Technology and Knowledge Transfer Programme
On the Use of Solar Energy in Kuna Yala

Programme Description
July 28, 2006

Vision:

Strengthen Kuna cultural patrimony via the delivery of practical skills and solar technology that will increase opportunities for sustainable development and self determination.

Objectives:

- Facilitate the Kuna's analysis of the impacts, demand and offer of electricity in their sovereign territory.
- Build individual, systemic and institutional capacities for the use of solar technologies.
- Transcend commercial limits preventing social/cultural applications of electricity.

Programme Framework:

1) Foundational Phase

April '05 – Pilot Project

The school of the community of Ogobsucum was selected as a pilot project to test the compatibility of the solar technology with Kuna society. The trip familiarized the team with the installation scenario (cultural and technical) challenges. The successful formation of a Kuna team of technicians and the illumination of 10 classrooms provided valuable feedback and implementation parameters. This experience was very valuable in the larger programme definition and methodologies.

October '05 - Analysis Electric Demand

In response to circulated TOR's, a team of 4 Kunas were selected to conduct an analysis on the demand and offer of electricity in Kuna Yala. The team was from the community of Ogobsucum, two of whom were in their 2nd year studying electric engineering at the University of Panama. The results were presented to the General Kuna Congress, the maximum Kuna authority.

September '05 – May '06 – Capacity Establishment

This successful phase of the programme focused on building individual, institutional and systemic capacities. With the cooperation of the General Kuna Congress, Permacity Corporation, the Panama Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Provincial Council of Kuna Yala, 28 kuna solar technicians were trained, 16,000lbs of solar systems were installed in 20 different communities on separate islands, and Dad Ibe, a Kuna commercial solar entity was established. The social uses of the equipment, the employment of the technicians and the organization of a network of solar users has had tremendous successful environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts.

2) Implementation Phase

Aug '06 – Jan'07 – Solar Technology in Support of Natural and Cultural Patrimony

With successful installations in 20 of the 48 Kuna communities performed by solar trained Kuna technicians, the platform is set to enable solar energy to make a significant contribution to the well being of the Kuna.

Next Phase Discussion

Unlike the historical use of diesel generators, this culturally compatible implementation and equitable use of modern sustainable technology is encountering great success because it is not putting cultural and natural patrimonies of the Kuna into conflict with each other.

Actions during the Implementation Phase will utilize this acquired cultural acceptance to leverage further sustainable development throughout the Comarca Kuna Yala.

The Implementation Phase endeavors will;

- Complete cultural use solar implementations in the remaining communities of the Comarca.
- Repair or improve community custodianship of Kuna natural patrimonies. (i.e. solar system installations in exchange for; community managed trash disposal plans, marine protected areas, prohibition of turtle hunting/ coral extractions, etc. To be determined in collaboration with Kuna authorities.)
- Facilitate the functioning of Kuna – Kuna commercial solar installations. That is, empower Dad Ibe to fulfill the Kuna commercial demand for electricity, replacing harmful diesel electric plants.

For more information:
Ing. Scott Agustín Muller
s.muller@codesta.org