

“Light, Hope and Opportunity: Empowering Women through Clean Energy”

A *Quilt for Change* challenge in support of women’s empowerment and the non-profit organization *Solar Sister*

ABOUT THE PROBLEM...

Have you ever been without power due to an ice storm, heavy snowfall or hurricanes? Depending on the duration and severity of the cause, power outages are disruptive to our daily lives, but usually temporary in nature and soon forgotten. Many of us have generators at home to provide some power, for lights, to keep our food cool, and to either heat or cool our houses (depending on the season) until local power was restored. And we all probably have friends, family and neighbors who helped us through the experience. But what if you had to live under those conditions all the time? No electricity means no air conditioning, no heat, and no refrigeration for food or medicine. It means no lights for your kids to study by, no hot water for bathing and sanitation, or ovens and stoves on which to cook. It means relying mostly on wood for cooking and heating. And it means no Internet, mobile phone usage, television or video games with which to connect to your family, friends and community. Long-term, such conditions fundamentally affect the quality of life, health, the ability to provide for one’s family and the future for those who lack access to reliable electricity – a condition known as Energy Poverty.

Around the world – and especially in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia – 1.6 billion people suffer from Energy Poverty. 70% live in rural areas, and must travel – often great distances – to work, study, gather fire wood or other fuel, or gain access to health care because of a lack of lighting and power. Because they must leave home to meet these basic needs, women and children are exposed to physical danger, productivity at work and school is lost, and isolation takes a toll in health care. Families spend up to 30% of their income on energy that is insufficient, hazardous and unhealthy. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), 2.7 billion people around the world lack clean cooking stoves, and the toxic atmosphere caused by burning wood, dung and other fuel sources inside their homes is a major contributor to the chronic respiratory health problems which kill nearly two million people per year. Kerosene lamps are used widely for lighting but pose a significant safety hazard and contribute to indoor air pollution.

In recognition of this debilitating energy poverty – one that hits women and children especially hard – the United Nations has designated 2012 as the International Year of Sustainable Energy

for All. According to the IEA, much of the effort underway to shrink the energy gap goes to improving the electrical grid servicing urban areas. To address this problem, the UN has set a target of doubling the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix (from 15% to 30%) by 2030. Globally, investment in clean energy has more than doubled in the last five years, to \$260 billion in 2011. That sounds like a lot, but even with an estimated investment of \$9 billion per year going directly to projects in the developing world, by 2030 at least 1 billion people – mostly in rural areas – will remain without household power.

Many governments, non-profits and businesses have joined forces to help bridge this energy gap, focusing on the promotion of alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power and the adoption of clean cooking technologies to address the major health-related aspects of energy poverty. The International Partnership for Clean Indoor Air (IPCIA) was formed in 2002 as an outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In 2012, the IPCIA merged with the U.S.-initiated Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves (GACC), a public-private partnership that supports international efforts to spur the adoption of clean cookstoves and fuels in 100 million households by 2020.

... THE SOLUTION...

Thanks to improvements in technology and the unlimited energy potential provided by the sun, a range of solar powered products has been developed that can help alleviate the energy gap, providing safe and clean lighting, power for household appliances, and cooking alternatives to wood, charcoal and other organic fuels.

One organization that specializes in using solar technology to combat energy poverty is *Solar Sister* (www.solarsister.org), an award winning non-profit organization based in Bristol, Rhode Island. A GACC partner organization, Solar Sister works to address the energy and economic development needs of rural women in East Africa, helping to close the energy gap one woman entrepreneur at a time. *Solar Sister* reduces energy poverty by empowering women with economic opportunity, combining the breakthrough potential of solar technology with a deliberately woman-centered direct sales network to bring light, hope and opportunity to even the most remote communities in rural Africa. *Solar Sister* invests in women entrepreneurs in Uganda, South Sudan and Rwanda to bring the power of the sun to rural families and to provide a scalable, sustainable small business for their growing network of Solar Sister Entrepreneurs. \$500 in micro-investment seed capital provides a Solar Sister Entrepreneur with a “business in a bag”: training, marketing assistance and an inventory of solar products which are then sold to customers who use the products to improve the daily lives of their families. Entrepreneurs use the profits from their sales to pay back the seed money and purchase more products for re-sale, thereby establishing themselves as small businesswomen in their communities and providing income for their families. Entrepreneurs are encouraged to recruit other entrepreneurs, building a network of Solar Sister Entrepreneurs to bring light, hope and opportunity to rural East Africa.

...AND THE CHALLENGE

Quilt for Change is partnering with *Solar Sister* to sponsor the “Light, Hope and Opportunity” challenge exhibition, designed to raise awareness of energy poverty issues among the quilting community of North America, and to encourage support for the important work being carried out by *Solar Sister* in East Africa. Art quilters are encouraged to put their talents to use to highlight the energy poverty challenges faced by women and their families in rural areas with no access to regular electricity, the potential solar and other alternative energy sources have to mitigate some of these challenges, and the good work of *Solar Sister* in empowering African women to change the conditions of their lives. Selected quilts will be included in a traveling exhibition that will open under the auspices of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations at the UN’s European headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland in June 2013, and tour at various quilt shows throughout North America for the remainder of 2013 and beyond. Submissions are due to *Quilt for Change* by March 1. (Please see Challenge Submission Requirements below for more details). For more information on the challenge, *Quilt for Change* and *Solar Sister*, please visit www.quiltforchange.org and www.solarsister.org. This challenge represents an opportunity to highlight a debilitating and persistent issue facing women and families in the developing world, and to use art quilting as a means to promote social change and empower women around the world.

