

Gaia Energy customers who are using their ethical energy tariff, are supporting Christian Aid to implement their 'Breaking the Barriers' project in 15 sub-districts in Konso. Through this programme women are being supported to create and own Women's Led Sustainable Energy Enterprises in some of the poorest and remote off-grid communities.

Project Overview

Through this project, Women's Led Sustainable Energy Enterprises (WLSEEs) will receive training in sustainable energy products and technologies, business skills and can access finance through Micro Finance Institutions. In particular this project aims to:

- **Strengthen a solar enterprise group;** This group has been established to supply and install standard solar products (mainly solar technologies for light). This fund will be used for increasing their working capital and to help them establish a shop in the town.
- **Establish and support Improved cookstoves (ICS) producer groups;** in Konso BtB project will establish and support 15 ICS groups both technically and financially to produce ICS appropriate to their living context
- **Establish Marketing and Distribution Groups;** The groups are formed in villages of Konso district to serve as a marketing and distribution channel for both solar products (supplied by the above group) and Improved cookstoves (which will be produced by other project target groups).

Key Project Activities and Results

The first six months of this project provided a strong foundation for this work and focused on awareness raising; beneficiary selection; legalization (ensuring all the 45 SHGs and groups were reorganized and legally registered), business plan development, and training on solar technologies.

In the last 6 months we have been:

1) Supporting groups to complete the construction of workshops and storage facilities



Shelter construction in Konso District

BtB project has organised 44 WLSEE's in Konso zone. These groups need a shade where they can make / store their product. With support from the project, they secured land from their respective local administrations and constructed workshops for production, storage and retailing as per their business plan.

The construction work has taken much more time than planned due to lack of construction materials and inflation of construction material cost. WLSEE's have however adapted to these challenges by using different designs and construction materials which suit their local context in terms of availability (economy) and weather conditions. One solar enterprise group in Konso have secured shade from the town administration for five years for free.

2) Facilitating timely disbursement of loans by the Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs)

The project has been working closely with the MFI's to disburse the loan, which is 25% of their business capital. However, challenge in signing a standard agreement, which is crafted by the EU (the main funder) with EU laws have hindered us from moving as the MFI's wanted to sign an agreement based on the national law. After having repeated discussion with the management of the financial institutions, the MFI's have signed the agreement and the process of transferring the loan to WLSEE's will be complete in a months' time, as the money has already arrived into their account.

3) Identifying Solar Energy Technology (SET) suppliers and linking SEG for sustainable supply.

With the purpose of linking WLSEE's to Solar Energy (SE) products/service suppliers, two-day workshops were organised in Addis Ababa. During the workshop WLSEE's were introduced to two potential Solar Importers (Tigist Tadesse Import and LYDETCO plc.) which are selected for the purpose of Breaking the Barriers Project by Christian Aid Ethiopia and ERG. At these workshops, Solar suppliers provided detailed explanation and demonstration on the solar technologies that they are importing and distributing in the country. They learnt simple techniques of maintenance and installation of different solar technologies and each solar group prepared agreements to supply and distribute solar technologies

4) Providing technical training for Improved cookstoves (ICS) producers

Ethio-resource Group (ERG), as the project partner working in this area, has identified fuel saving improved cookstoves suitable for the target areas. The assessment considers criteria's such as eating/food habit of the community, availability of resources for production and capacity of the community to afford the technology. Accordingly, nationally approved ICS called "Mirt" and "Gonziye" were selected for production and promotion in the project target areas. The two products are approved by the Ministry of Water and Energy. The selection was made based on a rigorous assessment that has been carried out in all the three areas. Following selection, technical training was provided to 15 producers (75 individuals) on how to produce ICS (Mirt) and to 5 Solar groups on solar technologies. Accordingly, all producer WLSEEs purchased ICS moulds to produce ICS.



Improved cookstoves production



Beneficiaries

The project has 445 direct beneficiaries (444 women and 1 male) who are organized in Women Led Sustainable Energy Enterprises/WLSEEs.

Plans for the next 12 months

Activities over the next 12 months will include:

- Support WLSEE's to procure items needed for full scale production
- Facilitate the transfer of loan from the MFI's to individual groups
- Support Solar Energy Groups in availing new SE products from National importers
- Promotional work and Market linkage