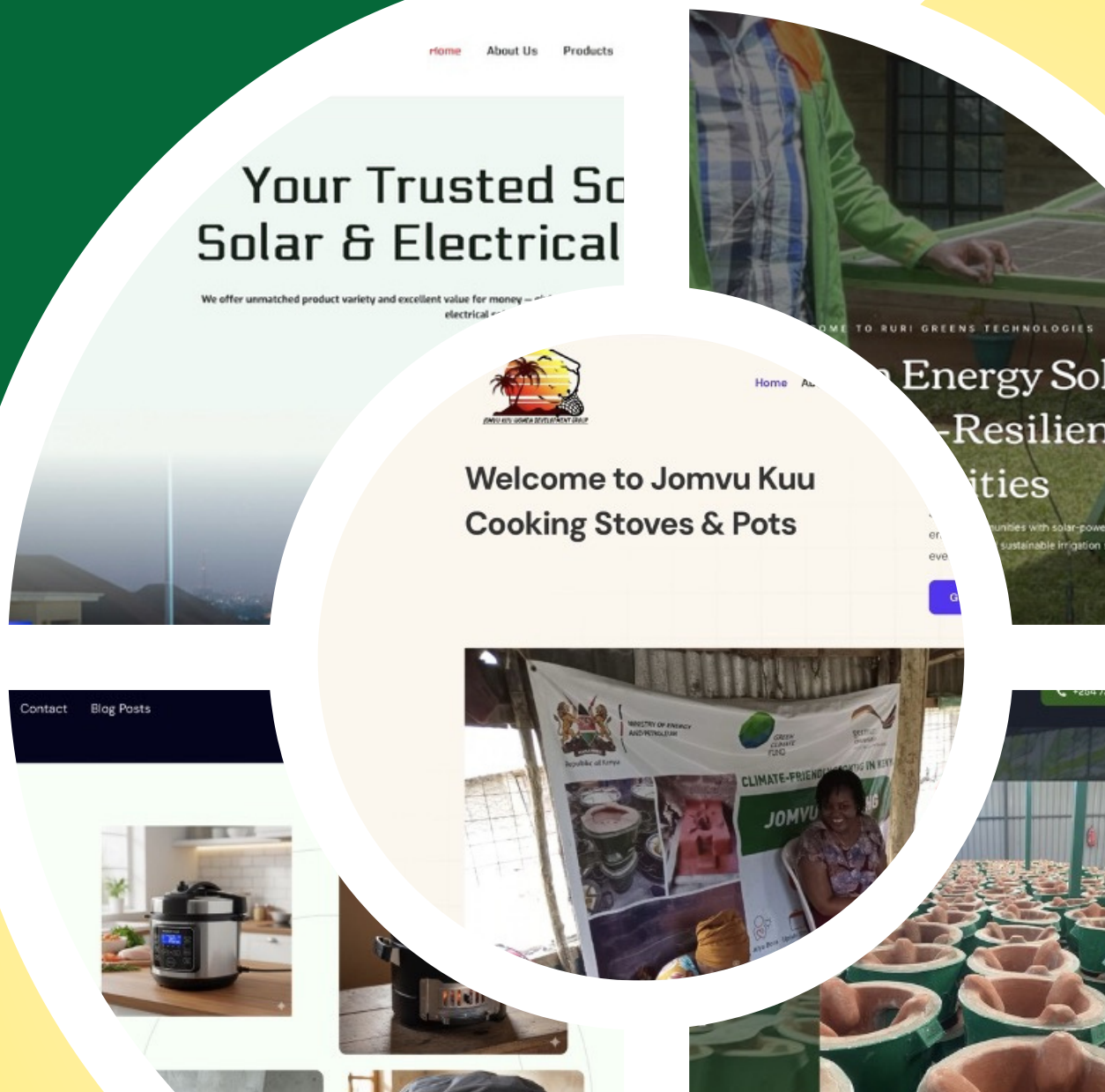


Empowering Entrepreneurs through enhanced access to digital space: Experience from Women and Youth-Led Clean Energy Enterprises in Kenya

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Box 1: About EVI-SICEE Project

The Evidence for Informing Optimization and Scaling of Youth and Women-Led Clean Energy Enterprises (EVI-SICEE) project is a three-year research-to-impact initiative led by the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS). The project is implemented across four Sub-Saharan African countries, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, and South Africa, with research activities primarily concentrated in selected country contexts to generate comparative and policy-relevant insights.

