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Williams Ngupahua

## Solar Installation Technician

### A Trailblazer for the Solar Energy Sector

Solar energy systems are steadily gaining in popularity and today there are more sought after than ever. In fact, in the near future, solar technology might well be one of the primary forms of power for our day-to-day needs.

Meet Williams Ngupahua. A qualified electrician and budding entrepreneur trained at the Windhoek Vocational Training Centre, who has ventured into the field of solar energy installations and who has established his company, Speedy Solar, as a leading and credible service provider in this growing and exciting field. This is his story.

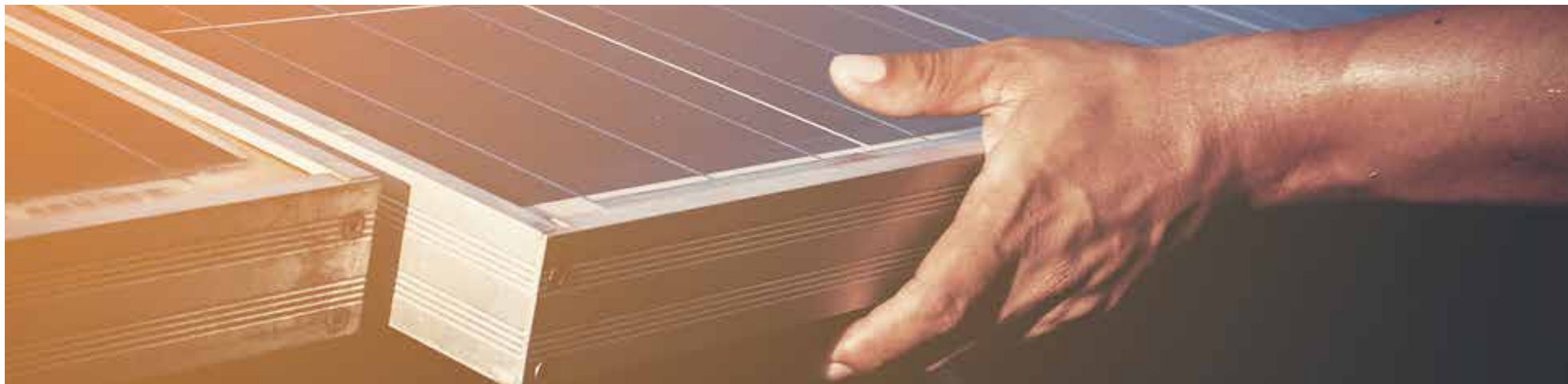
### Childhood Dreams

Williams hails from Otjiharuua in

the great Omaheke region where he completed his secondary school at the Mokgandeni Tlabanello High School.

From a very young age, Williams demonstrated a keen interest in all things technical - always eager to fix things in and around the home. "I always knew that I was more technically-inclined, because I really enjoyed doing things with my hands. While still at school, I started fixing stoves, radios and other electrical appliances. And I always knew that one day I was going to become an electrician", Williams shares.

So it came as no surprise to his family when Williams announced that he applied to qualify as an electrician at the Windhoek VTC. "While my friends and classmates were submitting applications to



the University of Namibia and the former Polytechnic of Namibia, I only applied to the Windhoek VTC. Mind you, my marks were good enough for enrollment at university or technikon, too. But, Windhoek VTC admitted me in 2001 and my dream came true", he notes.

### **Captivated by Solar Energy**

With fossil fuels, such as gas and oil expected to be depleted in the not too distant future, it is becoming more and more apparent that making full use of solar energy is now more imperative than ever. It was during his time as a trainee at the Windhoek VTC, that Williams was first introduced to the exciting world of solar energy. "I became completely captivated by how energy from the sun, which is so abundant and comes to us free every day, could be converted into electricity. What fascinated me more was that compared to non-renewable fossil fuel energy, solar energy is also considerably

less expensive to produce, much more environmentally-friendly", he explains.

While his peers were focused on entering the field as ordinary electricians, Williams saw an opportunity to enter what was then still considered a relatively new and untapped market. "The local solar sector was still very much in its infancy stages then. And I knew that I would encounter challenges in attracting clients, should I decide to venture into this field. But, I had a vision and I realised that I simply had to make work of it. That if I worked hard, the clients would come", Williams says.

