

Growing sustainable energy businesses



Alma and Rosa in their solar energy shop, San Nicolás, Honduras.

Breaking the Barriers

The Breaking the Barriers programme is supporting 201 women's groups across Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Honduras and Malawi to establish their own sustainable energy businesses and promote gender equality. Christian Aid is implementing through local partners across the four countries, with support from the European Union.

Breaking the Barriers in Honduras

In San Nicolas, in western Honduras, three friends, Alma, 42, Domitila, 58, and Rosa, 45, have come together to develop a new business. As mothers, they have always wanted to work to support their families, and be able to look after their children at the same time.

As Alma explains, 'We have always had the dream of starting a business [and] being able to care for our children at home. But we did not have the opportunity to access credit since we did not meet the requirements set by banks and microfinance companies'.

Supported through the Breaking the Barriers programme, and by our partner OCDIH, they saw the

opportunity to open a small shop to sell solar panels and photovoltaic equipment (a renewable energy technology, which transforms the energy from the sun into electricity). Having attended training days and workshops to gain skills, their business 'EPAS' has been open to the public since 2019.

Since the start of Breaking the Barriers in Honduras in 2018, 38 Women-led Sustainable Energy Enterprises (WLSEEs) have now been established. These groups are provided with continuous technical assistance, support to develop business plans, and to date 31 of the enterprises have received access to funding.

The established businesses have started to sell eco-friendly cooking stoves, solar driers and solar panels, including additional accessories and services.

These businesses are already providing an income for the 98 women who make up the established 31 WLSEEs. By February 2020, just before the arrival of Covid-19 in Honduras, these women had more than doubled their monthly incomes, and some were achieving the minimum wage through their sales.

Shifting Power

A key element of the programme is to promote gender



Funded by the European Union





Saray Benitez, 31, (centre) promoting her new solar business in Nueva Arcadia, Copán.

equality and strengthen women's social status.

Women involved in the project report that there has been a shift in decision-making power at a household level. At the start of the project, 21% of women reported that either their husband or someone else in the household primarily decided how the household income would be spent.

At the start of 2020, 100% of women, who now all generate an income from their enterprises, report that they are involved in decision making about the household income.

Environmental impact

Among the women in the project, the use of eco-friendly cooking stoves has increased from 52% to 86%. As a result, the women report that they now use 50% less firewood relieving pressure on forests for fuel wood.

Sustainable energy finance

The project also works to improve the institutional environment for sustainable energy technologies and women's role in this area.

At the start of the project there were no financing initiatives to support sustainable energy technology businesses, especially for women.

During the project, our partner has worked to establish financial frameworks in collaboration with two local micro finance institutions to enable access to finance specifically for sustainable energy products. This has enabled the women to establish new sustainable energy enterprises.

Case Study: Solay Energy

With the growing cost of conventional energy sources, Saray Benitez, 31, a young entrepreneur living in Nueva Arcadia, Copán, saw the opportunity to develop a business to sell photovoltaic systems for the production of solar energy.

Trained and supported by our partner OCDIH, Saray's 'Solay Energy' business now provides equipment and technical support in the installation and maintenance of these systems.

'People see how solar energy is a good alternative to illuminate their homes', Saray explains.

She plans to develop her businesses to provide interconnected systems where the users can store energy for future use.

Breaking the Barriers and COVID 19

Due to the impact of COVID-19 in Honduras, the women's businesses have been affected and sales have decreased.

Our partners are supporting them to adjust to these challenges by providing training and working with them closely to develop strategies, so that when the businesses can re-open they will be able to trade.

Loan repayments have also been frozen during this challenging time. Despite these disruptions, some women have been able to continue to trade during the pandemic with safety measures in place.

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