



Health Electrification Champions

This profile is part of a series sponsored by the Power Africa Health Electrification and Telecommunications Alliance (HETA) on inclusive champions 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.



"Women, never doubt yourselves. We are the architects of change! Whether in last-mile communities or bustling urban areas, we, as women, are the stewards of energy."

Damilola Asaleye

Damilola Asaleye, is a renewable energy expert, and she is the Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of Ashdam Solar Co. Ltd, as well as the Founder and Executive Director of GWTEO. She is also a TechWomen Fellow, a Vital Voices Grow Fellow, and is recognized as one of the leading women in renewable energy in Nigeria by the Environment Africa Group and Environment Africa Magazine. Damilola holds a Master of Science degree in Physics, specializing in Meteorology and Atmospheric Physics, from the University of Ibadan (Nigeria).

Actively engaged as a STEM advocate, she has positively influenced youth to pursue STEMrelated careers through mentoring and teaching. Leveraging her expertise, she actively educates her community about the advantages of efficient energy utilization. Her primary goal is to diminish reliance on fossil fuels by promoting awareness about energy management, climate change, and renewable energy solutions. Damilola holds the position of Vice President at the Renewable Energy Association of Nigeria and was recognized as a Rising Talent in 2022 by the Women's Forum.



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

My journey into the energy sector began at thirteen years old, driven by the circumstances I witnessed in my country, Nigeria. The prevalent dependency on fossil fuels troubled me deeply. Growing up, there were many tanker accidents resulting in the loss of lives across the country due to the failing fossil fuel infrastructure. There were recurrent petrol scarcities, with long queues at petrol stations, prompting me to question the country's reliance on fossil fuels and the enduring energy poverty. Even now, Nigeria grapples with fuel scarcity. I have witnessed petrol stations shutting down and fuel prices soaring by almost 100%, with miles-long queues of people awaiting their turn to get fuel. This persistent issue fueled my curiosity to explore alternatives to fossil fuel dependence, igniting my passion for clean energy solutions. In my current roles as the Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of Ashdam Solar Company Limited. I am committed to driving sustainable energy initiatives further.







What is your role in health facility electrification (HFE)? How does your role in health facility electrification impact the community and stimulate economic growth?

My role is that of an enabler and developer. My organization and I electrify last-mile health facilities that previously lacked energy access. In order to electrify these facilities, we have had to navigate through rough terrain, including roads that were not yet built, various natural obstacles, bad weather, and areas disconnected from the power grid. Many organizations and individuals are unwilling to go to these places due to the challenges of reaching them. However, the people in these last-mile health areas still need electricity to power their facilities, sustain life, and boost their economy. We have also collaborated with other organizations to power data collection, refrigeration, immunization equipment, and lighting with solar energy. We ensure that these facilities receive power at near zero cost. Our approach involves community engagement and shared values; We not only power the health facilities but also extend electricity to the surrounding community. For our projects, we deploy and train community members, including youth and women. These communities are often remote and far from the city, so we cannot be physically present all the time, and so we need trained local operators to maintain and operate the systems. The youth we train become the operators of our systems. The trained operators, who also act as vendors, sell electricity to the community and health centers when needed. This role provides the operator with a source of income.

In addition to training operators, we educate communities about energy management and efficiency. This training raises energy awareness and the importance of managing energy effectively. We also teach basic supply system installations and operations, which ensures a pool of trained individuals who can step in if the current operator is unavailable. This approach empowers community members, enabling them to train others or become resellers of solar systems, spreading their knowledge and skills to other communities.



What motivates you in your work?

What motivates me is witnessing the joy when we address energy poverty and provide communities with energy access. People in lastmile communities have expressed gratitude, and have said, "Now I can do what people in urban areas can do." Witnessing the positive impact of energy access on homes, communities, and healthcare facilities fills me with contentment and joy. Relieving individuals of their dependency on fossil fuel generators, reducing their operating and maintenance costs, and experiencing reliable energy brings me immense satisfaction. The joy and fulfillment I see on people's faces are what truly motivate me in my work.

