

## Case Study



### Challenge

*How can we empower citizens of un-electrified informal settlements, create jobs, promote skills development and provide a much needed lifeline amid the COVID-19 crisis in South Africa?*

The pandemic continues to have devastating effects on individuals, families and communities throughout South Africa. Amidst these challenging circumstances, there are examples of "green shoots at grassroots" that showcase tangible examples of resilience in action in the green economy.

### Background

Freedom Farm and Malawi Camp are located on Robert Sobukwe Road in Cape Town, on land belonging to the Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA) and the Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality. These communities, along with the neighbouring community of Blikkiesdorp, have been prioritised for relocation to a formal housing development on Symphony Way starting in 2023.

Freedom Farm is home to close to 2 000 people. Residents have been living in the area for as long as 30 years (average 12 years). There is no formal access to electricity in this settlement and limited communal water points and sanitation. The unemployment rate in the area is close to 65% and more than 50% of children (0-18 years) are not in school. The leadership of this community is newly formed and has been stable since its formation.

Malawi Camp's community is a bit smaller, with just over 1 000 residents. Like Freedom Farm, the community is almost 30 years old. Similarly, Malawi Camp also struggles with no formal electricity and limited communal water points and sanitation. The unemployment rate in the area is slightly less than that of Freedom Farm at 55%, but just as many children (0-18 years) are not in school. There has been a recent spike in violent gang-related crime in this community.

## Green shoots at grassroots in Malawi Camp and Freedom Farm: Creating resilient urban communities amidst the COVID-19 crisis

The impact of a focussed effort to keep pursuing the vision of a thriving, prosperous Africa mobilised by the green economy, in this case, one solar panel at a time.

It is undeniable that the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the global economy. While immediate health concerns prevail, economic recovery packages are being prepared at the global, national and regional level. In South Africa, there is a strong call to #buildbackbetter. The build back better movement is a call to use the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to collectively pivot towards economic growth paths that are both sustainable and socially responsible. Even though lowering carbon emissions is at the heart of the global climate change narrative, a green economy is a prosperous, job-creating economy underpinned by sustainable infrastructure solutions. Key to the success of this #buildbackbetter narrative is the drive for an equitable transition which is aligned with wider social impact.

## Key Insights

- Community-led development is key to the success of grassroots economic recovery. Essentially, communities know their contexts better than anyone else. Engaging communities creatively, helps them appreciate their strengths (assets) as a unit and empowers them to help design their solutions; encouraging community buy-in and support for the process.
- Alternative approaches to service delivery have the potential to support South Africa's post-COVID-19 economic recovery by delivering basic services, empowering and upskilling South Africans and creating jobs.
- These "green shoots" in Malawi Camp and Freedom Farm demonstrate that action, guided by strong values, is the key to ensure economic recovery (#buildbackbetter). To move with agility from surviving on business as usual to thriving on alternatives means shifting the dial through values-driven impact-focused action.

## Solution

With the groundbreaking support of the Airports Company South Africa, iSolar Ngoku, supported by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, GreenCape is leading the provision of alternative energy services in Malawi Camp and Freedom Farm. The solution designed by the community is a solar home system consisting of a solar PV panel, battery and on-going operations and maintenance support by locally trained installers.

Two service levels have been designed to promote empowerment and choice:

- Basic offering covering three internal lights; power for small appliances and devices (e.g. charging cell-phones or powering a small music system or tablet).
- Upgraded offering includes a 24-inch flat-screen LED television that can be powered by the solar home system.



The project also trains community members to be qualified installers. Some of these trained installers will be employed by the project. With this solar system, the basic offering could be powered for 8-10 hours per day. The battery will last a minimum of 2-3 years. This service is not a "handout", but is a paid-for service designed to promote community ownership and develop active citizens. The payment system is designed that the home solar system is paid for after 24 months, and is then owned by the client.

A community fund is created from a portion of the monthly payments for the upgraded offering, which can be used by the community to fund shared community resources (e.g. expansion of the community crèche; development of a food garden; bursary schemes; emergency funds; helping poor or unemployed to stay up to date with their payments)

*Learn more about iSolar Ngoku here: Solar Energy Solutions for Informal Settlements and [www.ishackproject.co.za](http://www.ishackproject.co.za)*

## Impact

For the first time in 30 years, these communities, home to more than 3 000 South Africans, will have access to an electricity service that they own. Local community members are being trained, and local jobs are being created. With the community now having access to (alternative) energy that can power appliances and devices, it makes them eligible for certain services that would not have been possible before, such as community-wide Wi-Fi services, which unlock the potential for wider education and job creation impacts. These "greenshoots" in Malawi Camp and Freedom Farm demonstrate that action, guided by strong values, is the key to ensure economic recovery post-COVID-19.



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