Energy Enterprise Coach

Helping renewable energy SMEs scale

GUIDING DOCUMENT FOR SMEs IN RENEWABLE ENERGY: TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

This guide is made for small and medium sized businesses like yours working in renewable energy. It's a simple, self-use toolkit designed to give you a clear path to grow your business and keep it running well over time. Here, you will find easy-to-follow steps to help you manage business challenges and plan for the future. The recommendations are flexible for you to adjust them to fit your business. The guide is split into three parts:

- Financial Sustainability
- Business Development and Growth
- Digital Tools and Marketing

Each section starts with a checklist of important items that are recommended essentials for a growing company to have in order to stay on track towards achieving your growth objectives. Following each checklist, you'll find a short list of key activities, along with suggestions on how often to do them. These are designed to help you build a stronger, more stable business. We have also included a simple tracker to help you monitor your progress and make improvements along the way. Some useful resources are also available in the annex to help you develop your knowledge, business strategy, and financing strategy.

This guide gives you a useful structure to follow, but it is not one-size-fits-all. Your results may depend on your team size, available funds, market conditions, or local systems. Use what fits your situation, and feel free to change things based on what works best for your business. Think of this as a starting point to help you stay focused and make steady progress no matter where you are in your business's stage of development.

Section 1: Financial Sustainability

This section helps you check how financially healthy your business is and how to keep it that way. By doing these activities regularly, you'll stay on top of your finances and make better decisions to keep your business stable.

Essentials for Financial Sustainability

Business Financial Statements (Profit & loss, balance sheet, cash flow statement)
Tax Records & Compliance Documents (Tax ID, VAT registration, annual tax returns)
Bank Statements & Loan Agreements (for tracking cash flow and liabilities)
Invoices & Receipts (for sales, purchases, and operational expenses)
Grant & Investment Agreements (if receiving donor funds or equity investment)

1.1. Revenue Review Trends

Quarterly action

- Review your revenue and income every quarter. Which products or services bring in the most money? Which ones are not doing well? Think about what you can do to improve.

- Identify which products or services are the top earners.
- If needed, change your prices or payment options based on how your customers are buying.
- Explore alternative ways to generate revenue so your business is safer from sudden changes or risks.

1.2. Conduct Internal Financial Review

Quarterly action

- Keep an eye on key money matters to make sure your business stays stable.
  - Cash Flow: Track the money coming in and going out.
  - Cash Flow Forecasting: Try to predict future cash needs to avoid cash shocks.
  - Profit Margin: Track how much profit you're making from your main business activities.
  - Current Ratio: Track if you have enough money or assets to pay upcoming bills.
  - Customer Payments: Track how quickly customers are paying you.
  - Debt vs. Own Money: Understand how much of your business is funded by loans vs. your own investment.
  - Burn Rate: If you're a growing business, keep track of how fast you're spending your money.
- Help your team build financial skills – basic training in budgeting and accounting can go a long way. Revisit the EEC e-learning platform courses to revise your basic skills.
- Review your costs and cut down on things that aren't necessary.

1.3. Strengthen Customer Payment Systems

Ongoing action

- Use digital payment options like mobile money to make it easier for customers to pay you.
- Set up automatic reminders (like SMS or WhatsApp) to help customers pay on time.
- Offer flexible payment plans – like pay-as-you-go – so more customers can afford your product or service.

1.4. Assess Funding Opportunities

Quarterly action

- Look for grants or subsidies that support renewable energy businesses – these can help lower your costs.
- Build connections with investors and lenders who support green or social-impact businesses.
- Explore funding options that mix (blend) grants, loans, or investor money to make financing more affordable.

Note: See the Quick Reference Resource Guide at the end of this document for links to relevant sources of funding and Technical Assistance (TA) opportunities.

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Section 2: Business Development and Strategic Growth

This section covers key steps to help your business grow and become more stable over time. These activities are designed to boost your income and take advantage of market opportunities as you scale.

Essentials for Business Development and Strategic Growth

Business Plan and growth strategy
Market research and competitive analysis
Sales and marketing plan
Suppliers and distributor list
Staff development and capacity building plan
Operational efficiency plan

2.1. Review your Business Plan

Half-yearly action

- Use feedback from customers, employees and market trends to review and improve your business, sales, and marketing plans.
- Regularly check and update your short-, medium- and long-term goals and track the progress.
- Change your operations as needed to keep up with changing customer needs and market conditions.

