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A year after quake, Nokero and American Green light up orphanage, tent city in Haiti

*Interview opportunity: Miriam Fredrick, Director, The New Life Orphanage in Haiti
Photos and video by Kurt Mann*

Jan. 14, 2010 – Filmmaker Kurt Mann wasn't sure what he'd find when he arrived in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, early in January of 2011. A year after the devastating earthquake, the city still lacked basic necessities like heat, light, clean water and shelter.

In the wake of the disaster, there are a growing number of people, like Mann, who see a kind of opportunity among the rubble. Haiti's proximity to the United States, coupled with its desperate need for large-scale rebuilding, make it an ideal place to re-build infrastructure in a new way. Rather than attempt the arduous and overwhelmingly expensive task of building traditional, industrial-age



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infrastructure, Mann and his group believe new, green technologies can be extremely useful if they are applied in a way that's appropriate to Haiti's culture and conditions.

With this in mind, Mann's [American Green](#) organization brought a powerful new tool of the environmental trade: **the Nokero N200 solar light bulb**. Mann brought more than 200 of these small, portable, solar-powered bulbs, which are designed to meet the needs of billions of people worldwide who live with little or no electricity. Mann also travelled with non-profit United for a Sustainable America and members of Florida's well-known PBS&J engineering firm, which performed a complete commodity audit of one community as part of a long-term strategy for green growth in Haiti.

"Our groups are there to try and help create a sustainable system in Haiti that will replace the aging systems they have now," Mann said. "It's a system that would be cleaner, much more affordable to build than typical infrastructure, and it could save them literally thousands of dollars."

Mann's first stop upon arrival was to deliver Nokero solar light bulbs and perform an energy audit of the **New Life Orphanage** just outside Port-au-Prince. Each child at the school received his-or-her own bulb, which they charged during the day and used



at night, or in the darkness of the indoors during rainy days and frequent power outages. The Nokero N200 bulbs lasts 6 or more hours per night on one day's charge, and are bright enough to light up a small room. They also have a "turbo-task" mode that allows the user to crank up brightness if needed.

Mann also travelled to a tent city nearby, where people live in tents without basic facilities. Surrounded by a mass of humanity, dwellers in the tent city have little



choice but to spend each night in complete blackness or burn candles or kerosene. The fuel lighting options are not only an extreme fire danger and highly polluting, they are also expensive.

The Economics

Haitian families and street vendors often spend \$10-\$30 US dollars on batteries, kerosene, or other lighting methods each month. The Nokero solar light bulb is capable of replacing existing technologies, and can retail in Haiti for about \$20 (depending on market factors). It's rechargeable and powered by the sun, so it can pay for itself within weeks or months, and it lasts for 2 years before the recyclable, rechargeable battery must be replaced (for about \$1 US). The bulb is rainproof and its impact resistant, so if a user changes the battery once every few years and generally takes good care, Nokero bulb can last for 7-10 years.

"I asked myself, 'Would the solar light bulb be a sustainable technology to last for years to come? Would the average Haitian be able to afford it?'" Mann said. "And the answer was a resounding yes."

While some prefer to donate items or funding to people in impoverished regions, Nokero and American Green take a different tact commonly referred to as Social Entrepreneurship, or *philanthrocapitalism*. The idea is that welfare is not sustainable in the long term, nor empowering to its beneficiaries.

Nokero and American Green are attempting to set up local Haitians with small business opportunities to buy and sell the bulbs, thereby creating a self-sustaining economy that can uplift a community by delivering economical and environmental solutions to everyday problems while also creating wealth within the communities which use and sell the product.

The pollution

More than 1.6 billion people worldwide live without electricity, and billions more live with intermittent electricity. More often than not, fuel lighting is used to light a home or shop for basic needs. Fuel lighting is toxic and polluting – more than 1 million people a year die from fires caused by fuel lighting, and more than 190 million tons of carbon dioxide (the equivalent of 30 million cars) are released into the air each year.



The film

Mann is producing a documentary about his experience in Haiti as part of a larger media campaign to document the worldwide effort to create a more energy-efficient, sustainable global economy. To help Mann bring more than 1,000 bulbs to Haiti when his crew returns in late March go to the Gift of Light web site at www.americangreeninternational.com. His work can be seen at www.americangreen.tv.

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For images and b-roll contact [Tom Boyd](#)

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