The project is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) under the Clean Energy for Development Call for Action (CEDCA). It is designed as a research-impact-oriented programme that integrates evidence generation with practical enterprise support mechanisms to strengthen youth and women-led clean energy enterprises (CEEs).

At its core, the project seeks to contribute to sustainable development by producing actionable evidence that informs policies, incubation strategies, and investment decisions supporting youth and women entrepreneurs in the clean energy sector.

The Challenge

Youth and women-led SMEs in Kenya's clean energy sector face multiple structural barriers, including limited digital capabilities that constrain their visibility, competitiveness, and growth.

Evidence from the EVI-SICEE project shows that inadequate digital presence is one of the most significant challenges affecting these enterprises. Without an online presence, businesses struggle to demonstrate credibility to funders, investors, and partners, limiting their ability to access finance, expand beyond local markets, and participate in regional and global value chains. For many entrepreneurs, the absence of a website meant they could not meet basic due diligence requirements, even after being shortlisted for funding or partnership opportunities.

“Visibility matters a lot. Having a web page gives you a step ahead when applying for grants. When you are shortlisted, they always check if you have an online presence. Mourine Chepkemboi, Business Incubation Lead.

The Intervention

To address this gap, the project launched a targeted business development initiative designed to transition entrepreneurs from total digital absence to full-scale market visibility.

First, project leads conducted field-based needs assessments to select a cohort of entrepreneurs for full-scale digital onboarding, resulting in the launch of six professional, sector-specific websites. These platforms were strategically designed to move businesses in the clean energy and green technology sector, specifically those dealing in improved cookstoves and solar products, into the national spotlight.

The second, and more critical phase, involved a structured capacity-building webinar that converted "website owners" into "digital managers". By training 100% of participants in self-management tools, the project ensured long-term sustainability and technical independence.

The key impact metrics included:

- **6 Professional Websites Launched:** Six entrepreneurs transitioned from 0% to 100% digital presence, each launching a fully functional, professional website creating a credible entry point into national and global markets.
- **Expanded Geographic Reach:** The initiative supported businesses across diverse counties including Mombasa, Kisii, Kiambu, Tharaka Nithi, Homabay, and Kakamega, strengthening local economies while enabling broader market access.
- **Sector-Specific Focus:** All beneficiaries operate within the clean energy and green technology sector, focusing on improved cookstoves and solar products, areas critical to the project, climate action and sustainable development.

Technical Empowerment:

Entrepreneurs were not just given websites, they were trained to own and manage them, ensuring long-term impact:

- **Website Analytics (Google Site Kit):** Entrepreneurs can now track who visits their site, where traffic comes from, and what content attracts attention, enabling data-driven decisions.
- **Content & Website Management (Elementor):** Participants can independently update products, prices, and images without technical expertise, reducing reliance on external developers.
- **SEO & Blogging:** Entrepreneurs learned how to use storytelling and content to attract organic traffic, position themselves as experts, and build trust with customers and partners.

Together, these skills shift entrepreneurs from passive recipients of support to active digital players in the clean energy ecosystem.

