

Health Electrification Champions



This profile is part of a series sponsored by the Power Africa Health Electrification and Telecommunications Alliance (HETA) on diverse professionals for health facility electrification (HFE) in sub-Saharan Africa. In sharing these profiles, HETA aims to highlight health, electrification, and digital connectivity or telecommunications professionals in HETA countries who have helped accelerate electricity and digital access in healthcare facilities while also supporting the inclusion of women and youth.



“Every day, I’m motivated by the opportunities to improve access to services that will promote the health and development of the nation of Eswatini”

Echo VanderWal

Echo VanderWal, co-founder and Executive Director of The Luke Commission (TLC), has dedicated her life to shaping healthcare in Eswatini. After witnessing the devastation of HIV/AIDS in rural communities during a visit in 2004, Echo and her husband Harry founded TLC in 2005. TLC has delivered over 200,000 patient visits annually, establishing TLC as a beacon of compassionate medicine and leadership development. Echo's advocacy for women and youth resonates throughout her work, making her a driving force in healthcare equity.



How did you come to work in the health electrification sector?

I grew up in a family with a lot of love but not a lot of resources. For a time, our family lived outside, bathing in a river and cooking over a fire. My parents always told my two sisters, my brother, and I that the sky was the limit, and that we could do anything we set our minds to. They instilled in us an appreciation for working hard and taught us the joy of serving others.

At the age of eight, I had a deep sense of calling to work in healthcare in Africa. I worked hard as a student and eventually went to college where I met Harry, my husband, who had a similar calling. We married after college, and I trained as a physician assistant while Harry trained as a doctor. I started a real estate development company and learned valuable lessons about business that serve me well today. In 2004, after hearing about Eswatini from a friend, we visited for the first time. The first homestead we visited on arrival was in a place called Timbutini where we saw people dying from HIV. We knew we had found our new home and our life's calling. In 2005, we sold the real estate development business and moved to Eswatini full-time to start TLC.



What motivates you in your work?

As Executive Director of TLC, I have the pleasure to work with and support a motivated and solutions-focused team in innovating to extend compassionate, comprehensive healthcare to as many people as possible. Every day, I'm motivated

by the opportunities to improve access to services that will promote the health and development of the nation of Eswatini. Motivated by faith, I'm inspired to treat every patient who comes to us for care as a beloved father, mother, brother, sister, or child. TLC has reduced the stigma associated with pursuing treatment by caring for each patient with dignity, maintaining trust, and respecting confidentiality by viewing all humans as equal regardless of age, socioeconomic status or ability.



Share an accomplishment related to HFE that you are most proud of.

We were particularly proud of the successful completion of a HETA project in Eswatini recently. This project involved procuring energy monitoring devices, containerizing solar and battery equipment, and commissioning energy monitoring kits at 25 health facilities. Additionally, we implemented a battery management solution at three sites and a solar and battery solution at two sites, ensuring the project's longevity and effectiveness.



Do you have any advice for women and youth pursuing a career in energy, health, telecoms, or digital innovation?

The sky is the limit! Dream big. Prepare well. Look beyond yourself to the good of others. My advice to anyone who wants to work in health and development is to get a good education and to spend some time in a field unrelated to health to develop life and business skills. Don't be surprised if you have an opportunity that pushes you beyond what you thought you might be doing or where you might be working.



What are some untapped actions that the energy sector could focus on to accelerate progress in HFE? How will these solutions help the health facilities and the surrounding communities?

Real-time, transparent energy monitoring helps health facilities plan for future energy needs, including solar and battery backup solutions to power that is critically needed equipment. Such solutions ensure that patients receive timely service, rather than having to wait for power to be restored or for lab tests to be run a second time

About HETA | The Health Electrification and Telecommunications Alliance (HETA) is a USAID Global Development Alliance and Power Africa's flagship initiative for health facility electrification and digital connectivity in sub-Saharan Africa. Our mission is to catalyze public-private partnerships and sustainable business models that increase access to reliable, renewable energy and digital connections for 10,000 health facilities—vital improvements to support equitable access to lifesaving care across the region. Together with diverse partners from the public, private, and social sectors, HETA is making it easier and less costly to invest in the systems that power healthcare and productive uses of energy. To learn more, please contact HETA@abtglobal.com.