In one of the communities in Ajemitale, Odo Nla, llaje Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria where we deployed energy access as a part of a HETA project, we found there to be reverberating positive effects on the community that went beyond the health facility. In this coastal community, the major economic activity is fishing. The community had experienced significant postharvest losses because they could not refrigerate their catches without power. However, within two to three hours of energy access, their catches were frozen, allowing them to preserve and sell their produce over an extended period without spoilage. This significantly reduced their postharvest losses.

Additionally, in the same community, the introduction of energy led to substantial growth for a particular SME. Initially, this business operated a single minimart. After gaining energy access, the business expanded from one shop to three shops with different departments. The owner now runs the original minimart as well as a provision store and canteen. He can now refrigerate drinks and even play music, attracting more customers. Witnessing this rapid growth in the local businesses was truly amazing.



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

There was a health facility in Ajemitale, Odo Nla, llaje Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria that could not afford to be connected to our mini-grid at the time. Through the HETA project, we were able to go back to the community and power and provide resources for a health facility there. The cost barrier initially prevented this health facility from connecting to the power grid. However, with the support of HETA, this was ameliorated at no cost to the facility.

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

The time for you to join the industry is NOW. I initially realized energy problems when I was 13. Energy access and energy poverty persists and is increasing, not decreasing. We need to involve more women and youth. Women, never doubt yourselves. Know that 'Yes, you can achieve it.' Women are already making strides in the sector, and we need more of us in this space. We are the ones who can reverse this energy crisis! We are the architects of change! Whether in last mile community villages or bustling urban areas, we, as women, are the stewards of energy. Women are the energy managers in homes for revenue, and across the board. We should believe that 'Yes, we can do it and are capable!'"

What are some untapped actions that the energy sector could focus on to accelerate progress in HFE?

Some of the untapped actions, especially when considering health, involve tailoring our approach to the communities we serve. We must design a system that will address the unique challenges of that community. We must break down each problem individually and avoid offering generic solutions. Our responses should be as locally relevant as possible. Each community is different and has its own set of rules and terrain, which may differ significantly from others. It's crucial to customize energy solutions for the last mile, reaching down to the grassroots level, rather than providing one-size-fits-all solutions.

For example, in a coastal community where we deployed mini grids for a project, the usual practice of using concrete for ground mounting was impractical and prohibitively expensive due to the coastal environment. Instead, our team consulted the community to understand their traditional construction methods. We found that the community builds their houses on wooden stilts in the swamp, structures that have lasted for hundreds of years. Based on their recommendations, we used the same type of wood, known as ironwood, to create rafters for mounting our solar panels.

Additionally, the community contributed by building walkways to our energy cabins, ensuring accessibility. These walkways demonstrated their commitment to and participation in the project.

This approach saved costs and involved the community directly in the project, adding value through their local expertise and labor. We hired community members for the installation, providing them with employment.

What does the future of solar energy look like in Nigeria and across the continent?

Currently, there are several renewable energy financing mechanisms in place, such as the ROGEAP and the Universal Energy Facility, creating more opportunities. Commercial banks that previously avoided the renewable energy industry are now very interested and are starting to invest in it. There are also innovative models being developed to finance projects using local currency instead of foreign currency, addressing the instability in the sector. Another area of innovation is technology. We are seeing advancements in building-integrated photovoltaic systems, which are increasingly being adopted. I anticipate these innovations will help achieve universal energy access. Examples include using solar panels as roofs, windows, and decorative glass. Additionally, with the increasing installation of solar panels, we need to consider recycling and managing the end-of-life of these panels. This necessity will

spur new business ideas and innovations. Many entrepreneurs and tech startups are already working on solutions, and I foresee even more developments in this area.

Despite our efforts in transitioning to solar energy, challenges persist. We must collectively strive to go beyond our current endeavors to address energy poverty effectively.

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or insights on this sector?

The beauty of energy access comes with so many dimensions: experiencing different cultures, engaging with various people, and encountering diverse communities. Even within similar areas, each community holds something different and unique. There is beauty in providing energy access to people. Every community is distinct, and every energy access initiative should be tailored to its specific location, which adds a new dimension for developers like us. It prompts us to be creative across different regions, reminding us that while the world is unified, every community retains its uniqueness.

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.

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