

Davi Project for Peace Bucknell University
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Light the Way

Lamp Distribution Program in Rural Areas, China

Background

As one of the poorest counties in China, Ninglang County¹ is located in the northwestern part of Yunnan Province. There are 233,327 residents, but 82% of the population is suffering from poverty. In 2001, the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China listed Ninglang County as one of poorest counties that needs to be improved. Although students from every village have access to at least one elementary school, the facilities of these schools are underdeveloped. There are two problems that these schools have in common; they either have no electricity at all or are unable to afford electricity. Since a large percentage of these schools are boarding schools, students live there. Students at the schools can only study before the sun sets because there is no source of light at night for the students. During cloudy or rainy days, students go outside to study under very dim light. This is bad for their eyes and will cause myopia.

Objectives and Goals

The main goal of the Lamp Distribution Program is to improve students' study conditions by providing solar-powered lamps in order to ease the educational inequality between conditions in rural and urban areas. Since China is a country with huge territory, the educational resources are not evenly distributed. Because of the lack of the educational resources in rural areas, the opportunity gap between people in rural areas and those in urban areas are growing, which will lead to social unrest. As a project for the purpose of pursuing peace, we designed our project to ease the potential possibility of conflict by helping rural schools improve their facilities in order to provide the future generations in rural areas with equal opportunities to have better educatiϕns and lives.

For students in rural areas in China, education is the only way for them to improve their standard of living and reach out to the outside world. Almost all the students try their best to study day and night, but the nighttime darkness makes it difficult for them to read and write. This lack of basic study conditions creates an invisible obstacle that limits the students' future educational opportunities. The Lamp Distribution Program can solve these problems by giving those students solar powered lamps, which are expected to improve lightness of studying environment in order to protect students' eyes and allow them to continue to study after sunset with. More importantly, we believe this project will give hope to the students and encourage them to pursue higher level education, which will not only help them get out of the poverty, but will also help ease racial tensions caused by income and educational inequalities, help local tribes adapt to modern society and promote peace in these rural areas. These solar-powered lamps, which can be purchased online in China for 11 dollars each, are durable and reliable. The website is provided below.² These lamps are designed for study use. They can be recharged under different weather conditions. The rechargeable batteries can store electricity that can sustain the lamp for at most 8 hours. Since Ninglang County has an altitude higher than an urban city like Beijing, solar energy is abundant. In addition, our website, brochures and other products³ can also help raise the upper and middle-class's awareness of the educational inequality between rural and urban areas and raise awareness of regional tension between minorities and the Han race in China.

Partnerships

The schools that will receive our lamps will be Xichuan Town Elementary School, Bolopin Elementary School, and two to three other elementary schools in Xichuan Town, Ninglang County. The total number of students we will help is around 520. The students can keep the lamps with them and bring them back home. At the same time, these schools are also the partner schools of the lamp distribution program. In the summer of 2012, two of this program's initiators, Xu and Jiang, went to the schools to do preliminary research and meet with the principals of those schools. We were told that many lights in the classrooms are too old to

¹ <http://baike.baidu.com/view/602641.htm>

² <http://item.taobao.com/item.htm?spm=a230r.1.10.316.uzEYXz&id=21692968115>

³ We will explain that in Fundraising Part.

operate. In addition, in order to save on electricity fees, the schools do not allow students to use any lamps or lights at night. The lack of sufficient lighting at night is always a problem for these schools. They are looking forward to upgrading the lighting systems for the students. The principle told us “the school will be extremely thankful for any effort devoted to solving the problems addressed relating to infrastructure.”

Another partner organization is the Volunteer Association of the Tourism and Culture College of Yunnan University⁴. This association has already organized volunteer trips, voluntary tutors and other activities that took place in Ninglang County for more than 8 years. They also conducted activities at two of the schools we plan to visit. This is also why we picked that area and those schools. They are willing to advise us about obtaining lodging, transportation and dining in Ninglang County. They are also willing to provide places for temporary storage of the lamps before we conduct our program. Besides that, one of our initiators, Shenyun Xiao's, father's charity organization in China, Oriental Legend, will provide backup for the whole trip.

Meanwhile, the program initiator, Yi Xu, is working with a political science professor about starting a Bucknell in China faculty-led excursion, which has already been approved by Bucknell University. The goal is for a group of Bucknell students to pay a visit to the schools and conduct research on the topic of education and economic inequality. During the Bucknell group stay in China, they will also visit Ninglang County in Yunnan province to assist the project team.

Timeline and Sustainability

The estimated length of the program will be approximately 20 days. We will recruit volunteers both in America and in China. The group will consist of students from high schools and universities. We will purchase the lamps, arrange accommodations, and prepare the mini English sessions as well as some art classes for those schools we will visit. During the program, we will visit schools, distributed lamps, hold mini lectures we prepared and teach students to create artwork for the purpose of future fund-raising. We will follow our project plan and have meeting everyday in order to assure program progress and allow for unexpected changes as needed. After the program, we will update the website, create photo albums, print brochures, and fundraise to lay the foundation for the future development of the project.

- **Fundraising Plan:** During the program, we will teach student how to draw pictures related to peace and how the lamps will inspire their education. We will take a picture of the students with their drawings. After getting student and their parent permission, we will put the student artwork, photos and other information on the brochures and website. We also plan to display and sell the pictures created by the students at online stores or directly to companies and charity foundations. We also plan to host a Chinese food dinner in order to raise funds. The money received from these activities will be used to sustain next year's program. In addition to this, we will also contact the factories that are making solar energy lamps request their support as a partner organization.
- **Future Development of the Program:** We will expand our program to other rural areas where electricity is limited. In addition, we also plan to set up a solar-powered water heating system in Xichuan Town Elementary School in the future, because the students there do not have any hot water in winter.
- **Future Cooperation with Schools:** The Bucknell Engineering department may be able to cooperate by assigning solar lamp design to a specific class or lab as an assignment. In addition, we will conduct presentations and distribute brochures to high schools and universities both in China and in the US, in order to raise awareness about the existing educational inequalities and encourage more volunteers to join our program.

Conclusion

The *Light the Way: Lamp Distribution Program in Rural China* is dedicated to easing educational inequalities and encouraging minority students to pursuing higher levels of education by providing solar powered lamps to students in rural areas in order to improve their study conditions. These lamps will protect them from getting myopia and most importantly, reduce social unrest due to the social inequality. Because of our practical plan to collect funds for the future and the large number of students who need our help, this program has great potential to improve the living and education conditions of students in many rural areas, helping them to achieve brighter futures.

⁴ <http://www.weibo.com/u/2440966120>