

DESTINATION NEW PARTNERSHIPS – A MAP FOR ACCELERATED SPREAD OF SOLAR COOKERS

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ABSTRACT

Collaboration between solar cooker promoters and other agencies is essential to achieving a multiplier effect in spreading solar cooking and solar water pasteurization. This paper intends to initiate dialogue on working in partnership to advance on-going dissemination of solar cookers in new communities. Soliciting interest, obtaining decision maker buy-in, and securing a funding commitment are but a few of the challenges we face as we approach other agencies. This paper draws on past technical assistance initiatives to guide solar cooker promoters in formulating recommendations and taking actions that move us closer to the intended outcome: establish new partnerships to spread solar cooking.

Keywords: solar cookers, multiplier effect, dissemination strategies, technical assistance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sarah, an acquaintance from Washington, DC, approaches you during a break at a health conference. She is now a decision-maker with the well-respected international NGO, Women's Health First. Having understood that solar cookers can benefit women's health, Sarah sees potential for solar cooking in her agency's campaign to reduce women and girl's exposure to cooking smoke in Sudan and Malawi. Though your organization has no projects in those countries and has allocated all its funds to existing programs, you want to capitalize on the opportunity to work with Women's Health First. Upon further research and discussion with Sarah, you observe that her agency's campaign and the conditions at the two project sites are appropriate for addition of a solar cooking component. You and Sarah must now map the way to partnership between your organizations.

2. BACKGROUND

SCI's technical assistance services are usually provided to agencies over a period longer than a few days. In other words, such assistance goes beyond training on use of solar cookers to include capacity building services towards independent management of solar cooker initiatives of varying scope and scale. The clients for services from SCI and other solar cooker promoters can include local community groups, non-government and government organizations, institutions of higher education, and multilateral agencies.

There are many examples of multi-year technical assistance including: Solar Cookers International to the Development Technology Centre of the University of Zimbabwe; Solar Household Energy, Inc. to the Fondo Mexicano Para La Conservación de la Naturaleza; and Bolivia INTI to Sobre la Roca. In each of these cases, three basic types of assistance were offered: training on solar cooker promotion, starting local production capacity, and monitoring and evaluation of project impact. Local partners brought community leadership, knowledge of local needs and resources. The common lesson across projects is that there are no quick results, however with perseverance, thousands of families ultimately benefit from local access to solar cookers.

3. PARTNERSHIP: TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE

One of the greatest challenges to effective spread of solar cookers and solar water pasteurization is the expectation of quick results. Technoserve reminds us that we tend to ignore a lesson from history - few changes occur instantly. There is little historical evidence suggesting that fundamental changes occur quickly in the human realm. The three plus decades devoted to promotion of improved stoves confirm this. Evidence from SCI's

projects suggest it takes four to five years for wide-spread adoption of solar cookers in extreme situations such as refugee camps and the same to reach ten percent of target households in settled communities.

Another challenge is getting sustained attention by the very agencies we seek to partner with. Staff movement and the multi-faceted development agenda of development agencies, requires SCI to stay focused in identifying the organizations and key decision makers to target. This process of orienting agencies to solar cookers, their uses, benefits and limitations goes hand in hand with advocacy. Targeting specific agencies and specific individuals within them is generally a long-range strategy combining intention with some randomness. In 2001-2002, an ad-hoc committee of the SCI board of directors worked with a number of relief organizations on a development strategy for Afghanistan that includes solar cookers. Though the strategy has yet to be implemented, it contributed to nurturing a seed in the International Rescue Committee previously sown at a refugee camp in Kenya. More seeds were planted later in New York such that by late 2005 plans were underway for a pilot solar cooker initiative in Chad.

4. THE MAPPING PROCESS

Below are topics to be considered in developing a common framework for working with other organizations in spreading solar cookers.

4.1 Establish a Partnership

Given that relatively few people in developing agencies know and intentionally seek out solar cooker promoters, general education of prospective partners must go hand-in-hand with proactive outreach to specific individuals or groups. Once there is openness and understanding of solar cookers, we can move forward by:

- ♦ Learning about the operations of the other organization
- ♦ Exploring common ground
- ♦ Finding more allies within the organization
- ♦ Sustaining partner interest in solar cooking
- ♦ Negotiating the details

4.2 Agree on Project Basics

The three elements below are present in virtually all sustained efforts to promote solar cookers. These elements should be agreed upon prior to formalizing the partnership.

- ♦ Strive for local production or assembly
- ♦ Select a strong local institution for implementation

- ♦ Build local capacity to foster the independent spread over the long-run

4.3 Avoid Pitfalls and Missteps

Partnerships have many challenges, a major one being the power differences due to the size of each organization. Strategies of win-win outcomes include:

- ♦ Defining expectations and responsibilities
- ♦ Moderating scale and scope
- ♦ Anticipating risks
- ♦ Demonstrating commitment and acting with integrity

4.4 Get Funding

A creative approach to funding is needed, as few partners will contribute all the funds to carry out solar cooker projects.

- ♦ Contracts and sub-contracts
- ♦ Matching funds
- ♦ Special fundraising campaigns
- ♦ Other financial arrangements

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has identified possible steps in seeking out new partners for implementation of solar cooker projects. The mapping process outlined above seeks to help us make our collective expertise as solar cooker promoters available to other agencies. The author suggests that conference participants resolve to work together to develop recommendations for action on collaborative partner-seeking and sharing of technical expertise.