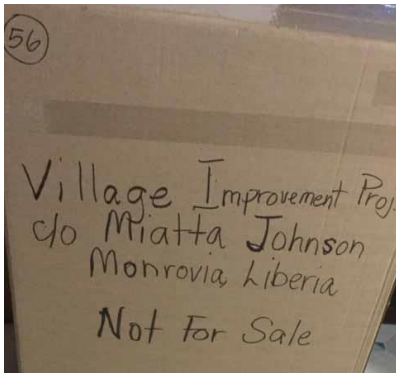## Solar Lantern Update: Light the Night-Illuminate Liberia

By LeRoy Boikai - President/CEO

Donations of about $8,500 from you, our supporters on GlobalGiving allowed VIP, Inc. to purchase 156 solar lanterns for five villages in rural Liberia. The 560 lumens bright lanterns with mobile phone chargers will be distributed to 156 families when they arrive in Liberia. Your generous donation has helped Village Improvement Project to illuminate the lives of Liberian families by allowing them to safely enjoy their homes into the night.

VIP, Inc.'s solar lantern project has now grown from providing clean and renewable solar energy for six families to 193 families in five rural villages in Liberia.

In addition, through the generous grant support of GlobalGiving, VIP is undertaking a feedback program to learn from recipients how the lights are impacting their lives. VIP is making available a mobile phone to a village liaison which will be used to conduct short surveys and remain in constant contact with residents of all villages with lanterns to learn about both positive and negative changes so that we can work with them to problem solve and figure out what other kinds of development initiatives they would want. This feedback loop will provide greater opportunity for the voices of those we are seeking to help to be heard about what they want or need rather than deciding for them.

Here's a recent field report (8/15/15) from our project team in Liberia:

From our observation, we are proud to say that the impact of the project is gradually becoming a reality in the lives of villagers in Gaynjabu Village. All the lights are working perfectly and are in very good condition. But the most amazing part is the level of improvement it has brought to the lives of the villagers in Gaynjabu. Most of the villagers explained that they bring the solar light outside at night so that the entire village will benefit from the light. As a result, the village is a very bright little place at night where school children are able to study under the light at night.

Another impact is how it has cut down living cost from buying batteries and candle. Many families can now save up to 1000 Liberian dollars ($11.49) per month from money previously used to buy batteries and candles. Before the solar light, majority of the villagers used the Chinese light while a very few used candles. The price of a pair of batteries is 50 Liberian Dollars (~$0.60) and the minimum amount of batteries a Chinese light would take is two. Secondly, the batteries in the Chinese light will need changing every four to five days. Just with two batteries and a Chinese light, one will have to spend 500 Liberian dollars (~$5.75) monthly for those using a light with only two batteries which is too strenuous for an ordinary villager to spend that sum of money on just light.

This photo of a baby sleeping with one of our lanterns highlights for me the impact of clean energy for village communities in Liberia. First, this baby is no longer breathing in fumes from indoor air pollution. Secondly, if the lantern were to tip and fall, there is no danger of burn from heat because the lanterns are cold to the touch and most importantly, there will be no accidental fire.

This other photo shows all of the expensive and potentially dangerous lights that the solar lanterns replace. There is a potential for economic and health benefits for people living in poverty as a result of replacing kerosene and battery lights with solar

lanterns and VIP intends to use its feedback mechanism and other evaluation tools to provide impact and outcome measures that can be shared with the nonprofit and donor world at large. In other words, VIP intends to share "lessons learned" both positive and negative from its projects and services to a marginalized population.

Your generosity and feedback are key to our success. Village Improvement Project, Inc. is counting on you for sustained funding to fulfill our mission of sustainable development for bottom of the pyramid citizens of Liberia. Thank you!