

Chiapas, Mexico: Katadyn Drip Filters being used to combat blindness and diarrhoea

The remote region Chiapas in south eastern Mexico is home to approximately four million people. Of those, around one million people are of indigenous origin. In the isolated mountain villages, running water is more often an exception. Every day, the women trek an arduous distance many kilometres in length to collect water of dubious quality. Many children die of diarrhoea and become infected with the disease to the eyes



called trachoma, which, if left untreated, can lead to full blindness many years later. The course of the disease is extremely painful. The eyelids become deformed inwards with the effect that the eyelashes constantly rub against the cornea scarring over with increasing intensity. The WHO estimates that six million people around the world



have become blind as a result of this disease and that more than 150 million urgently require treatment to avoid becoming blind. This chronic infection is brought about by a lack of sanitary conditions. In many cases, the cause can be found in a lack of the availability of clean water.

The Mexican company Bio Derivados was established in 1988 and conducts business in the pharmaceutical and food industry. Bio Derivados set a goal for itself to do what it can to alleviate the suffering in Chiapas and to improve the quality of the water there. With Katadyn, they found the right partner to achieve this goal. Since 2007 the government organisation Sedesol, which is responsible for projects involving native peoples,



along with the Mexican ministry of health have formed a collaborative project, whereby 1500 Katadyn Drip Filters have been distributed to families in the disadvantaged mountainous region of Oxchuc. At the same time, water tanks were installed in each house, with which rain water can be collected.



The combination of rain water and the Drip Filters will allow the population to have easy access to clean water and will play an essential role in preventing infectious diseases from being spread.

The Drip Filter is comprised of two plastic tanks and three cleanable ceramic filter candles. The polluted water is filled into the upper tank and runs only by means of gravity through the filter candles to then be collected into the closed lower tank. From there, the germ-free water can be withdrawn from a small outlet



tap. Among the population, the product is well accepted, simply because the water looks so much better. One single Drip Filter has a capacity of up to 150,000 litres, depending on the water quality. Drip Filters have proved to be a simple and effective tool to combat a large number of waterborne diseases in developing countries. They have many advantages over other measures such as boiling water (too expensive because of a shortage of firewood) or treatment using chlorine (unsuitable for regular use as a disinfectant).



Early in 2008, Toni Brandi, Katadyn's international sales manager, took a trip to Mexico to get a first-hand idea about what the situation in Chiapas is like. He was impressed to learn how well families have already integrated Drip Filters into their day-to-

day lives after such a short period of time. Every three weeks, the representatives of the Mexican ministry of health visit the villages. During these visits, they inspect the health of the children and the adults and each family receives invaluable tips on improving sanitary conditions at home. The representatives also check the water tanks and the Katadyn Drip Filters, and if need be, replace the filter candles.

Along with other, well coordinated measures, the Katadyn Drip Filters in Chiapas play a crucial role in ensuring that the number of diseases and the mortality rate of the indigenous population are lowered significantly. Clean water remains a basic necessity for survival.

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