2.2. Review Strategic Direction

Annual action

- Look at your market and business plan. Think about new geographic regions where energy demand is growing and there is regulatory support for your business.
- Track your current products or services against market demand. Do you need to improve them or add something new?
- Find and connect with partners – like distributors or cooperatives – that can help you reach more customers.
- Ensure your business goals combine long-term commercial success with positive community impacts.

2.3. Stay Updated on Sector Developments

Ongoing action

- Keep learning about your market – what customers want, new trends and useful technologies.
- Take part in renewable energy events and local networking sessions to connect with others in your sector.
- Join trade groups or industry associations to stay informed about policy changes, incentives and emerging business opportunities.

Section 3: Leveraging Digital Tools and Marketing

Digital tools and digital marketing are important for growing your business and showing what you offer. These tools are often underutilised because of capital and time constraints. This section gives you a simple plan to help you use these tools to grow your business.

Essentials for Digital Transformation

Strong Online Presence & Digital Marketing – Facebook, LinkedIn, X, Instagram
Customer Relationship Management System
Digital Marketing Personnel
Digital marketing plan – content creation and management

3.1. Enable Digital Transformation

Annual action

- Use digital tools to help with daily tasks like accounting and sales, for example QuickBooks or Xero.
- Use tools like customer management software to stay in touch with your clients and partners.

3.2. Use Online Marketing Tools to engage with customers

Ongoing action

- Set up and maintain a good online presence using social media and a simple, professional website.
- Share stories or testimonials from happy customers and real examples (case studies) of your work to build trust.
- Create a clear and consistent way to communicate and market to your customers and ask for customer feedback and use it to improve your products or services.

Section 4: Monitoring and Continuous Improvement Tracker

This tracker helps you keep track of key activities across different parts of your business. Depending on the size of your team, either the whole team or department leads should meet – led by the CEO or founder – at regular intervals to review progress, update the tracker and plan next steps. This helps everyone stay on the same page, builds accountability and gives a clear picture of the progress. An excel version of this tracker is made available at the bottom of this page.

TABLE 4-1: MONITORING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT TABLE

Thematic Area	Task	Responsibility	Notes
ONGOING ACTION			
Financial sustainability	Strengthen customer payment systems (mobile money, PAYG, automated reminders)	Finance Team	*Guidance:* *Include date of action/review* *Include key details of any action taken*
Business development and strategic growth	Stay updated on the sector	Business Development & Partnerships Team	
	Attend renewable energy forums & sector networking events	Business Development Team	
Leveraging digital tools and marketing	Maintain social media & website presence (Facebook, LinkedIn, X, Instagram)	Marketing team	
	Develop & execute digital marketing campaigns	Marketing team	
	Track customer engagement & feedback	Customer Support Team	
	Monitor digital payment & customer financing systems	IT & Finance Team	
QUARTERLY ACTION			

Financial sustainability	Review revenue trends and income sources	Finance Team	
	Assess funding opportunities (grants, investors, subsidies)	Business Development Team	
	Conduct internal financial review (cash flow, expenditures, budgeting)	Finance Team	
HALF-YEARLY ACTION			
Business development and strategic growth	Review of business plan & growth strategy	CEO/Strategic Lead	
	Update sales & marketing plan	Sales & Marketing Team	
ANNUAL ACTION			
Business development and strategic growth	Review strategic direction	CEO/Strategic Lead	
Leveraging digital tools and marketing	Implement & update CRM system	IT & Sales Team	

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Quick Reference Resource Guide

We have put together a helpful list of free global tools and resources that you can use to grow your business and handle the challenges of working in the renewable energy sector.

TABLE 5-1: QUICK REFERENCE RESOURCE GUIDE TABLE

Resource Name	Link	Description
Energy Enterprise Coach	https://eec-elearning.com/home	EEC platform is an e-learning resource offering courses on business management, financial management and other crucial aspects of business development
Market intelligence support		
Clean Energy Solutions Center	https://www.cleanenergysol.com/	Offers tools, reports and policy support tailored to developing countries
Power for All	https://www.powerforall.org	Research and insights on energy access and distributed renewables
REN21 Global Status Reports	https://www.ren21.net/reports/global-status-report/	Annual global reports on renewable energy trends
BloombergNEF Clean Energy Investment Trends	https://about.bnef.com/clean-energy-investment/	Analysis of global investment flows and technologies in clean energy
Business development support		
SEFA (AfDB)	https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/initiatives-partnerships/sustainable-energy-fund-for-africa	Concessional finance and technical assistance for SMEs in clean energy

