
Foreword

Since the 1981 UNCNRSE conference in Nairobi, a number of policy makers and NGO representatives have been calling for increased reliance on renewable energy. However, despite attempts by donors and policy makers to increase use of renewable energy technologies, there are very few renewable energy success stories in Africa. Part of the problem is that rural people are unaware of the technologies, and do not have the material or information resources to attempt projects, no matter how technically, environmentally or economically viable they may be. For too long the emphasis has been on 'turnkey' style transfer of technology, with limited involvement of local manpower and industry. In too many cases, this results in technology transfer that is donor-led rather than demand-led.

However, the Kenya experience provides a refreshing alternative to aid-led interventions. Since 1985, local Kenyan companies have installed thousands of lighting systems in schools and homes on a commercial basis. There are similar experiences with the PV technology in Zimbabwe, Botswana, and West Africa. The sale of solar electric systems has created jobs for installers in rural areas, and opportunity for urban and cottage industry. For example, solar batteries are now sold in Kenya, and low voltage lamps are being manufactured for solar electric systems in Zimbabwe and Botswana.

A key to the successful Kenyan experience has been commercial response to real demand. In rural Kenyan homes, institutions, and cottage industry, there is a very high demand for electricity to power, lights, televisions, radios, vaccine refrigerators, and small appliances such as sewing machines. For these requirements, solar electricity is a realistic alternative to costly extensions of grid power or generators.

Dissemination of renewable energy technologies can only occur if there is appropriate information available to potential end-users, installers, extension workers and policy makers. However, educational material prepared in Western countries may not be suitable to the needs of rural Africans. There is therefore a need for information suitable to regional needs. Like Mr. Hankins first book, *Renewable Energy in Kenya*, this book provides information in a form that is accessible to local people.

There are other effective methods by which information can and should be shared in the region. The technology is changing rapidly, and prices have come down for a number of solar electric system components; there is a need for this information to be passed along the dissemination chain. It is hoped that a number of organisations will take up roles in this chain.

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