



**2009-10 UNEP Sasakawa Prize Award Ceremony
Acceptance Speech
Nuru Design: Sameer Hajee**

Mr. Steiner, Mr Ogata, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

We are deeply grateful and humbled by the honor of being named a UNEP Sasakawa laureate. In looking at past recipients of this award, I can see that we are in the company of organizations, Sunlabob and Practical Action among them, that have made tremendous progress in catalyzing environmental change.

Environmental impact is at the heart of what Nuru Design stands for. Our primary mission is to provide a clean alternative to the existing sources of energy available to the rural poor. 2 billion people in the world, 1/3 of the world, have been, for one reason or another, unable to access the modern energy sources that we in the western world take for granted. We must ask ourselves, why do these 2 billion people subject themselves to harmful fumes emitted by burning kerosene and firewood, why do they spend up to 1/4 of their monthly income on kerosene, why do they subject their children to potential burns and fires. Is it because they don't care about their health or their money or their children? The answer is because they have no choice. Because they, like us, have a clear need for energy and understand, as we do, that energy sustains life. And what is clear furthermore is that their energy needs are driven by basic energy needs for cooking and light. Our esteemed co-winners, Trees, Water and People have an innovative solution to address the former.

Nuru Design is currently addressing the latter – a need for clean and affordable light - not light for its own sake, but light that enables a more productive life – light that allows them to keep their shops open at night increasing income potential, light that allows them to study after dark increasing employment opportunities, light that allows them to break out of the cycle of poverty.

In 1970, 4% of SSA had access to electricity, last year – 10% - 6% (some 25 million people) added in the last 39 years. Poor progress indeed. Nuru Design operates on the assumption that grid access for rural populations is a pipe-dream. It is becoming more and more obvious that to make an immediate impact, we must look for innovative off-grid lighting solutions, *innovative* off-grid lighting solutions, not the same off-grid lighting solutions that have been tried in so many pilot projects around the world that work in a limited context and that for one reason or another have been unable to scale. We need a scalable and affordable solution today, one that takes the economic, social and environmental reality of the rural poor into account.

Nuru Design has developed and is currently delivering such a scalable and affordable solution. At the heart of our solution is seemingly the most archaic way of producing energy - human power. But our belief is that human power has not been utilized to its full potential. Human power harnessed and converted into electricity is currently powering thousands of lights and mobile phones in the most remote parts of the world that the grid will NEVER touch. The model is working 1) because we have designed an innovative delivery model, a scalable, replicable and lucrative microfranchise that puts a local rural entrepreneur “in-charge” of providing and recurrently recharging customer lights, but 2) because human power is limitless, unrelenting and ubiquitous – just like... the human spirit.

Thank you.