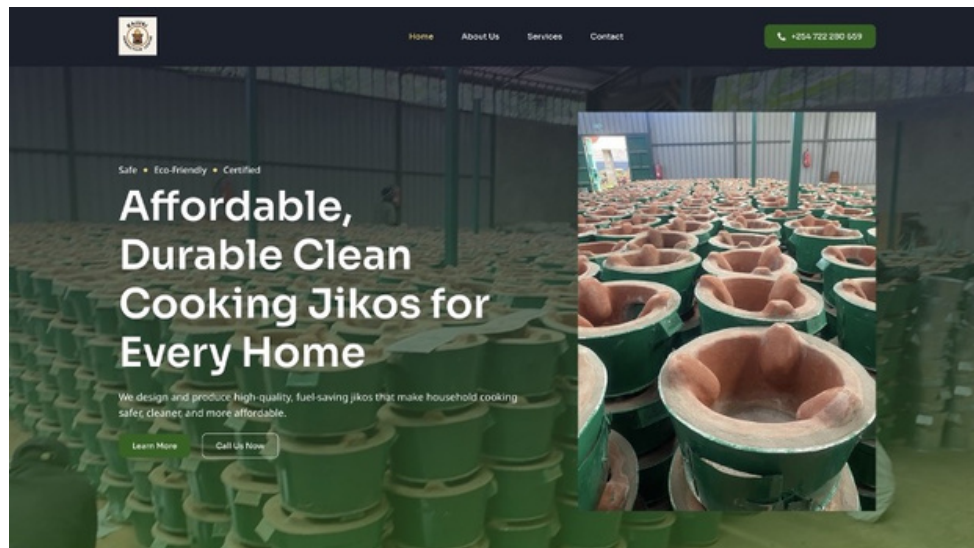
The voices of impact

The project moved beyond technical service into capacity building. Below are the entrepreneurs whose businesses have been digitally unlocked through the integrated support advanced by EVI-SICEE project:

Lilian Kanjuki | Capital Clean Cooking Solutions (Tharaka Nithi)

The Business: Manufacturer of improved cookstoves improved cookstoves.

Website Link: <https://www.kajukiproductioncenter.co.ke>



Screenshot of Kanjuki Production's website

Fatma | Cookstove Entrepreneur (Mombasa)

The Business: Community-focused improved cookstove distribution.

Website Link: <https://jomvu.co.ke>

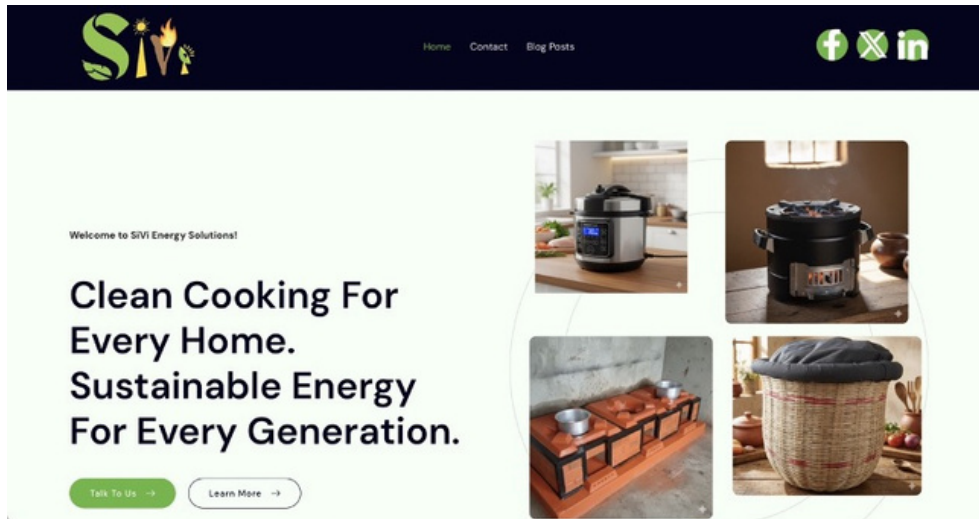


Screenshot of Jomvu's website

Caroline Ahenda | Cookstoves (Homabay)

The Business: Manufacturing and retailing of cookstoves and clean energy products.

