

The story:

Lighting up St. Paul Hospital in Kashikishi

We all heard the story many times, the one which goes “boy meets girl, girl likes boy, boy likes girl, parents are against,...”and so on. Similar: Africa has poor hospital, hospital has helpers, helpers install hardware, helpers leave, hardware flops, everybody unhappy...Our hero, Herbert, knows a better one. Herbert is a technical engineer, working with our Basel Society for Medical Cooperation. In an enormous effort, he and a team of five students of various German universities, spend 10 weeks of their holidays in Kashikishi, in northern Zambia, 20 bus hours to the north of Lusaka. In high temperatures of the summer 2014, hot even for Zambian standards, they assemble a 15 kW photovoltaic electricity plant, mount 100 square meters of solar panels, a solidly built battery house with instrument panels, and lay almost a kilometre of cable, feeding special sockets in critical places of St. Paul Hospital. The operating theatre, the maternity ward, the laboratory, the emergency room and the administration now function around the clock, no one is worried about having to perform a Caesarean section at the light of a biker’s headlamp again, or shorten the life of machines and computers owing to frequent and devastating power failures. So far, so good, we all celebrate the finalization of this and other projects in the hospital: The water supply system, the sewage system with ancillary production of biogas, now used for cooking in the kitchen, we savour the bananas growing on the clearing basins, the new toilets are shining. The nursing school, having burned off to the ground two years ago, is in the final phase of rebuilding. The vice-minister of health and a number of personalities visit the premises, are impressed with the technical details, there is a religious service and a great party well into the night, we all have fun. Well, how about the rest of the story? Back in Switzerland, Herbert wears his secretive smile, opens his laptop and wants to find out if anyone is abusing of “his” solar power. He clicks himself into the instrument panel, securely fastened to the wall of the battery hut in Kashikishi. Immediately, he discovers that a rogue user in the operating theatre has connected a “forbidden” appliance into the solar power socket (turned out to be a power drill). A VOIP call to the maintenance team: the real story begins here. Besides doing the hard work of installing the hardware, Herbert has picked a team of four able-bodied men with interest for support work. The day started early, with a morning meeting for the whole group. The men wear blue dungarees and have a smartphone each, compliments of Herbert. Late comers pay a fine, albeit

small, but demanded in cash on the spot. Herbert himself pays too, but the wiry ascetic has rarely been late. Measuring instruments and tools are distributed, jobs are assigned for the day. The tools are quality hardware, and assigned personally. Daily, solar energy technique and electrician's tasks are explained. The men are tested for knowledge in questions of maintenance, weak spots and are instructed in trouble shooting. With time, self-assurance and pride settled in. The men are recognized on sight on the hospital area. Team spirit prevails, and all jobs get done. Of course, Herbert visits the instrument site daily, but he now rarely has to call. Rather, he waits for a call from Francis, the team leader, or another of the able bodied men in blue. As for us, we continue planning an upgrading of the system, so that big power users, for instance the x-ray machine, can be plugged in the system anytime. For that, and other projects, like housing for personnel, with solar energy supply of course, we will form a new maintenance teams. They are a very important part of the story, as is love in the story of boy and girl. So finally, boy marries girl and they live happily ever after.

