



**GEF Small Grants Programme  
Site Visit Project Fact Sheet  
UNFCCC COP, Durban - December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

**Provision of Local Renewable Energy and Energy Efficient Services, South Africa**

**Project No:** SAF/05/04

**Grantee:** Switch On Energy Services

**Location:** Nkweletsheni, HighFlats, in Ixopo,  
Kwazulu Natal Province

**SGP Contribution:** 50,000 USD

**Cash Co-Financing:** 830,129 USD

**In-Kind Co-Financing:** 280,012 USD

**Project Duration:** 06/2005-02/2008

**Number of people served:** 500

**Focal area:** Climate Change

**Background**

The project aimed to address the need of rural areas in South Africa to access affordable and environmentally friendly energy sources. The residents of such communities around the Nkweletsheni, Highflats are forced to rely on the use of fuel wood, paraffin and where available, coal thereby contributing to climate change. In addition to the negative environmental impact from combustion emissions and the degradation of forests (natural carbon sinks), this presents a range of associated problems related to poor health and safety conditions. The burden of wood collection, a task that is usually carried out by women and

children, is also time-consuming (reducing the time available for productive activity or education) and often hazardous.

**Project Description**

The goal of the project was to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency in the rural community of Nkweletsheni, Highflats, Ixopo in South Africa by supporting women to provide access to sustainable energy and create a demonstration site where communities could learn about climate change. The project also aimed to contribute to the creation of green jobs and sustainable development by offering affordable products that help reduce poverty and improve the quality of life in these communities.

The key activities of the project included: a participatory needs assessment to identify the priority energy needs of the community; a series of awareness programmes, workshops and training for community members and existing energy centres; the creation of Highflats Energy Centre (HEC) Cooperative; and establishment of the Highflats Energy Centre (HEC) as a one-stop energy shop owned and operated by a women led cooperative.

This energy center provides affordable, safe and sustainable energy solutions to the community and acts as a learning center. In addition, to sustain the work of the centre the project helped develop a business plan for the store and identify suppliers of energy products.

Currently the store sells airtime and prepaid electricity; solar cellphone chargers; solar home systems (LED & 12V); gel fuel, stoves and lamps; batteries; energy efficient lights; safe paraffin stoves and heaters; LP Gas; LP Gas stoves; candles and ultra efficient wood/charcoal stoves.



### **Environmental Impact**

To date, the center has been able to help over 500 households switch from traditional energy sources, such as fuel wood, to sustainable energy. More importantly, it has increased awareness about climate change and the solutions available at the community level. Since 2009, the cooperative has been able to sell 105 solar panels and 211 gas stoves among other products, creating a demand for green products at the local level.

The center has become a recognized demonstration and learning center for 12 wards, of which only 3 have access to electricity, and receives approximately 240 visitors per year who come to learn more about sustainable energy and climate change.

### **Socio-Economic Impact**

The project increased the annual income of the community by 60,000 RAND and contributed to the creation of 8 green jobs (4 permanent and 4 temporary). It also provided the community with two sources of income: one from the sales of the store, and another from the membership fees of the cooperative. The project enhanced the capacity of the community to start and manage their own green businesses, in particular, the capacities of women. The community also benefited from improved health, additional time to study due to the access to light, improved safety and overall quality of life.

Thanks to the seed funds from the GEF SGP, the community was able to leverage significant co-financing resources to sustain the project.

### **Policy Impact**

The project has contributed to the goal of the Department of Energy of the Government of South Africa to overcome barriers for a better provision of energy by establishing a network of self-sustaining energy centers with the purpose of facilitating and extending access to modern energy services to the poor population. By establishing a self-sustaining community-managed energy centre without requiring the support of a major oil company, the project has become a model in the region.

### **Gender Mainstreaming**

All the direct beneficiaries of the project are women who have become empowered through the implementation of the project. Through this experience, women not only received training, but the necessary technical and financial support to demonstrate their capacity to be successful entrepreneurs. In turn, these women have also improved their income, social status, and overall quality of life since they no longer have to wake up early in the morning to collect fire wood for cooking.

### **Replication and Up-scaling**

The project can be replicated to other areas and provide access to sustainable energy. Since the government and the province of KwaZulu Natal have been focusing strongly on Solar Energy and Solar Water Heating, there are good opportunities for the replication of the project.