

WINNING HEARTS OF COMMUNITIES



In Nigeria, transmission and distribution losses remain a significant challenge for distribution companies and are often attributed to energy theft. The Kano Electricity Distribution Company (KEDCO) was experiencing AT&C losses of 62% and urgently needed to implement a programme to improve its customer satisfaction and get losses under control. In a study conducted by KEDCO, it revealed that in the Villages customer segment, consisting of very poor category of customers, AT&C losses were 92%, and collection efficiency averaged near <10% across three villages.

After conducting extensive due diligence, the utility selected India-based energy firm Tata Power to pilot the 'Winning the Heart'

model, applicable to deprived section of society. Three villages, namely Dosayee, Dausara and Dankunku in Kano were selected to implement the model in 2017. Some 300 households in Dosayee, an extremely poor village, were the first participants of the project.

The primary objective of the pilot was to establish a safe and reliable power supply to villages, improve revenue collection efficiency and facilitate the provision of social services for poor communities such as literacy training, youth employment, healthcare, and work opportunities for women and unemployed youths.

The plan required the utility to make no capital investments to implement the project as it was

intended to be a self-sustainable model. The project also did not require any exceptional technical, operational or project management skills. It only needed guidance

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from experienced senior managers and mentors and local people were selected and trained to play these roles. The local KEDCO managers and staff received training, which resulted in the efficient and effective installation of the necessary infrastructure, getting the project up and running within a year.

The project included providing electricity to all villagers using a single distribution transformer to optimise the monitoring of the energy supplied, as well as check the quality of that power. A vocational training centre was established to equip youths with mobile repair, electrician and plumbing skills. A Women's Literacy Centre was built to teach females how to read and write, and provide them with basic life skills.

PROJECT CHALLENGES

It was not all smooth sailing and the project was met with a few challenges, especially getting project support from all residents or ward heads, and ensuring regular attendance of literacy classes – this was supported by a reward-based model.

The single biggest challenge, however, was achieving community buy-in. The Dosayee village head and his team, consisting of four Ward heads and the local Imam, had an initial meeting with the project team to achieve a full understanding of the project mission and long-term benefits. After three follow up meetings, a large team from KEDCO was mobilised to undertake a survey, going from door-to-door to conduct a community census to achieve community buy-in.

PROJECT RESULTS

In 2019, overall ATC&C losses in the three villages were reduced by 17% to 45%; the provision of improved

supply saw a 100% increase of KEDCO customers and nearly 200% increase of customers paying their bills. The total revenue potential of the model is about \$6 million per year, with an overall collection efficiency of 5%. Collection efficiency jumped to 3-times base collection in just two months.

In Dausayi, revenue collected by KEDCO per month jumped from 33,100 Naira to 86,500 Naira. In Dankunku and Dausara, collection efficiency jumped from 6% to 39% (29,000 Naira to 46,059 Naira) and from 3% to 25% (11,150 Naira to 51,345 Naira), respectively. Other villages are now requesting the model be implemented for them, owing to its success in the three communities. Customer satisfaction increased from low to high.

Ravindra Joshi, a technical consultant from Tata Power and Chief Driving Officer who is leading and mentoring the project, says: "As a policy decision, 8% of gains will be used for opening up more Women Literacy Centres. The response rate in villages is expected to double, and similarly, we anticipate the number of customers will also double."

COMMUNITY UPLIFTMENT

Some findings revealed that the majority of the villagers were happy with their circumstances, but that most of the women were illiterate and didn't have basic mathematics skills, meaning they were unable to count their daily sales. These women cook small meals or snacks but are unable to count how much money was made over the day. This lack of exposure to such life skills is what motivated the 'Winning The Heart' project to start a Women's Literacy Centre (WLC). The results of the census were delivered to the Village



Head and his team who bought into the WLC idea.

The model was designed to facilitate training for 60 women, trained by one instructor. A small KEDCO team of female managers was formed to select the instructor and students for the pilot. Luckily, the Village head was able to ensure the selection of optimal candidates from Dankunku, which helped KEDCO select candidates for both instructors and students in a short time. A team was formed to monitor attendance and progress of learning every week. The programme saw a change in the confidence level of women day by day and week by week. All 60 women students were delighted with the learning experience.

BEST PRACTICE

The project can easily be replicated in Africa since the total population of those living in poverty is estimated at 200 million people. According to a study conducted in 2010, 61.7% of the urban population in Africa lives in slums. With the right team and expertise, this model can translate into massive benefits for communities across the continent, as has already been seen with the high success rate of such projects in India and in Nigeria. ■