

# Renewable Energy Jobs & Access

A SERIES OF CASE STUDIES

Gambia 

## PROJECT PROFILE

NICE International BV, a Netherlands-based initiative of Energy4All Foundation and a member of the Alliance for Rural Electrification (ARE), is promoting solar-powered information, communications and technology (ICT) service centres. These serve people living on less than USD 5 a day in peri-urban and rural areas with either no grid access or very poor grid connection.

Four types of services are made accessible: battery charging, information (access to TV, communication tools, Internet), value-added services (business and banking education) and income generation (online trading, outsourcing).

The project started in 2006 with two pilot centres in Gambia. Five more centres were opened in 2009-2010. Each is operated as a franchise by a local entrepreneur. The franchise and lease arrangement allows local entrepreneurs to run a Centre without having to make a large investment.

With additional funding from several sources, including the EU Energy Facility, the network will be scaled up to a total of 50 centres over the next few years. By 2014, 16 additional locations will be established in Gambia, 20 in Tanzania and 14 in Zambia.

On average, each NICE Centre will be located within easy reach of about 20 000 people. Altogether, the 50 locations will provide access to energy and ICT for up to one million people, providing opportunities for income-generating activities.

The NICE Centres are mostly grid-connected, but in some cases run exclusively on their own solar photovoltaic power and thus are capable of operating in off-grid locations. On average, the solar systems produce 7.5 kWh per day.

## JOBS AND TRAINING

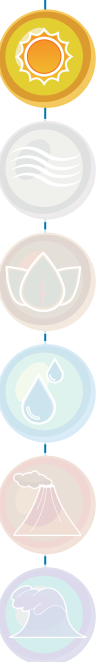
Each NICE Country Organisation employs at least a local managing director, finance manager, technical manager and a service manager. Each Centre is run by a local entrepreneur and employs on average five staff members. The technical and business skills needed to successfully operate a Centre are scarce in developing countries. As such, NICE offers the required capacity-building at a local level. Through the franchising model, the NICE country organisation supports individual centres with training and coaching.

Maintenance and support of the equipment is done by the NICE Country Organisation, backed-up by international suppliers. The franchisees pay a lease fee for the use of the equipment. Technical contractors to the NICE Centres are trained in specific skills in order to effectively support the business.

Further downstream, reliable access to energy is the enabler of development. The NICE Centres are supermarkets for products and services that help people in their personal and economic development (e.g. solar products, IT Education, online healthcare, financial and government services). Their focus is on youth (which represent 50% of users), women (25%), and small entrepreneurs (10%).

Experience to date suggests that, among other impacts, the Centres have helped to

- » increase disposable income.
- » improve the quality of the workforce available for local businesses.
- » improve the quality and competitiveness of local businesses through better ICT skills and networking.





## PROJECT SNAPSHOT

NICE International BV, a member of the Alliance for Rural Electrification (ARE), operates solar-powered information, communications and technology (ICT) service centres in Gambia, with plans to expand to Tanzania and Zambia.

- » **Technology**  
Solar PV
- » **Employment**  
Average of 5 employees/local NICE Centre; at least 4 managers directing country-wide operations

## COUNTRY INFORMATION

- » **Population**  
1.7 million people
- » **GDP/capita**  
USD 467
- » **Electrification rate**  
8.3% average  
2.8% rural  
45.9% urban
- » **Access to modern fuels\***  
4.9%

*The data from the case study was provided by the Alliance for Rural Electrification. Population and GDP data are from the World Bank Indicators (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>). Energy access data from United Nations Development Programme and World Health Organization (2009) report, *The Energy Access Situation in Developing Countries: A Review Focusing on the Least Developed Countries and Sub-Saharan Africa*.*

*\* Modern fuels refer to electricity, liquid fuels, and gaseous fuels such as LPG, natural gas and kerosene.*

At the local level, ICT skills are demanded by many employers, but not taught at most schools. Hence those that gain these skills are a major asset to the labour market for youth.

On a regional and national level, ICT services increase access to and quality of education, facilitate and reduce the cost of delivery of information and services by reducing the need for transport to main cities where most basic services are provided.

## FINANCING

NICE centres are set up as local business entities to make them financially sustainable. Through the fees that customers pay on a pay-per-use basis for development services, the centres are able to generate revenues.

The expansion of NICE centres will be financed by franchise fees of the NICE Country Organisations, a subsidy from the European Union (30%), and private investments (such as Rabobank, Schneider Electric).

Experience suggests that the NICE Centres reach a positive cash flow within one year of their establishment and run a profit within three years.

## SUPPLY CHAIN

### Upstream Linkages

The solar systems used by the NICE Centres are advanced systems assembled from components of different suppliers. Solar and ICT equipment are typically purchased internationally.

### Downstream Benefits

Locally, each NICE Centre supports several local businesses, including: internet service providers, technical installation, maintenance and repair, products and services.



The Policy Advice and Capacity Building Directorate (PACB) welcomes your comments and feedback at [pcb@irena.org](mailto:pcb@irena.org).

These local case studies were prepared by IRENA in cooperation with the organisations described. They intend to explore the employment dimension of renewable energy development and deployment in rural areas in the developing world. For a more detailed version of this case study, please see IRENA (2012), *Renewable Energy Jobs and Access*, which is available at:

[http://www.irena.org/DocumentDownloads/Publications/Renewable\\_Energy\\_Jobs\\_and\\_Access.pdf](http://www.irena.org/DocumentDownloads/Publications/Renewable_Energy_Jobs_and_Access.pdf).

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of IRENA or its Member States.