### **Young Entrepreneur**

After registering his company, Williams started small by selling and installing affordable and compact solar systems to rural households, during a time when people did not know a lot about these systems and their benefits. "In many rural

areas, there's no electricity. When my rural clients saw that one panel can power a radio and a few light bulbs, they started buying into solar energy. You will find that a single installation at one village resulted in orders from five or six households in the same vicinity. A starter kit amounted to about 400 dollars then. People came back and wanted bigger systems and the demand grew", he explains.

Today, Williams as an early entrant to the solar installation market, continues to lead the way in advocating for solar energy as a renewable energy source, especially in rural communities. He is now reaping the rewards of what seemed a risky decision at the time to enter this market. Today, his company, Speedy Solar is a reputable service provider in a sector that continues to grow. "Solar energy is much more affordable today. People now understand the benefits of renewable energy, for example

how solar geysers, which can last between ten to fifteen years, can save you thousands of dollars over the same period. It's a no-brainer, really", he shares.

### **Diversified Business**

Speedy Solar has also ventured into the area of rural water supply. Not only does the company install solar systems to replace generators and windmills, it also sinks boreholes in rural areas to improve the access of communities to potable water. According to Williams, this is one arm of the business that continues to grow from strength to strength.

"It's really all about giving people what they need. Consider that access to water remains a key developmental challenge, especially in rural Namibia, where perhaps there is sufficient underground water, but not enough boreholes from which to extract water. Also consider that windmills and generators are unreliable

and expensive to maintain, and it became clear to us that we need to diversify into drilling boreholes on which we can then install solar pump systems”, he explains. “We have been very busy in the Omakange area where we have sank several boreholes and installations. It’s so rewarding to see how the work we do changes the lives of people. We are making a difference”, a proud Williams says.

## Solar Champion

Williams is a passionate trailblazer for the solar installations sector. As a small and medium enterprise, Speedy Solar has invested considerably in the training of young Namibians empowering them with the technical skills to enter the sector.

For Williams, it is not about training people that may compete with his business, at all. Rather, it is about creating opportunities for other young men and women. I have trained about twenty people in this field. Our in-service training not only focuses on the technical competencies, we also make it a point to share the basics of entrepreneurship and business management with such candidates. It’s not about training a potential competitor at all. Rather, it’s about empowering others to become independent”, he explains. “In fact, if you ask me what my biggest achievement is, I will say, not the financial success and business growth, but that we are able to train others”, he adds.

However, Williams laments the lack of financial support available to other upcoming solar installation technicians, who want to establish their own businesses. “It’s tough out there. I know of many graduate contractors who have landed sizable purchase orders, but still the commercial banks seem reluctant to extend collateral to get them off the ground”, he notes.

## Bright Future

Today, Speedy Solar is an accredited by the Ministry of Mines and Energy as a reputable technician, supplier and installer of solar energy systems, for installations financed under the Ministry’s Solar Revolving Fund. “Our Government is doing well,

through the fund, to broaden access to solar energy systems. And yes, while being an accredited service provider for the Ministry helps in sustaining the business, competition is tough. There are many other accredited companies. For us therefore, customer satisfaction is what separates us from the rest. We always need to do our best, no matter how small the installation”, Williams says.

Although Speedy Solar continues to grow in leaps and bounds, Williams recognizes the support of his mentor and benefactor, Bennie Amuenje, who backed him financially and who encouraged him to persist during the difficult times. “I could not have done this without the support of Uncle Bennie, who

remains my business mentor. My advice to other entrepreneurs therefore is to find seasoned and experienced people who can lend a helping hand and offer you good advice when times are tough. Believe me, things can go ugly and you may lose hope. But, a good mentor can get you back on track and motivate you to persevere”, he concludes.

Williams Ngupahua. Solar Installation Technician, Teacher, Entrepreneur, Pioneer, Visionary. His story teaches us that where there’s a will, there’s a way. That our dreams are within our reach, if we believe in ourselves, and work hard towards achieving our objectives. That success starts with self-belief in who we are and what unique contribution we can make to the world. His passion for renewable energy has made him a torchbearer for this sector. He is living his passion.

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