UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

November 6, 2013
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Lighting the Way

In the rural community of Macha in Zambia, electricity is a luxury not available to most people. When the sun goes down, so does their primary light source. Mothers prepare meals over open fires, students do their homework by candlelight and children play in the dark.

A team of undergraduate and graduate students from UC Santa Barbara's Department of Film and Media Studies are seeking to provide a secondary light source to the people of Macha in the form of high-efficiency, solar-powered LED lamps developed by John Bowers, professor of electrical and computer engineering and of materials, and his team at the campus's Institute for Energy Efficiency. Bowers is also the institute's director.

On Sunday, November 10, the students are holding a fundraising event at the Isla Vista restaurant Hana Kitchen to raise money to purchase lamps through Unite to Light, a nonprofit organization co-founded by Bowers specifically to supply solar-based lighting to the developing world. From 1 to 6 p.m., the restaurant will donate a percentage of its proceeds to the effort. Hana Kitchen is located at 6558 Pardall Rd .

"After doing fieldwork in Macha in 2012 we discovered that most people did not have electricity and used candles in their homes at night to do housework, homework or to read, though many cannot afford to buy candles regularly," said Lisa Parks, a professor of film and media studies at UCSB and director of the campus's Center for Information Technology and Society.

Parks and computer science professor Elizabeth Belding have been leading a four-year research project funded by the National Science Foundation to bring wireless technology to Macha.

“In 2013 we decided to take 50 solar-powered lamps from Unite to Light — funded by donations from people in my family — on our trip to Macha, and we distributed them to people in the community,” Parks continued. “After we gave away all the lamps, Machans kept coming up to us and asking for them.”

In response to the high demand, students Lindsay Palmer, Pailin Srukhosit and Julia Petuhova, participants in the research project, decided to organize a fundraiser with the goal of getting more lamps to families in this remote area in Zambia’s southern province.

If all goes according to plan, Parks said, a shipment of lamps could be on its way to Macha by December.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.