



# Commercial microgrids lesotho

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A key aspect of helping the developing world is not only ensuring that they have sufficient power and infrastructure to run key facilities like schools and hospitals. It is also important to ensure that their energy infrastructure is resilient and, hopefully, runs on renewable energy.

This is what OnePower has done and continues to do in Lesotho, a very small mountainous country surrounded by South Africa.

OnePower CEO Matt Orosz first spent time in Lesotho from 2000 to 2002 as a member of the Peace Corps. He had a vision of bringing necessary light and electricity to people in rural Lesotho. He kept this in mind while pursuing his education at MIT, getting his Ph.D. in solar thermal and photovoltaic hybrid power generation. In 2015, Orosz began his full-time work with OnePower in Lesotho.

OnePower is bringing power to rural regions of Lesotho in the sustainable form of microgrids. Communities that are far away from major population centers might be far away from the main grid, but with the microgrids, that OnePower is creating they can sustain themselves and be immune from any damage that major power grids might incur.

While there are other minigrids operations in Africa, none can claim the feats that OnePower has accomplished. Lesotho is crisscrossed by mountain ranges and a river -- known as the Kingdom in the Sky -- and it is especially difficult for electricity to reach some remote communities.

OnePower's first minigrid has been providing power to 200 customers for over a year. Orosz and OnePower are expanding this to an eight-minigrid project that will provide reliable electricity to over 30,000 people, 13 health clinics, 25 schools, and more than 100 small businesses. Not only that, these systems are powered by OnePower's solar panels. Construction of these sites is underway, and Orosz is working on power transmission over obstacles like roads and rivers.

New initiatives like this often rely on grants for their startup capital, but Orosz secured funding from several private investors. By ensuring that his investors get a return on their investment, Orosz and OnePower will prove that their business and technology are worthwhile investments.

"The goal is ultimately to prove that you can make this work: that you can generate electricity and sell it to a customer in Africa, and that revenue enables you to pay back the financier that helped you build the infrastructure in the first place," Orosz says. "Once you close that loop, then it can scale. That's the holy grail of minigrids."

Source Study: MIT News -- Expanding energy access in rural Lesotho | MIT News | Massachusetts Institute of

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