



African Energy Solar Success Series

Solar Shack

A Decade of Growth Through Quality

Tawanda Tawengwa's passion for solar was sparked while he was studying economics at Georgia Perimeter College, USA. He was making regular trips home to Zimbabwe, where there was a crippling energy shortage that put most homes in the dark for days at a time.

Says Tawanda: "In 2008 there was a US election looming, and there was a lot of discussion around renewable energy as being the technology that was going to revolutionise the world. Coming home to Zimbabwe, which has incredible sunlight all year round, the scope for solar energy as a solution to the electricity crisis was plain to see."

Tawanda soon launched a company that went on to become Solar Shack. What started as a briefcase operation quickly took off as Tawengwa won his first ever tender - for UNICEF no less.



"I had tendered for the project listing African Energy products, though we had no relationship between us at the time and I didn't even have the equipment. I emailed

AE, and they supplied the equipment in a matter of days through another partner also working in Zimbabwe," says Tawanda. Ten years on and Solar Shack employs 25 people working from four offices. It's one of only a handful of companies with a national footprint.



Describing his business strategy, Tawanda outlines three approaches that are working well for Solar Shack. "Firstly, I have surrounded myself with excellent technicians who make sure that any work we do is perfectly planned. I'm an economist, so I can see the opportunity for solar in Zimbabwe and Africa, but really, it's the technicians who can make or break a project."

Also critical to ensuring client satisfaction is the use of excellent equipment. Tawanda has positioned Solar Shack as solar water pumping specialists. "Water is tied to either production or sanitation, so it's an area that our clients can't afford to cut corners in. On the pumping side, we use the Grundfos pumps which are of excellent quality and have good support. If a pump goes down at a tomato farm for

instance, the client stands to lose their investment, so we only use equipment that we know works, and we know is durable," says Tawanda. "We have deployed Grundfos pumps that are providing water to fifteen or twenty thousand people in some cases. If we used less quality pumps, there would be consequences for those people, and for the solar energy industry as a whole, and I like to sleep at night!" he says.



Building up the reputation of solar energy is a third pillar in Tawanda's strategy. In addition to ensuring that Solar Shack's installations are effective and durable, he takes an unorthodox approach to Solar Shack's competitors in Zimbabwe.

"There is no way that Solar Shack or any other company can serve the whole country. Instead of working in isolation, we can better satisfy the appetite for solar energy by working together on projects to ensure better outcomes. This will boost the reputation of solar energy in Zimbabwe, which is good for all of us," he says. Part of his company's policy is to make sure that clients always have the right information, even when they are not buying from Solar Shack.



To date, Tawanda and the Solar Shack team and their partners in the industry have provided hundreds of thousands of people in hospitals, government buildings, farms, and communities with electricity and water, exemplifying the transformative nature of solar power.

"Africa needs solar energy," says Tawanda. "Even if households are all using solar geysers, this will free up megawatts for use in critical industries, and makes our lives here more enjoyable and sustainable. I want to see companies and countries cooperating to build the reputation and use of solar energy across the continent and the world."

