



Inclusive Energy Fund Case Study 4

Changing women's perceptions and uptake
of solar energy

July 2024 Emily Balls



FAIRTRADE
FOUNDATION

IEF Case Study 4

Changing women's perceptions and uptake of solar energy

- Cooperative: Bukhaturwe Community Development Initiative (BCDI)
- Country: Uganda
- Theme: Clean, green energy for households

Introduction

Bukhaturwe Community Development Initiative (BCDI) is a Fairtrade and Organic certified coffee producer on the foots of Mount Elgon, Uganda BCDI is an all women cooperative who aim to empower female coffee growers and reduce the gender equality gap in coffee. Their mission is to deliver high-quality, specialty coffee whilst shaping our industry through social, environmental and economic development for smallholder farming communities and actively addressing gender equality. BCDI started in 2018 with 10 farmers. In 2024 they have approximately 370 women farmers with a production capacity of over 600 metric tons of exportable coffee. With an average of 8 members per household, BCDI is contributing indirectly to the well-being of around 2968 individuals through coffee sales.

Project Objectives

BCDI aimed to support its members to buy genuine and affordable solar production, noting that women are the key users of domestic energy. This project targeted women and youths to engage in using clean and green energy, which is in high demand for domestic use especially due to BCDI's rural location and lack of access to off-grid providers or grid energy.

Successes and Lessons Learnt

During the midterm evaluation, women groups within BCDI like "Tukola-Bukozi" shared their feedback and perceptions on solar energy. They noted that they had used solar energy for charging phones and perceived household solar products as very good for supporting children's education through reading books at home in the evening. They also noted that a benefit of using solar lighting and therefore burning less kerosene fuel was reduced soot in their homes. Another theme that came up was safety and security improving due to now having security lighting on around their homes at night, as well as a reduced risk of house fires and accidents due to solar energy being safer.

"I received the solar panel system for lighting as part of this project. Before getting the solar, I was charging my phone from the saloon and they could steal my battery but now I am very comfortable because am charging from my house. I used to have a small local lamp commonly known as "Tadoba" which used kerosene that was not health friendly because it could produce a lot of smoke. Using solar energy means I have avoided the risks of fire accidents originating from Tadoba and even the security of my home is improved because security lights are always on at night and they cover all the corners and this has also chased away night dancers because they fear to be identified. In addition, my children can now read their books at ease. I therefore thank BCDI and project funders as well for thinking about us by bring genuine solar products on loans."

Betty Mukite Watasa, age 62

Challenges

Early in the project, cooperative leadership reflected that more sensitisation meetings or trainings on clean, green energy were needed, because many people had specific concerns regarding solar energy and had also heard myths about solar energy. These included topics from the safety of the solar panel materials to affordability. Leadership decided that since community members did not know where to start looking for answers, it was essential to ensure that they received correct information through trainings. They also needed to emphasise a commercial focus and the business opportunities for members from clean, green energy. Trainings were carried out for several months and reached the majority of cooperative members. These were supported by printing of t-shirts and flyers.

Towards the end of the project, the cooperative leadership identified a challenge around low turn up for clean energy products – demand from members to apply for these products has been lower than expected. They think this is due to the seasonality of coffee and members needing to invest their money during the coffee harvesting period, so not having spare money for new products. They reflected that timing is very important and more time may be needed to see what demand actually looks like, given seasonality, financial variation and timing of coffee payments to members across the coffee season. The project was just one year long and experienced some delays, which means timings may not have been optimally linked to seasonality. the cooperative leaders said it was difficult to engage young people and to effectively manage large groups of participants in training – this was resolved by working directly through youth councils who engage other youths and support a good turnout. Assigning experienced individuals to mentor or supervise youth participants provided the necessary guidance and support.

Next Steps

The leadership team reflected that women members have been part of the project from time of inception and have been involved in planning, budgeting and participating in project activities.

Women are now more familiar with green energy and will use this new knowledge and experience to support their households.