

Story of Change: Absolute Energy

ISLAND MINIGRID

Absolute Energy offers inexpensive clean energy to the people of Kitobo Island, Uganda through a solar mini-grid for domestic and business purposes. Several businesses benefitted greatly from the introduction of the off-grid power system.

A fish processing business was recently opened on the island. This business would not have existed before due to the energy needed to grind fish, make powder out of it, package it and then sell it for customers on the island. Another noteworthy prospect that launched is the ice making machine. The process of making ice requires high voltage, between 380 and 400 Volts. The mini grid is the only real affordable option that can meet these demands.

"The fishermen used to lose a lot of fish because it could rot without ice and they could spend a lot of money getting ice from the mainland but now I am sure they spend less because ice is readily available and it's the real quantity. If you buy 100kg there are really 100kg but if you buy 100kg from the mainland, then on the way it has to melt then you have 80 or 70 or 60kg."

The fish processing business could not have been profitable without relying on the newly-introduced renewable energy source on the island. Otherwise, the machinery required would need to depend on a diesel generator, which is much more expensive and above the available budget. The solar power plant provides the necessary voltage to run a successful operation and prepare the product for market. The main type of fish processed by the business is silver fish as it is widely available around the island and can be bought from local fishermen. The manager can see the positive impact of the mini-grid on the entire island.

"To me and others what I see is power allows to build stable livelihoods in the area and settle. That is why we are now building. When you get somewhere good for you make sure you buy and own it. [...] Because we have power, I can get light at night, I can charge my phone from home, and our kids when at home can enjoy the TV and study everything. The change is really big."

The island's system also enabled other businesses to emerge and thrive. **Sharif W.** and his family took advantage of the newly available power and established a home cinema. They used a video hall and started charging people to watch movies and football games. He just used 3 machines: an amplifier, a DVD player and a TV set. He also started taking bets on football game.



Sharif in front of his video hall.
(credit: Sagaci Research)



Absolute Energy Solar PV farm at
Kitobo Island, Uganda
(credit: EEP Africa)

"Power is part of life now. Like you wake up daily and maybe you watch TV, maybe you take your clothes for laundry, someone has a machine so it is easy, and you power your laptop easily. So, without power, really things would slow down."

Ramathan M. saw another business opportunity and decided to wash and iron people's laundry for money. With the help of another person, they wash the clothes using a washing machine and iron them. This is not a widespread practice since most people in the community wash their clothes by hand. They are very happy that they were able to buy a washing machine which would not have been possible before the mini-grid was set-up in Kitobo.



Ramathan and his laundry business.
(credit: Sagaci Research)

"The change is not that it has brought buildings, a road here, or money but it has changed the wellbeing of people. It has brought convenience".