

Solar energy in Africa – Report on a visit to Burkina Faso in summer 2010

Dear friends, dear supporters of solar energy,

I have been back from my yearly visit to Burkina Faso for more than 2 months, and would like to report on the progress of our local projects.

I am happy to say that the local team has worked very well, and that every single project we have addressed is on course (you may want to have a look under www.soleilburkina.ch). We are now working on construction plans for our planned solar workshop, together with a local construction company we have identified. We have also entered an cooperation agreement with the Lycée Professionnel in Bobo-Dioulasso, where the first prototypes of local, solar-powered mills will be built in the next few months. We have also issued a solar cookbook for our customers with solar ovens, and – thanks to the generosity of a friend who collected money at her birthday party – we have installed solar lighting in the church of Kwakwalé, its teaching centre, and the village square.



My African colleagues of Soleil Burkina and I have come to the conclusion that solar cooking is in need of active promotion and that alternatives to firewood are needed – deforestation continues to impoverish the northern part of the country and to turn it into a desert. To achieve this, we have developed a new promotion strategy: the solar ovens and solar cookers (these are Papillon-type parabolic cookers) will be combined with high-efficiency “foyers améliorés” – compact, low-cost wood ranges that can be manufactured locally and reduce firewood consumption by 50%. In this way, we can offer a complete solution for cooking – solar whenever possible, and highly efficient when firewood must be used, for instance in rainy weather or late at night.

The material and components necessary for building solar ovens – wooden boards, nails, glass panes, reflectors - is available locally, but at a very high price as measured on the local income scale – close to 70 Swiss Francs, or more than one full month average salary, solar ovens must be subsidized by at least 50% for the present. The new approach is to not just sell the products. Rather, the customers spend five days at workshops, where they learn how to use, but also how to assemble their solar ovens; the incentive is a massive subsidy of 70%, for a purchase price of 25 Swiss Francs. The workshops are assisted by a carpenter and a moderator who is in charge of cooking for the participants, using a “foyer amélioré” or a solar oven depending on the weather conditions. Towards the end of the workshop, the participants can try out their own recipes on their own solar ovens, and they are also issued an illustrated solar cookbook suitable even for women who cannot read or write French.

The first 2 workshops aimed at two women's organisations – the "Collectif Guimbi Ouattara", a local network, and the "Femmes Solidaires". The success far exceeded our expectations. The 22 members of the „Femmes Solidaires“ – all of them school teachers – all signed at once. Within a week, the group had grown to 40. The participants decided to work in small groups, and re-scheduled the workshops to Saturdays because of their ongoing workload. In 4 days, the Femmes Solidaires assembled 45 solar ovens and ordered 42 foyers, which are produced by local craftsmen and – selling for 6 to 8 Swiss francs - require no subsidies. The follow-up phase, important for all new daily-use products, has already started, and new orders are still coming in.

Thanks to this first series of workshops, Soleil Burkina has acquired very valuable practical experience in the marketing and promotion of solar ovens, and we are keen to expand our activities to new locations – including more rural areas. On the one hand, the workshops should just be replicated with women's organizations in other towns. On top of that, we want to promote solar ovens on the market squares of large villages in the surroundings of Bama.

We intend to address 8 new locations over the next 3 months, and hope to gain an additional 40 participants on top of those we can address via women's organizations. This is an ambitious target requiring a lot of efforts, financial and otherwise, from the staff of Soleil Burkina (public demonstrations of solar products, but also lobbying with the local administration and village elders, advertising on local radio stations, catering for the visitors and workshop participants, organization and implementation of the workshops, Follow-Up).

Some areas - logistics and transport, material procurement, salaries – exceed the resources of our small organization. The unexpected success of our workshops has used up most of our budget. This is why we come to you and ask for your personal support.

Campaign in 8 locations near Bama:

- Budget for preparation: lobbying (with a lot of transport involved), Radio and possibly TV promotion, Flyers and other promo material: 800 000 CFA/2'000.-CHF
- Budget for 8 local demos (catering, moderator's salary, car rental, fuel, tent rental, public announcer with PA system): 1'440 000CFA/ 3'600.-CHF
- Budget for 8 5-day workshops (salaries for carpenter and moderator, food for 15 participants, material for 40 ovens, transportation), 2'800 000 CFA/ 7'000.-CHF


Our objective is to reach several thousand people and make them aware of the benefits of solar energy, by showing them a wide variety of products (ovens, dryers, portable lamps, lighting...)

Please help me save trees, improve the condition of African women and their children and their health and well-being, and reduce CO2 emissions (one solar oven saves 2,5 t of CO2 per year).

How can you help?

- With **50 Swiss Francs** you can subsidize 50% of a solar oven
- With **200 Swiss Francs** you can sponsor a papillon-type parabolic cooker
- With **250 Swiss Francs** you can sponsor a complete solar cooker set (thermal basket, gas burner, gas container).
- With **500 Swiss Francs** you can sponsor a simple lighting installation
- With **2750 Swiss Francs** you can sponsor solar lighting for a classroom

Collect money in your company, among your family and friends, your church community

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