

VITALITE – THE FIRST COMPANY TO OFFER A FULLY INTEGRATED PAY-AS-YOU-GO (PAYGO) SOLAR HOME SYSTEM IN ZAMBIA



VITALITE, a Zambian company established in 2013, aims to make modern, renewable energy accessible and affordable to all Zambian households. In early-2016 VITALITE became the first company to offer a fully integrated pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) solar home system in Zambia. Since launching the VITALITE PAYGO Solar Home System, VITALITE has expanded into five provinces, electrified over 1,000 households, and trained dozens of agents and hundreds of resellers to market the PAYGO Solar Home Systems.

Critical to this VITALITE success is the full integration of the PAYGO technology with the country's leading mobile money provider, Airtel Zambia. The first such payment service integration between a mobile operator and an energy service company in Zambia. With support from EEP, VITALITE has been able to establish itself as the leader of accessible and affordable solar power in Zambia.

Mobile money in Zambia

In East and West Africa, mobile money payment integrations are commonplace and can be completed within weeks. When VITALITE began the process of integrating their pay-as-you-go PAYGO technology with Airtel Money in Zambia, the same integrations were largely reserved for the leading utility and service providers. As such, the ease of payment made possible by the trailblazing full integration between Airtel and VITALITE which took over a year to complete.

Another barrier to the adoption of mobile money in Zambia is that components of the physical infrastructure are still in development. Equally important to the network of towers that support transactions is a network of agents that expands across the country and who always need to be equipped with sufficient cash floats. One factor making this difficult to accomplish is the sheer size of Zambia. Comparing it to Kenya, where M-PESA revolutionized the potential of mobile money, Zambia is approximately 30 percent larger with roughly one-third the population.

Beyond the technical and physical challenges, mobile money in Zambia must also overcome a significant behaviour-change barrier. Moving from cash to mobile money requires confidence that the infrastructure exists to retrieve it wherever, whenever. It also requires confidence that all payments and transfers will be successful every time. For example, a customer must know that the 50 Kwacha they deposit into their Airtel Money account Monday morning in Kitwe can be easily withdrawn Monday afternoon in Kabwe. With a population primarily without bank accounts and therefore unfamiliar with e-money, this confidence must come from consistent sensitization campaigns and successful usage by early-adopters.

VITALITE has worked with Airtel Zambia to counter these challenges by aligning all rural expansions efforts with that of Airtel Money agent networks, incorporating mobile money explanations into pitches at market activation events, and ensuring that all agents who complete the mandatory VITALITE agent training curriculum are well-versed in mobile money. It is through these continued efforts and strategic partnerships that VITALITE Zambia is able to overcome the described barriers to offer a reliable and affordable solution to Zambia's energy crisis.

High Quality Products

The VITALITE PAYGO Solar Home System basic offering consists of a 12-volt photovoltaic module, including a 7-watt solar panel, battery pack, and a dual-purpose controller. The PAYGO technology combines a regular charge controller with a time-based meter board that will shut down the system's functionality if pre-payment has not been made. Each pre-payment results in a unique code representing credit for the system, which is entered into the SHS via an infrared remote control. These pre-payments are purchased as 'Top-Up Days' through any VITALITE Sales and Service Hub, agent, or via mobile money.

The VITALITE Solar Home System also includes 3 LED lights, mobile phone chargers, and a solar powered radio. The function of the system is to provide consistent bright light and basic power to provide a typical rural household with reliable electricity.



Reliable Service

Unlike other solar home systems in Zambia, the VITALITE Solar Home System comes with a comprehensive maintenance package that offers free maintenance and repair throughout the 3-year warranty period, carried out by local service technicians to ensure reliable energy service provision. This maintenance package also includes access to full-service customer care, which functions to ensure customers stay informed about the progress of their loan and receive any maintenance or repairs they may require.

Expanding income potential through agent training

VITALITE has developed an agent training curriculum that is being used to train 6-12 new agents every week. Agents that successfully complete the program are able to sell solar home systems and service customers with Top-Up Days to earn commissions. To support these agents, VITALITE is recruiting activation teams to carry out market activation events in the communities the agents identify as service locations.

Moving past 2016

Moving into 2017, VITALITE will offer larger capacity systems capable of powering solar televisions. Further, the microfinance capacity of the PAYGO technology will be utilized with partnerships to offer high value products as add-ons to the loan. VITALITE is committed to continuing to offer bundles that will provide all Zambia households with a range of clean energy alternatives.