute them among the minorities and people in poor areas. The stoves are loved especially by the minorities but they do not see the need (or have no ability) to buy them. They often do not want to change their (cooking) habits, even if it is damaging their health by indoor smoke. They still have a long way to go. So we are going to help them. We also want to employ two more deaf workers, one administrator and someone who can help in the kitchen. We have decided more things, so there is plenty of work to do in the coming months.



Lung diseases

We came in contact with an overseas Vietnamese who is helping people with lung diseases. He is doing this by providing medical aid. After years he discovered that the health problems came back. The main reason was that the people were still cooking with old and polluted cooking stoves. He concluded that not only medical care was necessary, but also prevention. When he contacted us, we were able to show him our clean cooking stoves. He became so excited when he understood that this could be one of the tools to prevent lung diseases. Now he is considering using our stove in his program.

Working together

We are a social enterprise and want to see a change in society with our products. This is not always easy because the kind of products we make are usually depending on sunshine or other conditions. It often needs a change of mind of the customers and that takes time and is not always easy. But we do not give up. Some larger organization wanted to help us but they required so much paper work and regulations that we as a small social enterprise cannot always wait or afford it. We often have to come up with our own plan in order to see some progress. This is just to let you know how it works.





An open door

One of the rescue & drug detox centers in north Vietnam was founded by a man who suffered drug addiction for years. He was set free 10 years ago and started to help hundreds of people who have been addicted too. We came in contact with him when Bich and Phi were teaching the Family Business Training course to former drug addicts and also to women who were abused through human trafficking. They were so happy with the course, because they all wanted to return to normal life and play their part in society. For us a new door opened and useful contacts were made!

Nationwide flea market

On April 27, which is King's Day, the Netherlands becomes a nationwide flea market. People are permitted to sell their used goods on the street without paying taxes. For one day it becomes a great marketplace and you can always find something that others do not need anymore. The workgroup took this opportunity to collect a lot of secondhand things during the year in order to sell it on this day. It was a lot of fun and many things were sold. Even during the day people came and donated things for sale. It was great and even more when the workgroup decided to support our work with their profit.



Workers left and came

Mr. Quan left when working in Solar Serve did not match his abilities. Also our deaf worker Mr. Tai moved to Saigon when someone approached him for a job. It was hard for us to let him go because he was a good assistant in the kitchen and also worked in the afternoon in our factory. Mr. Duy has been visiting us the last few years and was trained to be a FBT mentor. He got some problems and needed to be restored. We offered him a job in our new research center, so he took the challenge and now he is working with us and in the mean time he got married too.

Outstanding

Four enterprises were invited to demonstrate their clean cooking stoves for four days in Nghe An province. It was organized by SNV and the local Women Union. The demonstrations took place near the mountains and most of the local people were ethnic minorities. Thanh and Quan represented Solar Serve and demonstrated our stoves well. They also were able to find a woman who was willing to become our agent, after 18 people were interested to buy them. Later they called us back and told us that our stoves were really outstanding. A real encouragement!



Great visitor

Julie is from New Zealand and worked for many years in Hanoi and Saigon. She has been back to her country for a number of years, but wanted to visit Vietnam again. She has always been supportive for what we are doing in Danang. So she came to visit us last month and after a tour at our center, we sat down with her because she was interested in what we were planning to do in the near future. She ate lunch with us and left late afternoon. Later she sent us a message and thanked us for the time we spent with her.

Testimonies

One of the participants with a university degree learned for the first time how to make a business model by drawing pictures during one of the FBT seminars. Another family learned so much that they were able to plant 300 pepper pillars and now they can support their family. One family became very successful in growing bananas. Then they transformed their rice field into a fish pond and began to feed a special kind of fish with the leaves of the banana trees. Their business became so popular that the local government awarded them with the words 'Young man with a successful business model' in Dak On village.



Good example for others

A Xuan belongs to the De minority. He married his wife more than 10 years ago but they had no children. They wanted to start a business with a sow farm. People in their village were superstitious and told them it would not succeed because they had no children. They did not believe it and when A Xuan attended the FBT course last year he learned to analyze the needs of the customers. Now he supplies many piglets for families in his village and also other customers. Their model became a good example for others (even though they had no children!)

Helping HIV patients

One participant of the FBT course discovered that she had contracted HIV from her late husband. She became hopeless and wanted to commit suicide. Fortunately she met someone who helped her to find new hope. Although she did not know how to run a business well, she started to raise 40 pairs of doves. When she participated one of the seminars it was the first time in her life that she learned about business. A few months later she applied what she had learned and her farm started to develop well. Now she wants to multiply this model to the other HIV patients in her community.





Making a difference

Many times in her life, Mrs. Yen felt like a failure. She has 2 children and her husband has been a drug addict in the past. She is an owner of a noodle shop but her business was not really successful. She did not know why, but when she learned about marketing and how to apply it in her shop, things started to improve rapidly. She paid attention to making her product better in quality and also started to improve her services by making it good and clean. A few months later her shop became popular and even crowded. After making these changes, she now has to employ more workers!

Finally

That's all for now. Please let us know if you come to Vietnam and want to visit us. Even if you are on a tour you can always drop by. But we are not always at the center when we have projects in other places, so let us know before. We will always try to make time for you! Thanks again for standing with us,

Greetings,
Solar Serve team



Called to Serve

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