



SUCCESS STORY

Skills-based Training Provides Reliable Access to Solar Power

An entrepreneur's business using solar system increases income and creates jobs



Dawd's customers, lining up to get their mobile phones charged

“As for maintenance, I'm the expert in solar systems around here.”

Dawd Wako,
Mobile phone charging service provider

Lack of access to energy poses several challenges to residents of rural pastoral Ethiopia, affecting their livelihood tremendously. For example, they cannot operate devices like cell phones, preventing real-time communication and making emergency response extremely difficult. People are forced to use kerosene or firewood for lighting houses at the expense of the environment, health and assets.

The business of Dawd Wako, a resident of Borbor Town in Oromiya Ethiopia, is helping pastoralists tackle power issues. Dawd started the business of charging mobile phones in 2009 because he had to fend for himself. With the money his parents raised for him (3,500 birr/USD175), Dawd bought a 60-watt solar system and started to receive mobiles for charging. His excitement didn't last long, however. Due to lack of knowledge and skills to install and operate the solar system, Dawd couldn't charge the phones. He had to make several trips to nearby towns and even to Kenya to get the phones charged, and to buy batteries which were breaking down due to improper installation and handling. Dawd's operational cost was so high that he was about to throw in the towel. Fortunately, a rare opportunity opened up for Dawd in 2013. The USAID-supported project, Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement through Market Expansion (PRIME) worked with Dayod Engineering Plc to deliver a 10-day training in solar energy to him and 69 other entrepreneurs, who learned not only how to install solar panels but also how to use and maintain them.

That training turned around Dawd's business. His batteries stopped breaking down. “As for maintenance,” Dawd says proudly, “I'm the expert in solar systems around here.” Today, his income from mobile phone charging is more than 6000 birr (USD 300) a month. Moreover, he promotes and sells Dayod Engineering's solar products to pastoralists for a commission of 10 percent. Dawd has also opened up a butcher shop, which is earning him more than 12,000 birr (USD 600) a month and he is planning to open a restaurant soon. Recently, Dawd hired two employees who support him with the mobile phone charging business. Each earns 600 birr (USD 20) a month. On the whole, Dawd has come a long way. His business has not only changed his life but touched the lives of others, and has become a resource person for his kebele, of which he is proud.

PRIME works to significantly improve alternative livelihood options through essential skills transfer including basic employability skills, and entrepreneurship and technical training. Dawd is just one of thousands of young women and men for whom PRIME has facilitated training in these areas.