

SustainSolar Empowers Malawi School Children

Sustainsolar, a division of Sustainable Power Generation in Cape Town, South Africa, has just finished the installation of a [solar power mini grid](#) at the Sokolo Village School in the remote mountains of Northern Malawi.

The mini grid was part of a larger project sponsored by [Peachtree Church](#), of Atlanta Georgia, USA, where a girls' dormitory was added to the school as a solution aimed at increasing access to education by making class attendance safer and easier for young women.

Supporting education in remote areas of Malawi

Peachtree's mission program has four focus areas: anti-trafficking, development, education, and relief. To that end, Peachtree built the Sokola Village school's girls' dormitory, complete with plumbing and power.

"This school is the only school in the region. For that reason, many children walk for two hours or more every morning, across remote and often dangerous terrain, just to get to school," says Rick Armstrong, head of the Sokola mini grid project for Peachtree. "This new girls' dorm we built will house 96 young ladies and allow them to focus more on learning and becoming future leaders."

SUSTAINCOMPACT™ reaches the remote mountains of Malawi.

"Our solar systems are built and transported in weather-proof, secure containers; they are ideal for the rugged conditions found in Sokola," says Ames Martin, SustainSolar's Head of Operations, who went to Malawi to supervise the installation. "We built and tested the entire unit, including mock rig-up, here in Cape Town, before shipping it to Malawi. The compact shipped with every needed tool and component, so that it could be easily deployed as soon as it reached the school."

The [SUSTAINCOMPACT™](#) took four weeks to reach Sokola, transported by truck from Cape Town to Sokola. Within three days of the team's arrival it was producing electricity. The Sokola mini grid produces 6kWp and has 10kWh of battery; it is the first time that leading technology from [Tescovolt batteries](#) and [SMA inverters](#), both German manufacturers, has been used in a Malawian mini grid project, offering long-term, high quality solutions with an extended useful life of between 10 and 30 years. Beston Ntepa Gama, owner and MD of BNG Electrical Services, Peachtree's preferred electrical contractor said, "The SustainSolar system is the highest quality solar package I've installed in Malawi."

"This is exactly the type of project that meets Sustainable Power Generation's mission to change the way developing economies gain access to power," said Ames. "The fact

that we could bring so much tangible change and benefit to these eager learners, is an incredible feeling, and makes what we do worthwhile.”

Teaching and giving

Through BNG’s apprenticeship and intern program, many of Peachtree’s technical students were able to gain hands-on experience with the installation of the SUSTAINCOMPACT™. Following the installation, John Faridan, SustainSolar’s lead engineer, held a free advanced training session in which he went into detail about solar system design, integration, testing, installation, and maintenance.

It was great seeing such eagerness to learn. These students really care about and love what they do, and it was a pleasure teaching them,” said John.

Ames continues, “We want to do more work like this. Projects like the Sokola project are the reason we started Sustainable Power Generation. We have more projects lined up for Malawi, which is exciting, and we are making headway into bringing sustainable, clean power to Sub-Saharan Africa.”

Joanna Gentili solar project manager for Peachtree, with over five years’ experience working in Malawi on similar projects, said, “It was great working with Ames and John. They brought such a high level of energy and commitment to the project, delivering their product on time, while cheerfully sleeping on floors at night, and working with the community. They captured what this type of project is really all about.”

Rick Armstrong from Peachtree had this final word about SustainPower.

“This is the solution that exactly fits our vision and mission in Malawi. We couldn’t be more pleased with the speed, efficiency, and excellence of workmanship we’ve seen from the SustainPower team, as well as the high quality of their product. This is going to make a difference in many peoples’ lives for many years to come.”