Power a brighter future for rural communities in Zimbabwe through renewable energy

A lack of electricity is limiting development in Zimbabwe’s poor rural communities, and putting livelihoods—and lives—at risk. In Gutu district, crop yields have leaped thanks to Oxfam irrigation projects. However, people could earn many times more if affordable electricity was available to power agricultural processing facilities, and household lighting would enable families to run home-based businesses. Providing power to local clinics could even save lives. By helping to introduce renewable energy, your support could transform an entire community.

The Project
This project builds on the success of Oxfam’s Rut irrigation project which is helping smallholder farmers to increase yields and incomes, and provides affordable food to 75,000 people. Oxfam has been working to create sustainable livelihoods in Gutu district, in the south of Zimbabwe, for five years, as part of the wider Economic Justice campaign.

The three-year project seeks to further improve living conditions, community health, and long-term earning potential with the introduction of solar electricity for agricultural and domestic businesses, and health clinics. Technical support will come from our partner, Practical Action, who has a wealth of experience in developing sustainable energy in remote rural areas.

Project aims
Working closely with community project committees, we aim to:

▷ Enhance health provision in rural areas by equipping clinics with solar-powered electricity.
▷ Increase incomes and productivity by introducing renewable energy solutions for home and farm-based businesses and establishing a village savings and loans scheme.
▷ Improve living conditions by enabling an entire community to access a more clean, affordable, and sustainable source of energy.
The Background
Zimbabwe’s electricity generating authority is at the point of collapse. Mismanagement and lack of spares, regular maintenance and fuel mean that electricity supplies are unreliable even in urban areas. In the countryside, where poverty is endemic, fewer than 25 per cent of communities have power. Most of the rural population rely on traditional fuel sources, such as agricultural waste and kerosene, which are unsustainable, dirty, and expensive. Rural clinics are unable to operate at night or store vaccines, and school children struggle to complete their homework by candlelight. For small-scale farming communities, the lack of electricity also hampers farmers’ ability to process their produce and maximise their incomes, and domestic industries are limited to daylight hours.

This project will tackle each of these issues by providing sustainable solar power to clinics and homes, and constructing an agricultural centre where farmers can use processing and storage facilities to keep their produce fresher, and command a higher price. Together, this will raise standards of living, health and educational achievement across the Gutu community.

The Plan
Activities:

Power two rural community health clinics:
- Install a solar power unit in a community health clinic to provide lighting and refrigeration for vaccines.
- Equip this clinic, and one further clinic, with a solar-powered pump to deliver safe water.
- Provide training for key clinic staff on how to maintain and repair the power systems.

Improve agricultural facilities for small-scale farmers:
- Construct an agri-business centre that will provide local smallholder farmers with storage, processing, and packaging facilities (to be completed in 2014).
- Equip the centre with scales, crates, and shelving for the weighing and storage of produce.
- Provide community training on the management and maintenance of the agri-business centre, and produce manuals to support this training.

Support communities to take up solar-powered lighting:
- Train communities to establish and run a village savings and loans scheme, to enable members to purchase solar power systems for their homes.
- Provide 625 solar lanterns and 19 home solar systems to the village savings committee, so they can be bought by scheme members, providing them with power for home-based industries. Loan repayments will be used to develop energy services further and enable more people to purchase their own lanterns.
- Organise community training sessions to raise awareness of renewable energy and stimulate demand for solar energy systems.
- Link community members, the agri-business centre, and clinics with local maintenance services and suppliers of spare parts, and encourage the development of spin-off renewable energy businesses.

Equip two community clinics with a solar-powered pump to deliver safe water £15,254
The Impact
As a result of this project, we expect:

› New, reliable solar lighting will improve health and living conditions by providing a smoke-free, portable, accessible and low-cost alternative to traditional fuels.
› Community members will increase the productivity and income of home-based food and craft businesses through access to domestic solar power and loan schemes.
› Local farmers will be able to increase the value of their produce and reduce post-harvest wastage through access to processing, packaging, and storage facilities for their crops.
› Clinics will be able to provide a better service to the local community by having access to water, lighting and refrigeration, allowing potentially life-saving night time operations and the storage of vaccinations.

Who will benefit?
› In year one, 450 households will directly benefit from the new agricultural facilities and 640 households will gain from having home solar power. By project end, over 1,000 homes (around 6,000 people) should have domestic solar power.
› Indirectly, 19,200 people will benefit from the agri-business centre’s solar charging, processing and storage facilities. An estimated 17,000 people across Gutu district will also indirectly benefit from the improvements made to two local community clinics.

Monitoring and evaluation
Improvements will be regularly monitored and data measured will include: the uptake and repayment of loans for the purchase of domestic solar power; the increase in domestic productivity; the number of farmers using the agri-business centre; and the number of new spin-off enterprises generated.

Sustainability
Community members will be involved in all stages of this project, and through a management committee, will own and operate the agri-business centre. The loan scheme will be community led, and the committees will receive training to ensure their continuation. Training will be conducted for solar power maintenance and repair, and all groups will have links to component suppliers and technicians.

Provide 100 solar lanterns to the village savings committee £5,000

Dianna’s Story

Dianna is a nurse at Mazuru clinic which serves 17,000 people across the district. Remote and off the national grid, its three nurses are forced to work by candle light.

“When you have to deliver a baby using candle light it is terrible. You are helping the mother, and the candle may fall over or go out – the mother starts to scream, all of us are looking in the dark for the candle or matches whilst the mother needs our help. When we have no candles we have a real problem.

Solar power would help us so much here and in our homes as well. We need it there too, as at night we have to quickly collect our things and we need to keep our uniforms clean and sterile. We need our uniforms to be scorpion free!

If we could have solar power we can just switch it on and light up the night!”

Credit: Annie Bungeroth/Oxfam.
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The Budget
Total £180,000

- Improve agricultural facilities for small-scale farmers £58,243
- Power two rural community health clinics £22,674
- Support communities to take up solar-powered lighting £54,869
- Project management, monitoring and evaluation £44,214
- Improve agricultural facilities for small-scale farmers £58,243

Zimbabwe: country profile

Population: 12.7 million
Development: 173 (of 187) on the HDI¹
GDP per capita: $500 (UK GDP per capita: $35,155)
Life expectancy at birth: 51 years (UK: 80.1 years)
Population vulnerable to poverty: 24%
Electricity consumption per capita: 884 KWh (UK: 5,689 KWh)²

Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2011, unless otherwise stated.
¹ The United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: life expectancy and health, access to knowledge and standard of living.

Countries needing your support:
Angola, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cambodia, Ghana, Haiti, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, United Kingdom, Zimbabwe.

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