

# Solar LEDs for developing countries

**N**SW-based social enterprise Barefoot Power has received accolades for providing solar-powered LED lighting systems to developing countries. The company received one of two top Consensus GreenTech Awards 2010 for innovative solutions in green technology and sustainability last month.

The judges said the company is applying existing technologies in challenging markets where “the need is greatest without the ability to pay”. The GreenTech Awards were sponsored by Austrade, New Zealand Trade & Enterprise, Australian Computer Society, Connection Research, AusIndustry and Dimension Data.

The company was also named Coolest Company of the Year at *Anthill* magazine’s 2010 Cool Company Awards.

The company’s cofounder Stewart Craine said that around 100,000 home lighting kits have been distributed to around 500,000 people so far. The kits

typically replace kerosene lamps, reducing carbon emissions by around 10,000t/a. The goal for 2011 is to reach 1 million people.

Craine said the emission reductions are reaching the point where the company can begin claiming carbon credits on international emission trading markets. He hopes the credits will offset some of the company’s costs.

The company develops off-grid solar power systems in the 1W-15W range. The products are manufactured in China, and imported and sold by local entrepreneurs in developing countries.

Barefoot Power offers free business development training and advice to the entrepreneurs, and covers its costs by selling the products.

The lighting systems sell for \$20-\$250, providing an affordable alternative for families that may spend around \$1 a week on kerosene. The most popular is the

1.5W Firefly lamp that can also be used to charge mobile phones, Craine said.

Barefoot Power also owns importing subsidiaries in Uganda and Kenya.

At the G-20 Summit in Seoul last November, the company was declared one of 14 winners of the G-20 SME Finance Challenge, recognised for their proposals to improve funding for small and medium businesses in developing countries. South Korea, the US, Canada and the Inter-American Development Bank have agreed to set up a US\$528 million SME Finance Innovation Fund. The winners will receive support from the fund based on their individual requirements.

Barefoot Power is raising a second round \$5-\$7 million of debt and equity for expansion. Craine said there has been limited interest from Australian investors over the past six years and the Australian share of finance in the company has shrunk from 100% to less than 20%. ■



Barefoot Power provides solar-powered LED lights as an alternative to kerosene lamps in developing countries.