



Live from Kenya

by Bella Adhiambo Deputy Director of EP Kenya

EP LIGHTS UP!

I spent the night in a dinghy 300 shilling room in Talek and not in Mpuai house. All because of the rains that have hit most parts of Kenya so later than usual. Here in the Mara, when it rains, it is best you cross all the ridges, streams and rivers that lie between you and your home. The flooded rivers and impassable road tracks of the Mara, are a story for another day. Today I focus on lights- the solar lights in my room were dead apparently because there has been very little sunlight (read solar) with the rains and stuff. Strange to me considering the Solux LED 50 kits we provide and use at EP house in Mpuai work like magic.

The kit contains a panel, 1 lamp and 9 handset chargers at only 2500 shillings! The kit was initially introduced to the small community of Mpuai but has now caught on with people from as far as Nyanza, Western and the larger Rift Valley regions coming in to get it. There have been complaints about the costs being prohibitively high- that is for the marketers and manufacturers to haggle about. The sociologists that I am- I can only hope this solar powered lights get to as many people as possible especially in this region, where electricity is not available. I have had cases of people walk up to me and ask where town folks get solar panels big enough to run their TVs, iron boxes, cookers, fridges etc. How everyone can afford this even those with low incomes. They do not know about electricity and how it works!

EP has in the past 12 months distributed about 100 Solux LED 50 kits either as free donations to the very needy households or through direct sales at subsidized costs. One such beneficiary talked about how he did away with his small kerosene lamps and weekly purchase of kerosene worth 200 shillings. A little girl, Seremon who attends school nearby now gets to do her homework with the lamp her family got from EP. We have also noted a decline in the number of neighbors that come in to have their phones charged at the house since they now have their own chargers from the kit.

I have seen quite a variety of solar gadgets in this area, ironically most of them do not work well or last long. The fancier it is the lower the chances it will work well or long enough. What is worrying is the fact that most of this sub- standard solar models are either given as free handouts or sold at very low prices and installed by equally unqualified pseudo- solar experts out to make a quick buck. This makes it so hard to market good quality models that cost more and are installed by true solar experts. EP in its own small way is gradually exposing the local community to quality solar systems and models by providing them and more importantly through demonstration by using them in its house.

Enough of the serious talk, let us make a toast to young upcoming NGOs like EP that are using less conventional-but viable- approaches to address the socio-economic problems in our communities.

Bella Adhiambo

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