



PHOTO & CAPTION

Building a Micro-Enterprise Around a Solar Product



Photo: IRC Ltd

A USAID program's solar powered torch is not only providing light to the community of Monrovia, but also a means for income.

Telling Our Story
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Charity Prayer Band is not a musical group but a group of about 40 women and a few men on the outskirts of Monrovia's largest market district who banded together for spiritual and social self-help which includes a "susu" or a pooled savings and loan fund.

A USAID program designed to assist Liberia with energy issues raised the spirits and savings of the Charity Prayer Band by introducing them to a powerful and cost-effective solar-powered three LED combination torch encased in a recycled plastic water bottle that can be easily assembled by members of the group and then sold for profit to their community members.

The solar torch was originally developed and donated to micro-enterprises in Tanzania that have since become self-sufficient businesses. The successful Tanzania model was introduced in Liberia through a USAID-supported pilot project.

The first start-up assembly tool kit is provided by the program and includes 25 light kits valued at \$15 each. A person can assemble four or five of the lights in a day. Once all the initial kits are assembled and sold, additional kits may be purchased to continue the business. Each light,

once assembled, is sold for \$20-\$25 and includes a small solar panel for recharging batteries.

In Liberia, people who rely on kerosene and candles spend up to \$15 a month on supplies, making the price of the solar lamp very reasonable. The solar flashlight operates for up to 130 hours on one charge, batteries last up to three years, and the LED bulbs last a life-time.

Yatta Hoff Mabande, a widow with six grown children and a member of the Charity Prayer Band learned to assemble the torches by watching the first group of trained assemblers. She has high hopes for the group enterprise, "It means a lot to me. I now have a way to sustain myself even if I'm alone, and I can train others. The more people we train, the more business can go out!"