Website Link: <https://sivi.co.ke>



Screenshot of Sivi's website

Felix Ochieng | Solar & Cookstoves (Kisii)

The Business: Retail and distribution of clean energy products.

Website Link: <https://rurigreentechnologies.co.ke>

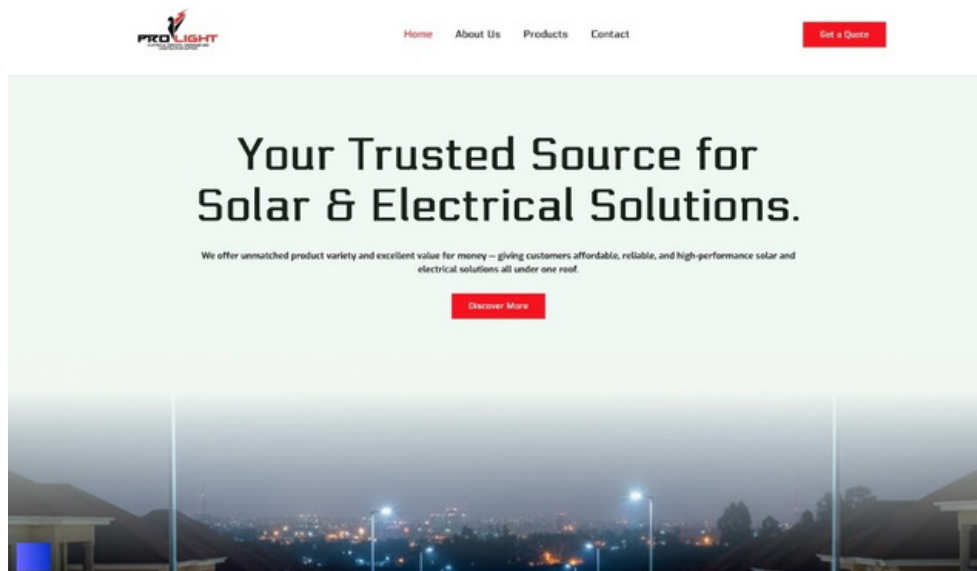


Screenshot of Ruri Green's website

Peter Wamunyori | Solar (Kiambu)

The Business: Manufacturing and distribution of efficient cookstoves.

Website Link: <https://prolight.co.ke>



Screenshot of ProLights's website

Debra Vihenda | Cookstoves (Homabay)

The Business: Manufacturing and retailing of cookstoves and clean energy products.

