

# Raising awareness on benefits of renewable energy solutions in rural Lesotho

Thousands of households living in rural and peri-urban areas in Lesotho do not have access to electricity grid and rely heavily on biomass and fossil fuels. The market for energy efficient and renewable energy (EERE) solutions is constrained by low penetration rates outside urban areas and weak customer knowledge and uptake.

Positive Planet International (PPI) is implementing this EU co-funded project in partnership with Rural Self-Help Development Association (RSDA) to contribute to the economic development of rural households in Lesotho by developing a sustainable social business within RSDA to promote and distribute energy EERE products.

Offering innovative EERE products in new marketplaces and especially where tech-driven products are scarce is a challenge. Hence the project aims at raising awareness about climate change and EERE products among rural communities in Lesotho.

## Assumptions behind implementation

This Technical Note explores how awareness raising sessions have been conducted in the context of this project and how efficient they can be in a rural context. Few assumptions were made behind the implementation:

- Participatory and demonstration-oriented awareness raising sessions are efficient to raise awareness on EERE within local communities
- Bring local communities together is efficient to raise awareness and promote further sales





## Methodology

### Objectives of the awareness raising sessions

- For rural communities in Lesotho to understand the harmful impact of biomass and fossil fuels and EERE benefits and impact on rural communities;
- For rural communities in Lesotho to be able to compare between EERE and traditional energy forms;
- To inform participants' attitudes, behaviours and beliefs with the intention of influencing contribution towards a greener environment by switching to some extent to renewable energy.

### Approach

#### TARGETS

#### 1. TRAINING: RSDA STAFF and INDEPENDENT DISTRIBUTORS

##### Training of Trainers approach

1. RSDA Staff trained by Positive Planet International
2. Independent Distributors trained by RSDA staff with coordination and support from Positive Planet International

#### 2. ROLL-OUT WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES

1. Members of various organizations (farmers groups, savings groups, church and funeral groups)
2. 53% live in large families (more than 6 members)
3. 73% living with less than M999/month, 52% have access to formal payments
4. Only 4% has access to EERE products

#### STEPS

- 1 The team identified and learned about the target audience through **market research** at the start of the project.
- 2 The next step involved **development of key messages and strategies** tailored to specific target audience to disseminate information.
- 3 The **campaign team** was carefully **selected** within the project team to prepare and run events efficiently.
- 4 As precondition for a successful awareness campaign, the team prepared thoroughly **tools and field preparations** depending on the nature of awareness raising activity in place. They utilised a range of different following tools to disseminate information.
- 5 Critical and mandatory step to organise awareness raising sessions in rural areas, the team organised **meetings with the village chief** in preparation for the event. The chief formally request for his permission to hold the event. In a few cases, the team left behind a letter to confirm the request.



*A chief's wife after a meeting with the Project Team*

## Implementation

### SEVERAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Awareness raising campaigns carried out by the project team focused on sensitising participants about the harmful effects of conventional energy sources and the benefits of EERE solutions. The project aimed at sensitising 10,000 community members.

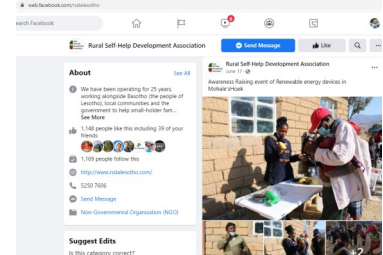
Stands/ demonstration of  
EERE products



Oral presentation to small  
groups



Social media & Radio  
programmes



#### SOCIAL MEDIA

The use of social media proved to be an effective means of raising awareness especially with the younger generation who are at school or employed in the city.

After every major event, Field Officers posted on Facebook and WhatsApp using key hashtags in line with our work to maximise visibility of the project. An incredible number of people reach every post. However the Project Team was lacking a dedicated resource to respond and follow-up on messages.

Random posts in English and French can be found on company website, Twitter, Instagram.

#### PLAN OF ACTION:

- Coordinate with Communication Officer;
- Take pictures on the field;
- Ask for consent to beneficiaries when taking a picture and ensure they sign the consent form

#### RADIO PROGRAMMES

Radio programmes are still by far the most powerful means to spread information and raise awareness in rural parts of Lesotho. The plan was to air the project once a month to target broader audience nationwide. **The Project Team managed to secure orders from the listeners during the programme.**

The Project Team struggled to rigorously assess the number of people that were reached as there is no such data available in Lesotho.

#### PLAN OF ACTION:

- Coordinate with radio stations and identify time slots to be broadcast;
- Prepare a script in coordination with the communication officer.