OTHER WAYS YOU HELP

- We realize that not everyone has the time or inclination to submit a quilt for this important challenge, and there are many other ways quilters and quilt guilds can support the work of *Solar Sister* and help narrow the energy poverty gap.
- Sponsor a Solar Sister Entrepreneur to kickstart a solar business with a "Business in a Bag," a full start-up kit of inventory, training and support. Individual quilters are encouraged to contribute what they can, while guilds could consider sponsoring an Entrepreneur as a guild charity project (e.g., donate the income from your next quilt guild raffle to *Solar Sister*).
- Join the Solar Sister Community: Help spread the word, and stay in touch. *Solar Sister* is on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Connect with *Solar Sister*, share their links with your friends and contacts, and help educate your friends and family about the vital work they do to empower women and break the energy poverty cycle.

- Other Ideas: Help us identify other ways quilters can help. Send an email to quiltforchange@me.com with your suggestions and with information on projects you and your guild are undertaking in support of *Solar Sister*.

For More Information on Energy Poverty and Organizations Fighting to Narrow the Gap:

Time Magazine - "The Worst Kind of Poverty: Energy Poverty," Time Magazine, Oct. 11, 2011

International Energy Agency - [www.IEA.org/topics/energypoverty](http://www.iea.org/topics/energypoverty)

United Nations Sustainable Energy for All initiative - <http://www.sustainableenergyforall.org/>

Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves - <http://www.cleancookstoves.org/our-work/>

USEPA Cookstove Program - <http://www.epa.gov/cookstoves/index.html>

Government of Canada GAICC announcement -

<http://www.ec.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=714D9AAE-1&news=4FD048C3-DAF8-47A8-AABC-34A5C6FAF91B>

Solar Sister: Light, Hope, Opportunity – www.solarsister.org

Quilt for Change – www.quiltforchange.org

Quilt for Change

“Light, Hope, Opportunity”

Challenge Submission Requirements

Quilters are invited to create and submit art quilts that address the issue of Energy Poverty. Participating quilters can highlight an aspect of energy poverty, for example, its effects on daily life, physical safety, health, access to education and information, and economic challenges posed to those who live without electricity; income and development inequalities faced by people who live in areas without steady sources of power; and the role of solar power and other alternative energy sources in mitigating the effects of energy poverty, indoor air pollution, isolation and limited economic development created by a lack of electricity.

“Light, Hope, Opportunity” is a juried challenge. Selected quilts will be included in a traveling exhibition that will open in June 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland, at the United Nations’ European headquarters, and then tour at various quilting venues in North America through 2014.

Submitted quilts must address the theme of “Light, Hope, Opportunity: Empowering Women through Clean Energy.” A strong artist’s statement is crucial, explaining the concept of your quilt, linking it specifically to the theme of the challenge and sharing your inspiration for the quilt, techniques and materials used, etc. Please limit your statement to 150-200 words and submit it as a Microsoft Word (or Word compatible) document. (See www.quiltforchange.org for examples from previous challenges)

- Each quilt should measure 24 inches high by 24 inches wide (60 cm by 60 cm).
- Sew a 5 inch (12.5 cm) sleeve with a ½ inch give sewn on the back and mount the sleeve 1 inch (2.5 cm) from the top edge of the back of the quilt to enable a uniform display of all the quilts in the exhibition.
- Sew a label on the bottom right hand corner of the back of the quilt with the quilter’s name, hometown, year made and quilt title.
- Photographs: We can accept digital photos only. Images must be of completed work – not work in progress. Images will be chosen on the basis of artistic merit as well as photo quality. To improve your chances of being selected, send only your best photos and use the same considerations you would for entering a juried

show, which means sharp focus, even lighting, no extraneous hands or feet or garage doors showing in the photo, etc.

- Each entry will require two digital images; one showing the whole quilt including the edges; the other showing an area in detail. All edges of the quilt must be visible; do not crop into the edges of the quilt. Send a digital image with a resolution of no less than 1800 pixels on the longest side, in high quality JPEG format. Label the file with your last name followed by partial title (example: smith_dreamingtrees.jpg). Images must accurately reflect the appearance of the quilt. Any digital image correction, aside from cropping, should be done only to ensure accuracy, and should not artificially enhance the image.
- Jurors reserve the right to refuse any quilt that differs significantly from the image submitted. We suggest using at least a 3 megapixel camera at the highest resolution.
- Please also provide a photograph of the quilter. As you progress in creating your quilt, we would love to receive (by email to quiltforchange@me.com) digital photos of the work-in-progress. These and photos of the finished quilts may be used on our website, in magazine articles and as part of the publicity for the exhibition.
- \$ 25 entry fee – please make checks payable to *Quilt for Change*.

Mail your CD (labeled with your name, please) with photos and artist's statement, along with a hard copy of your signed entry form and check, to Allison Wilbur, 11 Jennys Lane, Barrington, RI 02806. Mailing deadline is March 1, 2013.

Quilt for Change will contact selected quilters no later than April 1, 2013 to complete the exhibition logistics for the June 2013 opening at the United Nations' *Palais des Nations* in Geneva, Switzerland. Deadline for mailing finished quilts is April 20, 2013. Quilters have the option of donating their quilts to *Quilt for Change* for sale in support of *Solar Sister's* activities. Those wishing to have their quilts returned to them at the end of the exhibition tour will be asked to pay an additional \$20 to cover return mailing costs.

For planning purposes, we suggest you email us at quiltforchange@me.com with your intent to enter and provide a general description of your planned quilt. This is not required, but advised. We are happy to offer feedback and answer questions. A general description of your planned quilt and/or digital photos of your work in progress would be greatly appreciated.