

*By: Kawesa Mukasa, Solar Connect Association, Uganda*

### **SCA AND SCN TAKE SOLAR COOKING TO 4 VILLAGES IN RURAL UGANDA**

What began as an exchange of information and knowledge in the cafeteria at the International Solar Cooker Conference in the Spanish city of Granada in 2006 between Kawesa Mukasa of Solar Connect Association (SCA) and Clara Thomas of Solar Cooking the Netherlands (SCN), has developed into a serious partnership to promote solar cookers in four villages in Mbarara district in Western Uganda in form of a Pilot Project. When successful, it will be replicated in other areas of Uganda. SCA and SCN are consolidating the achievements of the International Solar Cooker Conference and are now walking the talk. Concretely, Clara Thomas and Henk Criete of SCN visited Uganda in December 2006 to see for themselves the solar cooker project. This sort of collaboration should be emulated by other promoters of solar cookers so as to exchange experiences from various parts of Africa and outside Africa and promote international collaboration.

What has been done and how has the targeted community benefited? With the support of Wild Geese and SCN, we have distributed to-date 510 cook kits to as many households since February 2007. The number of Cookkits distributed in four villages will reach 2000 by end of January 2008. These solar cookers have been made affordable for the very poor by a subsidy provided by SCN and Wild Geese. We are encouraging the use of efficient charcoal stoves which we are bought from local artisans in the city and taken to the targeted villages.

We have come with a new method to attract more customers by introducing a "Revolving Loan fund". This fund is for people who are interested in acquiring a solar cooker but are not able to pay the whole amount at once. So they are able to take the Cookit and pay for it in installment while we receive the full amount of the Cookit upon sale to enable us continue production without interruption due to funds tied in loans. This idea was proposed by SCN and so far it is working well as no loan taker has defaulted to date.

Another first in solar coking in Uganda is to concentrate on just four villages with a total of about 2000 households or families. We are working to ensure that every household gets a solar cooker. This means that in a village like Kikokwa that has about 670 households with an average of 6 people per household, each one of them will have a Cookit. We want to make these villages a model so that visitors interested in solar cookers can visit house to house and find big clusters of people using solar cookers. This will also make it easier to study the impact of solar cookers on a community in a measurable way. Additionally every Cookit is put in a bag which protects it from insects and other dirt, together with instruction material How to Use the Cookit. This adds value to it in the eyes of the buyer. Cookit instructors come from the village and are known to residents as sociable persons with a record of volunteerism in community activities. The training we have given to instructors is helping in capacity building at the community level. A solar cooking introduction and follow up program is organized.

We and the beneficiary households are in partnership and collaborate in information sharing regarding new recipes, cooking periods for different foods and some tricks on efficient solar cooking. Solar cooker is among responses to global warming and it enables and empowers communities to play their full role in forests sustainable management and conservation of the environment.

It has been proven scientifically that tropical rain forests are the major trappers of Carbon dioxide more than any other type of vegetation or forests. It then becomes an issue of self-preservation for every individual to contribute to the conservation of these rain forests in Africa and elsewhere. Habitat loss and degradation that comes as a result of human activity is the single biggest threat to biodiversity in Uganda today. Solar cooker use is one way of involving community involvement in conservation of forests that are habitat to diverse flora and fauna.

Farmers are no longer sure of rains and have lost crops due to either heavy rainfall or to no rain at all. At other times rain stops early and it is a problem for peasant farmers. East Africa and other sub-sahara countries will remain in the vicious circle of poverty if communities do not do something to roll back deforestation and unsustainable use of fossil fuels to cook food. The destruction of forests and lack of conservation of the environment is one of the reasons why some people from developing nations go to the extent of risking their lives crossing dangerous seas in ramshackle boats in search of the elusive greener pastures in the countries of the north.