Website Link: <https://debaquesgreenenergy.co.ke>

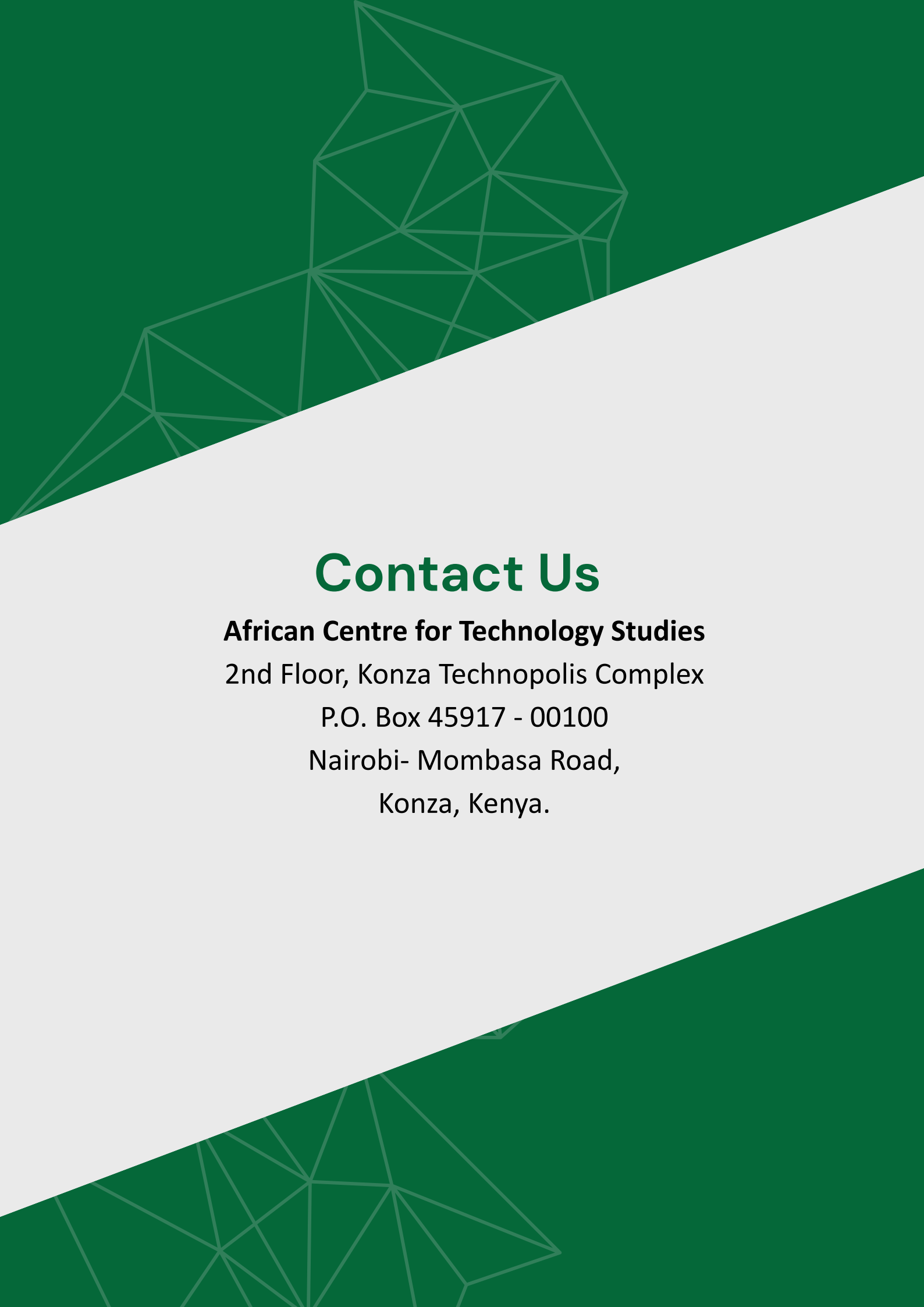


Screenshot of Debaques Green Energy's website

Conclusion

This exercise demonstrates that digital onboarding and capacity training is a repeatable and scalable model for economic unlocking. For the entrepreneurs, this initiative represented their first exposure to real-time digital performance tracking, and the professional infrastructure required to compete in a modern, digital-first economy. By transitioning these entrepreneurs from 0% to 100% digital presence, the project has removed the "visibility ceiling" that previously kept local innovation hidden from global opportunities. The result is a cohort of strengthened digital ecosystems where entrepreneurs now possess the practical skills and strategic insights necessary to engage partners confidently, document their environmental impact effectively, and grow sustainably.

The digital unlocking of these enterprises is only the beginning of a necessary shift toward profession-wide adoption of digital visibility tools, and to bridge the gap between local clean energy innovation and global climate goals, continued investment from donors and partners is required to scale this model across Sub-Saharan Africa and accelerate growth outcomes for youth and women-led pioneers. Policy makers and researchers are encouraged to use the evidence generated by the EVI-SICEE project to inform national incubation strategies, recognizing that a digital presence is a foundational requirement for SME bankability and long-term resilience. We invite the public and the media to explore these newly visible hubs of innovation to see how local Kenyan leadership is solving global energy challenges, as visibility remains the first essential step toward the partnerships that fuel sustainable development.



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