

Empowering Ugandans with **energy saving** solutions and technologies

*Green Bio Energy is a local social enterprise that is promoting efficient energy solutions and technologies in Uganda as a way of tackling environmental degradation and climate change. The Independent's **Ronald Musoke** talked to **Vincent Kienzler**, the enterprise's Managing Director about its vision, products and future plans.*

Tell us a little more about Green Bio Energy and its initiative that promotes environmental sustainability in Uganda?

Green Bio Energy (GBE) is a social enterprise aimed at empowering the population with energy saving solutions and technologies to tackle the consequences of environmental degradation and climate change. GBE works with local communities and small independent production teams to manufacture and distribute improved charcoal stoves, and carbonised and non-carbonised briquettes. These briquettes and stoves allow the user to save money on his or her energy bill, while at the same time contributing to protecting the environment. GBE also offers training in briquette production as well as selling locally designed and manufactured machinery to empower individuals to start their own business selling charcoal briquettes.

What prompted your company to come up with this project?

The two founders noticed the need for a company like GBE after long observation of the Ugandan society and its environment. Over the last few decades, increasing urban population and its ever growing need for energy solutions brought the price of cooking fuel to new highs and caused deforestation to reach a critical juncture. The founding partners knew that solutions existed to curb Uganda's deforestation so GBE was created to bring sustainable entrepreneurship and climate-friendly solutions to the sector.



Vincent Kienzler

In which ways do your products create a positive impact in as far as offsetting carbon in the atmosphere is concerned?

GBE promotes different technologies and provides different services that are actively offsetting carbon emissions. Under the 'Briketi' brand, there are briquettes, improved cookstoves, briquetting machinery and entrepreneurial training and services. The briquettes are made from recycled organic waste and residue so no fresh wood is gathered to manufacture them. As such, trees are preserved and continue to play their role of absorbing carbon dioxide before it reaches the atmosphere. The briquettes also burn longer than wood charcoal, and don't emit soot or smoke. On average, briquettes



An employee of Green Bio Energy arranging drying briquettes.

burn for two and half hours, compared to the 45 minute burn time of charcoal. As a result, less fuel is burned and people around the stove are less exposed to harmful emissions. Briketi improved cookstoves are made with durable materials and include insulating layers for higher efficiencies and more savings. A ceramic liner retains the heat and increases the thermal efficiency by about 40% compared to the traditional, local "sigiri".

Furthermore, Briketi supports and promotes other energy saving solutions like solar powered technologies. Instead of using the traditional and harmful "tadoba", GBE recommends using solar lanterns as it saves money; reduces emissions and creates a healthier environment.

Why should Ugandans care about environmental conservation and climate change?

Environmental conservation and climate change concern all of us — it is our responsibility to protect and preserve our surroundings. Without a concerted effort from all players in the

sector, there might be no forest left in Uganda in 40 years' time. All wildlife that depends on the forests would vanish, there would be more flooding, and more droughts. In addition, some areas of Uganda are prone to landslides after heavy rains, and such rains are likely to become more frequent and more violent with global warming. Recent studies on the impact of global warming have shown that developing countries like Uganda are the countries which will suffer the most from the impacts of climate change.

In what ways can government help organizations/companies like Green Bio Energy towards addressing the climate change challenge in Uganda?

It is important that everyone works together — government bodies and players in the private sector — to allow this transition to a smarter way of living and consuming. To promote energy saving innovations, the government needs to take steps to discourage the use of traditional fuel and technologies

as well as promote the use of new energy solutions. This could be through effective monitoring and control of cutting fresh trees, putting in place responsible policies to promote replanting trees. The government could also put in place fiscal incentives such as VAT exemption, which is paramount for organisations like GBE to grow and reach financial sustainability. Our stoves and briquettes target the poorest, and as such must be sold at very low prices in order to compete with the products sold by informal organisations that do not pay taxes.

Your last word?

It is important to realise that initiating behavioural change and promoting the use of eco-friendly energy solutions such as 'Briketi' briquettes and stoves is a slow process. It is therefore important to be patient and think about the long term, rather than to think in terms of immediate impact and profit like most companies or investors do. It is in small increments that together, we can build a healthier and better world.

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gbe

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