

## Water Can Be Child's Play

Renewable energy can reduce poverty by improving access to energy services in rural areas and creating opportunities for economic development. In 2005-6, Skillshare International worked with the Renewable Energy Association Swaziland (REASWA), to promote the cost-effective and socially responsible use of renewable energy in Swaziland.

The use of renewable energy brings benefits for the whole community, but can have the greatest impact on the lives of the most vulnerable members. For example, through improved, cleaner and more efficient energy sources, the burden on rural women can be reduced in terms of fire wood collection and the purchase and use of paraffin. The majority of rural primary schools in Swaziland do not have adequate access to safe drinking water and can not afford to install and run costly fuel pumps. Many schools rely on rainwater collection or pay for tankers to deliver water, leaving no extra water to cultivate gardens or vegetable patches, which are a valuable way to boost children's nutrition and can even generate an income. This problem has been exacerbated by droughts in recent years.

In August 2004, Skillshare International placed development worker Amy Francis at REASWA. Amy, who had five years' experience of working in the UK sustainable energy sector, worked with her colleague Khetsiwe Khumalo to help build the organisation's capacity in renewable energy techniques, awareness raising, resource mobilisation and research. Together, they sourced sites for 'play pumps' that provide water to schools. As children play, water is pumped from the borehole into a 2,500 litre tank. The tank's sides can be sold as advertising space to pay for the system's maintenance, and the remaining billboard space is used for educational HIV and AIDS messages by UNICEF.

*Amy and Khetsiwe, © Skillshare/Sally Marshall*



REASWA managed to obtain funding to install some of the first play pumps in Swaziland, and following on from the success of this project received a direct request from the installation company, Roundabout Outdoor, to find further suitable sites for a larger programme of installations. In close collaboration with the Swaziland government and other NGOs, Amy and Khetsiwe visited primary schools and identified new sites for the pumps, which needed to have an existing borehole with sufficient water reserves. Amy, who raised funds for five play pumps and identified 14 new sites, described her greatest achievement during her placement as "accessing funds to keep the organisation going and helping to make it more stable."



© Skillshare/Amy Francis

Because they have access to water, many of the schools have now set up vegetable gardens. They also have access to play equipment, something not seen before in the schoolyards of Swaziland's primary schools. When asked if there was a problem getting the children to play on the roundabout in order to pump water, Amy replied, "there is not a problem at all; in fact the only trouble is getting them to stop playing." Seth Maphalala, Chair of REASWA, commended Amy for her achievements: "Amy has achieved significantly with very limited resources and most of her focus is at grassroots level. She is a hard worker and has a lot to contribute in the area of renewable energy."