

## **COMMUNITY MEMBERS EMBRACE SOLAR COOKING IN THE SOUTH**

In April 2011, three members of the Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust (NaDEET) embarked on an evaluation of their adult community group programme by visiting several participants at their homesteads in Rehoboth, Mariental, Keetmanshoop, Bethanie and Maltahöhe. The Director of NaDEET, Viktoria Keding, our Polytechnic in-service training student, Emilia Sende, and an intern from the United States, Jon Maravelias, conducted the evaluation using surveys and interviews to determine the success of implementing a sustainable lifestyle amongst rural Namibians in the South using hands-on training with alternative cooking technologies, i.e. solar cookers, solar ovens, fuel-efficient stoves and recycled firebricks, as well as teaching water and energy saving techniques.

In Maltahöhe, we met with community organiser and shop-owner, Veronika Katjikuru, who explained the money and energy she saves using her solar cooker -- "I save N\$80 on my electric bill every month because I am not using electricity to cook my food anymore!" Indeed, this sentiment was shared throughout the community as many expressed that they are grateful to not have to travel several kilometers a day to collect firewood or even spend money to buy it. In fact, using recycled firebricks in a fuel-efficient stove retains more heat than an open fire causing food to heat up quicker. Therefore, rural Namibian residents can enjoy the time and money they save using the alternative cooking technology NaDEET has provided through our programme.

As we travelled on to the farming community of Bethanie, we met several community members at the homestead of Chief Fredericks and his wife, Anna Fredericks. There was no doubt that the NaDEET participants from Bethanie were our most "financially challenged," since the majority were unemployed and did not even have gas or electricity to use. As such, the solar cookers and solar ovens were very useful to a population subject to scarce resources and frequent power outages.

Furthermore, we discovered that the relatively small community centred on a traditional power structure created a highly organised Bethanie community. Due to the high cost of solar cookers, each community group could only receive 6-10 parabolic solar cookers, so many of our participants organised teams to share it. In some communities, this was a problem as less responsible members of the group either hoarded the solar cooker or remained out-of-touch. However, in Bethanie we saw a community that enjoyed sharing with one another and responsibly traded the cookers every three months.

On the contrary, we found the opposite situation in Keetmanshoop as many participants had moved to Windhoek for work, abandoning their solar cookers at the Women's Action for Development (WAD) office. It had been nearly a year since the solar cookers had been donated to Keetmanshoop, so WAD and NaDEET created an opportunity to hold an impromptu seminar to show new community members how to assemble the solar cookers and to cook with them. Afterward, we donated one of the solar cookers to the Keetmanshoop Multipurpose Youth Centre, who were very ecstatic to hold

solar cooking events on the weekends.

We found that it was very common throughout all of the communities for members to be excited to share their knowledge of cooking with solar power. In Mariental, we met Ingrid Kanguatuuako who explained to us that she had taught her elderly mother how to solar cook. Presently, the whole family now cooks all of their meals on the solar cooker and Ingrid hopes to recruit female domestic workers, heads of household and even suburbians for a second visit to NaDEET.

Similarly, Zita Mouton of Rehoboth kept her parabolic solar cooker at Orange Babies, a clinic providing baby formula for HIV positive mothers. She explained to us that the solar cooker had more opportunities to be used for demonstrations in the community, as well as to generate income for Orange Babies through having bake sales. We were very impressed to meet such inspired women in these communities who seek to teach others about sustainable living practices. Viktoria Keding, the Director of NaDEET, remarked "It is a real inspiration to see that NaDEET Centre participants have taken our sustainable living message to heart, and that they are able to convert it into practical solutions to their environmental constraints within the community." We at NaDEET hope that all participants will continue their hard work to change their communities for a sustainable future.

Overall, the participants surveyed reported a 67% daily-use of their parabolic solar cookers as well as all of the benefits mentioned above. Of those that reported that they use their gas stove rarely or never, participants relied on their parabolic solar cooker 79% of the time to cook their daily meals. Those that reported that they use their electric stove rarely or never reported that they use their solar cooker 63% of the time. And lastly, those that no longer use an open fire or only for traditional-use rely on their solar cookers 68% of the time.

In 2010, NaDEET launched its pilot programme to bring southern, rural Namibian community groups to NaDEET Centre. The 5-day programme features practical training in alternative cooking technology, water and energy saving techniques, conducting an environmental audit and learning the theory behind climate change. Thanks to funding from the UNDP Global Environment Facility and the NamibRand Conservation Foundation, each community group received 6-10 parabolic solar cookers, a solar oven, one fuel-efficient stove per person, recycled firebricks, posters and copies of our environmental literature, *It's Time to Solar Cook* and *It's Time to be Efficient*. NaDEET looks forward to continuing the adult community group programme throughout 2011 and beyond.