#### Seasonability of messages

- March: Solar dryers
- May to August: Lighting and heating
- October: Solar dryers
- December: Family time
- All throughout the year: cooking and lighting



## STANDS-DEMONSTRATIONS OF PRODUCTS

To create general public awareness on the benefits of EERE technologies, to attract **public and government support**, to build long lasting relationships with relevant stakeholders and identify potential partners. Such events gathered between **50 and 100 participants** and were organised in partnership with other stakeholders such as other members of the National Energy Sector Committee,

Such demonstrations of products took place every two months and on ad hoc basis when there was an invitation from other energy stakeholder.

### PLAN OF ACTION:

- Demonstrate use of products;
- Answer questions and provide information to potential customers;
- Distribute leaflets;
- Present the role of IDs as trusted selling agents on behalf of RSDA;
- Gather data from potential customers;
- Score sales/place orders.

## PRESENTATIONS TO SMALL GROUPS

The team presented to small groups in remote villages with no access to national grid. This ensured a more inclusive participation. One hour sessions were organized in cooperation with local authorities, Independent Distributors and agricultural resources centers' personnel in all the five districts of project implementation.

The original plan was to have three sessions per week per Field Officer, with a target of maximum 30 participants. This was not possible due to limited resources available. Two or three Field Officers had to work together per event.

Such events were more effective to close sales.

### PLAN OF ACTION:

- General project presentation in Sesotho;
- Demonstration of products and presentation of services offered by RSDA;
- Description of the benefits of EERE;
- Presentation and validation of the role of IDs as trusted selling agents on behalf of RSDA;
- Gathering of data from potential customers

## Meeting with villages' chiefs

This step is critical to be able to organise events in local communities. Between the time of the first interaction of the team with the village chief and the event taking place, this step can take up to **2 weeks**.

1. The ID physically meet with the chief to introduce the project, the organisation, indicate the proposed date and time of the event and to be allowed to share his/her contact details with the Project Team.
2. The ID shares the chief's contact details with the Project Team.
3. The Project Team calls to request a meeting.
4. The Project Team then physically meets the chief at his/her home for about an hour to introduce the team, the project and the purpose of the proposed event as well as confirming the date and time.
5. Only after meeting with the chief, the Project Team follows-up regularly via phone calls until the event.
6. The event is held at a location/ village identified and agreed by both parties.

All communication was held in Sesotho and primary contact with the chiefs has to be held by the local project team. Foreigners can though come along with locals.



## Used tools

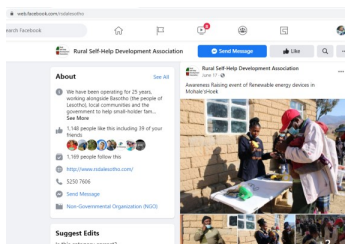
While most awareness raising sessions used common materials, there are a few specificities depending on the communication channels used for these awareness raising sessions.

## STANDS-DEMONSTRATIONS OF PRODUCTS & PRESENTATIONS TO SMALL GROUPS



- Leaflet with consistent key messages handed out at farmers' markets and expos, public gatherings and demonstration events
- Products to present participants with an opportunity to get a practical feel of the use of products and sell on the spot
- Order forms, receipts, invoices used by Field Officers to conclude sales
- Client database and attendance sheet for record keeping and building relationships
- Videos on phone shared with participants having smart phones and access to internet
- Games for people to appreciate the savings of using EERE solutions
- Marketing posters that included a range of EERE products and prices offered, with IDs number for those interested in buying products at a later stage
- Table, chair, table cloth and banner as well as t-shirts, hats worn by project team for visibility

## SOCIAL MEDIA & RADIO PROGRAMMES



- In consultation with the Communications Officer, Field Officers post pictures from events, products and key messages targeting different audiences.
- Script for the programme, including the objective of the talk and key messages





## Lessons learned

### What worked well

Collaboration with **local authorities** is essential in being able to organise local events and should follow local rules

Collaboration with **organisations** that already organise events with rural communities are important

The **participatory approach** used, especially using **games**, brought interesting insights for further developments

**Engaging with IDs** from the localities in the design and implementation of awareness raising sessions ensured inclusion of all community members

Sales of EERE products increased following awareness raising sessions

Jointly use of **different tool and methods** keeps participants engaged

Presentation to **small groups** as well as **radio spots** were successful at securing sales

### What was challenging

Scheduling awareness events with village chiefs is difficult as they are prone to free-bies

**Limited attendance** in very remote areas, with majority being elderly women

Participants' **different and late arrivals** prolong the sessions and leave others uninterested

Unreliable winter **weather conditions** and throughout the year posed challenges to organise successful sessions for participants and for the Project Team

Heavy **costs** and long **travelling time** to get to target areas

Difficulty to reach some areas due to poor **transportation infrastructure**

A **resource** should be allocated to **social media** communication to be able to follow-up and engage to acquire clients



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## TECHNICAL NOTE 3

## Raising awareness on EERE in rural Lesotho

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