

## SUPPORTING CUSTOMER PRACTICES INFORMATION FOR OFF-GRID SOLAR COMPANIES

Lockdown and social distancing measures implemented in many countries to prevent the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) have an immense impact on local economies, energy customer behavior, and business operations of off-grid solar companies in sub-Saharan Africa. This information sheet summarizes ways in which off-grid solar companies can continue to support their customers during the pandemic.

The impact of COVID-19 on local economies in sub-Saharan Africa might compel off-grid solar customers to redirect their energy spending towards even more essential items such as food and water. Early data suggests that energy sales and repayments have already been affected in some countries. It is important to understand how customers are impacted and to consider how to best support and communicate with them to help mitigate the effects of the pandemic on livelihoods.

### OFFERING CUSTOMERS CONTINUED SERVICES

To ensure that households do not revert to using kerosene in homes during this respiratory virus pandemic, sustained access to clean energy is vital.

Off-grid solar companies can consider offering/implementing the following:

#### SPECIAL SERVICES:



- Free energy days/time to customers in good standing.
- Flexible repayment options to maximize customer retention.
- Promotions (e.g. pay for four weeks upfront and get two weeks free).
- Discounted terms for clients to pay off their debt.
- Emergency energy credit for customers with mitigating circumstances.
- Non-energy support such as cleaning products and food items.

#### SERVICES FOR PAY-AS-YOU-GO (PAYGO) CUSTOMERS



PAYGO provides customers with the option to gradually pay off their solar energy systems in installments. The COVID-19 crisis has already impacted PAYGO repayment rates in some countries and it is likely that many PAYGO customers will find it difficult to continue making payments without support. Instead of disabling or repossessing their solar energy systems and depriving them of electricity during the pandemic, off-grid solar companies should explore strategies, such as:

- Suspending repossessions and disconnections.
- Freezing interest and charges on late payments/defaults.
- Pausing repayments temporarily.
- Restructuring payment plans to extend repayment periods/lower minimum payment amounts.
- Assisting existing customers who can no longer afford their products by identifying smaller/more affordable options.
- Buying solar home systems that are not in use or exchanging them for solar lanterns.
- Offering incentives such as bonus credit or discounts.
- Continuously updating customers with regards to payment relief measures.

#### MARKET INTELLIGENCE:

Off-grid solar companies can consider:

- Collaborating with others in-country to form an industry level coordination group to share information and resources.
- Collecting data through phone surveys to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on customers and sales agents, ideally ensuring data is sex-disaggregated to gauge impact on men and women.



For more information, refer to:

60 Decibels: <https://www.60decibels.com>

### PROVIDING CUSTOMERS WITH CLEAR INFORMATION

- Clearly communicate with customers, providing them with information in advance on how products or services might be impacted.
- Share details relating to available customer support, services, hours of operation, and platforms for engagement.
- Consider providing customers with information on the company's measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and supporting distribution of official country-specific health guidelines.