GET.invest Finance Catalyst	https://www.get-invest.eu/finance-catalyst	Business advisory support, financial structuring, and investment matchmaking
Shell Foundation	https://shellfoundation.org/	Catalytic funding and enterprise development support
Impact Hub	https://impacthub.net/	Business development support for impact sector businesses including training, networking, and capacity development
CTI PFAN	https://pfan.net/	Business coaching and investor matchmaking for clean energy entrepreneurs
Financial management tools		
Wave Accounting	https://www.waveapps.com/	Free accounting software for small businesses
SME Finance Toolkit – IFC	https://www.smefinanceforum.org/	Financial tools and strategy guides for SMEs
BFA Global – Catalyst Fund	https://bfaglobal.com/catalyst-fund/	Financial tools and insights for inclusive tech startups
Access to finance		
Sun Connect Finance Opportunities	https://sun-connect.org/opportunities/	Opportunities for grant funding for renewable energy projects
Get.invest Funding Database	https://www.get-invest.eu/funding-database/	Funding database for SMEs

Grant Opportunities	https://opportunitydesk.org/2025/02/22/20-grant-opportunities-for-nonprofits-entrepreneurs-and-professionals-currently-open-february-23-2025/	Grant opportunities for small businesses
Funding Opportunities for SMEs and NGOs	https://www2.fundsforngos.org/listing/a-list-of-newly-launched-opportunities-in-2024-for-kenya/	List of grant funding opportunities by various institutions for SMEs
Policy and regulatory information		
IRENA	https://www.irena.org	Global energy policy, data, and transition frameworks
RISE (World Bank)	https://rise.worldbank.org/	Regulatory index for sustainable energy
GOGLA	https://www.gogla.org/	Industry reports and networking for off-grid solar sector
Associations, network and capacity building		
Energy 4 Impact (Mercy Corps)	https://www.energy4impact.org/	Mentorship and enterprise support for energy SMEs
International Solar Alliance	https://isa.int/	Inter-governmental association for developing solar energy sector
Clean Cooking Alliance	https://cleancooking.org/	Enterprise development and funding for clean cooking solutions
EnAccess Foundation	https://enaccess.org/	Open-source tools for energy innovators

Spark Energy Hub	https://sparkenergyhub.com/	Technical training for solar professionals
Additional Resources for SAHEL region		
PNUD – Transition énergétique au Sahel	https://www.undp.org/fr/au-sahel-une-transition-vers-l-energie-renouvelable	UN-led initiative aiming to provide clean energy access to over 150 million people in the Sahel by 2025. *Initiative du PNUD visant à fournir un accès à l'énergie propre à plus de 150 millions de personnes dans le Sahel d'ici 2025.*
Alliance Sahel	https://www.alliance-sahel.org/actualites/energies-renouvelables-lenorme-potentiel-du-sahel/	Development partnership platform supporting renewable energy, infrastructure and social cohesion in the Sahel. *Plateforme de coordination des bailleurs soutenant l'investissement dans les énergies renouvelables et les infrastructures dans la région du Sahel.*
SEFA – Fonds pour l'Énergie Durable en Afrique (AfDB)	https://sefaafrica.org/	Technical assistance and concessional finance for renewable energy SMEs and projects. *Financement concessionnel et assistance technique pour les PME de l'énergie renouvelable par la Banque africaine de développement.*

ReSaD – Appels à projets Énergies Renouvelables	https://www.resad-sahel.org/Actualites/Appel-a-projets-energies-renouvelables	Offers funding for community-driven and renewable energy projects in the Sahel. *Opportunités de financement pour les projets d'énergie renouvelable portés par les communautés locales dans le Sahel.*
Initiative de Formation Solaire – AfDB	https://www.agenceecofin.com/formation/2705-98075-sahel-une-collaboration-tripartite-pour-former-les-professionnels-de-l-energie-solaire	Technical training for solar energy professionals across five Sahelian countries. *Initiative de formation technique destinée aux professionnels de l'énergie solaire dans cinq pays du Sahel.*
AIE – Transitions énergétiques au Sahel	https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/e28d2889-6a72-4e6a-875d-0fa95d2236dc/TransitionsenergetiquesauSahel.pdf	In-depth strategic report from the International Energy Agency on the energy transition landscape in the Sahel. *Rapport stratégique de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie sur les perspectives de transition énergétique dans la région du Sahel.*

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