



Solar Lighting Project

Dissin, Burkina Faso

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Picture Story

Engineers Without Borders

University of Maryland

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The Burkina Faso lighting project began in the usual way- with a plane ride. During the layover in Charles de Gaul, Paris, several students were already hard at work preparing for the project implementation.



While flying over the Sahara, the group received their first glimpse of the impending waves of sand that would also be replaced by red clay.



After arriving in Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou, the group stayed in the hotel Centre D'Accueil Notre Dame de Lorette. In the morning, everyone was introduced to the coffee and bread breakfast tradition of Burkina. This would be a much welcome breakfast for most of the trip.



Traveling to Dissin required catching a bus, but this one wouldn't start. Some of the students decided to help push-start the bus even though there ended up not being enough room for everyone. The students caught the next bus instead, which turned out to be a lucky move because the former bus was seen stranded on the side of the road about 20 miles away.



After a long bus ride through the heart of Burkina, students finally arrived in Djipologo, near their destination of Dissin.



Once in Dissin, everyone began to learn their way around.





Everyone made their way to the church which would be the home base for the project.



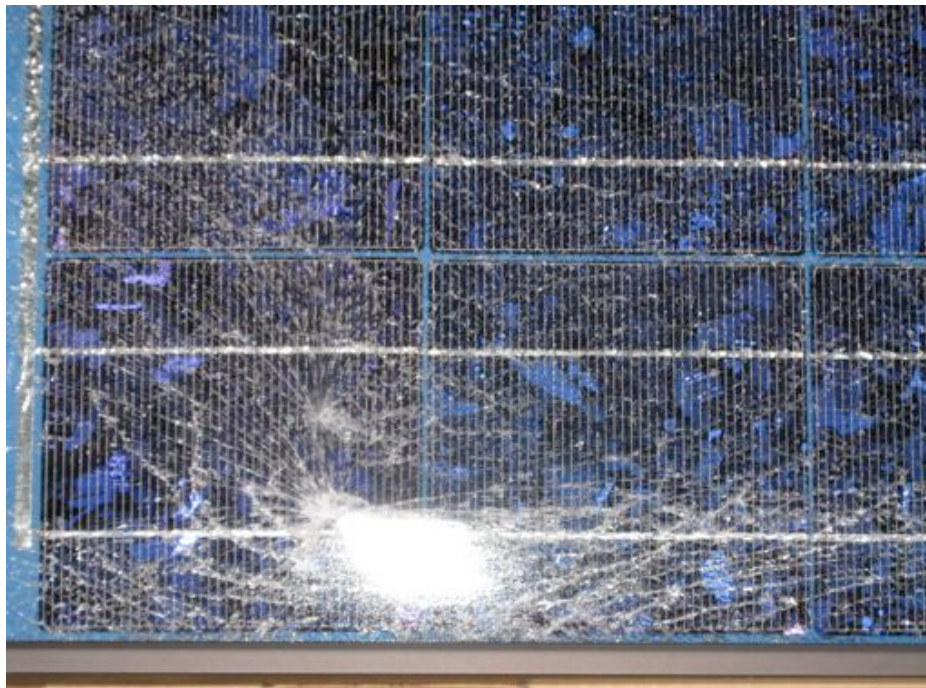
It was here that everyone had their first taste of dolo, which is a mild beer made from pounded millet and served in a Calabash gourd. It is a staple in each community, and an important part of the Burkinabe culture. Different villages have their own way of making it, so each village invited everyone to try their version of dolo.



Work began the first night with connecting the batteries in parallel for even charging and maximum life.



Two batteries had “gone missing” during shipment, and the next day when students inspected the solar panels, they also found one panel had shattered in shipment. Fortunately, the remaining 11 solar modules and 22 batteries had arrived intact.



The work drew a lot of attention. These girls were very shy at first and watched from afar, but before long they were helping out and enjoying occasional treats.



After some preliminary preparations, the village leaders came to the church to help prepare the equipment and learn about their new systems.











This is Ghislain. He came by every day to help with simple tasks, but demonstrated a rather sophisticated intellect and fast learning curve. He became a member of the team in some ways, and will be remembered by all.







The value of good communication was an important lesson throughout the entire project. Every endeavor required this skill, from building parts to buying lunch.



Every day was complimented by a sunrise and sunset over Africa.



Other lessons included cultural differences like bathing with a bucket and using a latrine.



The project enabled students to get to know the villagers, as can be seen by this friendly game of soccer with some local children.



The time came to go to the villages and install the solar systems.



When the group arrived, they were always greeted with quite a crowd!



And when at work, there was ALWAYS an audience!







Working in the schools made everyone truly appreciate the opportunities we have had all our lives, and how fortunate we are to live in a place where so much is afforded to so many.



It was a lot of work...









In addition to the solar installations, two team members from the R.H. Smith School of Business conducted surveys to determine possible extensions to the project.



The team's advisors helped villagers fix electrical problems unrelated to the team's project. This helped to build trust between the team and the villagers.





...and one night some students worked with a local in the dark to get the job done.



Many villages gave the team chickens or guinea fowl (one gave onions and peanuts). The advisors usually accepted on behalf of the group and the birds were usually given to the church cook.





When it was all said and done, the project was a great success.





And 12 villages had light for their children to read by.















As a final ending to a prosperous project, several students attended Sunday mass held by the priests who had taken such good care of the team. The sounds of drums, balafon, and the peoples' voices thundered beneath the thin roof of the open-air church.



As the return flight passed the tip of Greenland and coasted above northern Canada, icebergs offered a stark contrast to hot Burkina, and prepared everyone for the cold winter that awaited at home.



Our thanks go to the villagers, too many to name; to priest L'abbé Thomas d'Aquin Hien and the other priests; to Didier Meda and his family; and to our sponsors at the University of Maryland, as well as those off-campus, without whom this work would not have been possible.