

# Solar Backpacks Launched By A Student To Light Up Homework For Kenyan School Children

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Kenya is a country of firsts, a country of simple but world impacting innovations ranging from M-PESA and now to Students Solar Backpacks launched by Salima Visram.

Visram, a former Aga Khan Academy student, now pursuing her undergraduate in International Development Studies at McGill University in Canada has become a social entrepreneur with the launch of a crowd funded Kenyan business producing school students back packs that create solar lighting for pupils to do their studies.

The back packs consist of a solar panel, a battery pack and an LED lamp. The solar panel stores solar power during the day and allows the LED lamp to be connected to it during the night as a light source. For four hours of charging, the back pack is able to give out upto eight hours of light a night.

In regard to a report by Sunny Money, a lighting company in Kenya, upto 92 per cent of rural households in Kenya use kerosene to fuel lighting. When night falls, this sees millions of Kenyan school children are forced to rely on the toxic and expensive light source to do their homework. For those who cannot keep up with the expense of buying the fuel, learning stops when the sun goes down. This greatly inspired Visram's Entrepreneurship vision to provide a simple solution to the problem.

"If successful, I want to expand the project to a hundred schools in the county within the next year and a half. This is in direct alignment with Kenya's Vision 2030 "Masomo Bora", which is the nation's effort to ensure that all children are educated, and realize their full potential," said Visram.

According to Mr. Bill O'Hearn, Head of Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, Salima's vision and implementation demonstrate the power and importance of empowering students to create solutions to the problems that are hampering Kenya's development.

In January, Visram raised \$38,000 (Sh3,990,000) through crowd-funding platform Indiegogo, which she used to place the first order of 2,000 backpacks to distribute to the Kikambala village as a pilot project.

The business, last month, delivered its first 500 back packs in Kikambala Primary School, in Mombasa County.

The backpack allows children in rural areas to leverage the power of the sun during their long walks to and from school to provide light for reading at night.

Visram believes social business is the greatest catalyst in creating sustainable change, and hopes to form partnerships with UNICEF, the UNHCR and the Government of Kenya to expand the project to other parts of Kenya and Africa. Her goal is that through education, people will be given the tools to empower and alleviate themselves from poverty.

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