

Title: Peace through a Community Approach to Solar Lighting

School: Trinity College

Student(s) Information:

Vinit Agrawal, Kathmandu, Nepal

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Matthew Phinney, Haydenville, MA, United States

(none attended UWC)

1. Project Summary: Describe location, timeframe, participants, other funding involved, scope of work, and goals intended.

The project was conducted in two rural villages named Kaleshwor and Methinkot situated within a 50km periphery of Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. The project involved the participation of three students from Trinity College, Vinit Agrawal, Michael Pierce, and Matthew Phinney, as well as Niraj Shrestha from Tufts University and Abhisheskh Bhatt from Washington and Lee University. Although the team was only in Nepal for around four weeks, Abhisheskh and the participating organizations ECCA and Kaleshwor Community Learning Center had already started the work before their arrival. The project's goals were to institute a system of solar lighting working with ECCA and other financial institutions that use microfinancing and to encourage the villagers to solve their problems through a community-based approach. The team also aimed to help establish two community libraries, one in each village, with extra funding from both the Trinity College President's Discretionary Fund and Tufts University. Additionally, the team hoped to film a documentary of the project to increase the initiative's impact.

2. Project Results: Self-evaluate the project; your assessment should enumerate what goals were and were not accomplished.

The project was extremely successful. Aside from the documentary, which is still a work in progress, every goal was exceeded. Both villages were receptive to the new technology. In the village of Methinkot 112 sets of solar lights (*tukis*) and individual solar panels were distributed. In the village of Kaleshwor, people were especially eager to adopt the new ideas. By the end of the team's stay, 164 solar lamps were distributed and the community charging center, made up of four mammoth solar panels and 160 charging units located at the village school, was installed. This second method, having a community charging center as opposed to individual panels, was particularly useful, cost effective, and easy to set up. While in the villages we were able to observe first hand how effective and life-changing the technology could be. While interviewing

villagers who use kerosene lamps, our team could hardly stay in the houses due to smoke. The solar *tuki's* on the other hand, provided more light at less cost, from renewable energy, and caused no pollution. In addition to distributing clean solar lighting to the villagers, we were able to further increase their quality of life by providing funds for community learning centers (libraries). The combination of adequate light to read by at night and plentiful reading material has had a positive effect on learning in these communities. While living within the community, team members also taught at the village school.

3. Implications: What are the project's implications for peace? What are the future prospects for the project? What have you learned?

Our project approached peace from a unique angle by working to address the sources of conflict. In Nepal, as in the rest of the world, economic inequalities and competition over resources lead to conflicts. The solar *tuki* reduce dependence on non-renewable resources and raise the quality of life for those living in Kaleshwor and Methinkot. In this way, the solar *tuki* contribute to peace. Although the project focused on two villages in Nepal, it also has important global implications. Most importantly it serves as a model that can inspire others to initiate similar projects in the future. It also gave our team valuable experience. Based on the resounding success of this project, we hope to continue our mission in Africa next year.

Upon returning to campus, the team set-up a slide-show presentation and lecture as part of first-year orientation. First-year students, upper-class mentors, faculty, and staff attended. The discussion focused on the project goals and accomplishments, as well as the process of developing a proposal and applying for the Projects for Peace grant. To encourage others to think creatively about peace, teammates are starting a new student organization. A constitution is currently being drafted.

