

Children studying under the light of a solar lantern in Myanmar.



THE GIFT OF LIGHT

Solar lanterns produced and donated by a Japanese company are bringing light to off-grid and disaster-affected areas around the world.

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As many as 1.2 billion people around the world still live without electricity. Without electric lights, it is difficult at night to study, work, receive medical treatment or safely give birth. Kerosene lamps, the common alternative, offer only poor illumination. Moreover, they are a fire hazard, their fumes are damaging to the health, and they produce carbon dioxide.

With the elimination of these problems in mind, Panasonic Corporation has been promoting the 100 Thousand Solar Lanterns Project to deliver small-sized solar-powered lighting equipment to areas where electricity is not available.

“In 2006, Uganda’s Minister of State toured our Solar Ark facility and asked us to help people in his country suffering the effects of kerosene lamp

smoke by using our solar batteries,” says Akira Hoshi, leader of the 100 Thousand Solar Lanterns Project. “In response to his request, we commenced development of a solar lantern that can easily be used by anyone. We completed development in 2009 and donated 500 lanterns to Uganda soon afterwards. We donated a further 1,000 lanterns to Indonesia following the devastating Sumatra Earthquake the same year. After that, we donated 1,000 lanterns to Tanzania in April 2011 and 2,000 lanterns to Cambodia in March 2012. From the positive feedback we received from these beneficiaries, we recognized that the lanterns are particularly useful for education and medical treatment at night, and subsequently in fiscal 2012 launched the 100 Thousand Solar Lanterns Project.”

Panasonic’s solar lanterns and lights consist of a small solar panel, a storage battery and an LED light. The lanterns provide light for approximately six hours after a six-hour charge under the sun, and up to ninety hours if used in low light mode.

In 2015, the United Nations resolved to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The sev-

Solar lanterns enable medical treatment in the dark in the Philippines.

enteen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth in the Agenda include the eradication of poverty, ensuring health and well-being, ensuring quality education, the achievement of gender equality, the elimination of inequality, the improvement of the economic infrastructure and the conservation of the global environment.

To achieve these goals by 2030, the United Nations considers it essential that national governments collaborate with private companies as well as public organizations. Expectations are high of Japanese companies due to their high-level technological power.

“We donate the products to NPOs or NGOs in Asian countries. In Africa, the conditions for donating are more difficult and therefore we have often received cooperation and support from agencies of the United Nations to donate the products,” says Hoshi.

To contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, Panasonic pays careful attention to the feedback it receives from the beneficiaries. Reading this feedback, Hoshi became aware that the project produces very effective results in the area of education. Many children in poverty-stricken areas stop attending school to help their family or because they cannot keep up with their studies without lighting at home. However, children receiving solar lanterns can study at night and therefore achieve good grades. The light of the lantern has become the light of hope that children will graduate from school and thereby find employment and escape poverty.

The quality of education has improved as well



because teachers can prepare the classes at night. The solar lanterns have also been used for literacy education for adults in Cambodia.

In the Philippines and Myanmar, midwives use the solar lanterns at night, reducing the risk of harm to mothers giving birth and their newborn babies.

Disaster Relief

Although solar lanterns are mainly used in development assistance, they are also used for emergency assistance at the time of natural disasters. Before launching the 100 Thousand Solar Lanterns Project, Panasonic donated some 4,800 solar lanterns to disaster-affected areas following the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. Under the Project itself, the company donated about 1,000 lanterns to areas seriously damaged by Typhoon Yolanda in 2013. In 2014 and 2015, the company donated 3,240 solar lanterns to Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia in West Africa, where the Ebola virus disease had become an epidemic. The solar lanterns enabled medical teams to work through the night. Panasonic plans to have donated 100,000 solar lanterns to areas around the world without electricity by 2018, when the company will celebrate its 100th anniversary. As of November 2016, it has donated about 67,000 lanterns in nineteen countries.

“Ideally, society should not require solar lanterns as power grids should be established all over the world, but this will take time. We are working on the project in the hope that our products will contribute to solving lighting problems for people living without electricity until the day comes when electricity is readily available to everyone,” says Hoshi. 



Panasonic's solar lantern

All photos: Courtesy of Panasonic