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In Focus: Zonful Energy and Off-Grid Solar in Zimbabwe



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Darragh Cotter, Communications and Marketing Manager

GOGLA member, **Zonful Energy**, is a PAYG provider based in Zimbabwe. They recently **entered a partnership** with Mhondoro- Ngezi Rural District Council (and other partners) to provide 24,000 households in the district with off-grid solar energy. With initial funding support from KIVA of 5 thousand dollars (US) and an agreement to increase funding to 4 million upon the good performance of the pilot scheme, Zonful Energy is aiming to reach 120,000 households in the Mashonaland province of Zimbabwe.

11 million of Zimbabwe's 15.6 million population live rurally and with 75% of the rural population currently living off-grid and dependent on dangerous and expensive kerosene for lighting, it is easy to see the enormous consumer need and market potential for off-grid solar lighting. "People living in rural Zimbabwe will also typically spend 25% of their income on kerosene and mobile phone charging alone" notes William Ponela, CEO of Zonful Energy, further increasing the necessity for alternative clean lighting, energy and phone charging options.

Zonful Energy provides smart credit to enable low-income consumers to access energy products by paying instalments using mobile money platforms such as **Econet** and **Netone**. William says that Zonful Energy's innate understanding of rural Zimbabwean households enabled them to set up a social enterprise structure based on local leadership and indigenous knowledge. "We were able to develop a unique business model where we engage everyone in the off-grid solar value chain and enter into a strategic partnership with an emphasis on the local at the core".

The **Zonful Energy/ KIVA International PAYGO pilot project** was officially launched in March 2017 with over 300 delegates in attendance, including the Zimbabwe Minister for Energy. William says that the attendance of high-ranking officials and the cooperation with the local council is indicative of

of political will for off-grid solar in Zimbabwe. William believes that GOGLA's work combined with the [Power for All Zimbabwe campaign](#) have been successful in bringing about awareness with political circles. "The Government of Zimbabwe has taken off-grid solar seriously and has integrated it effectively into their plans, introducing duty exemptions alongside free national radio and T.V campaigns".



Attendees at the recent Zonful Energy launch

William also clearly sees the importance of working together with the local council on this project. "Working with local government and local leaders in rural districts, a more sustainable approach to off-grid solar can be adopted". "Our local partners guarantee repayment of the credit extended to households and provide assurances to local households on the benefits and quality of this new technology". This is especially important when considering the potential negative impact of poor quality products may have previously had on the local market. Zonful Energy systems are portable lights. In addition, Zonful Energy have set up support structures to facilitate ease of purchase for customers while a 24-hour call centre has also been established to offer technical support to consumers. The first results of the pilot project are expected within three months.

For more information, please get in touch with [William Ponela](#).

Business Development

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