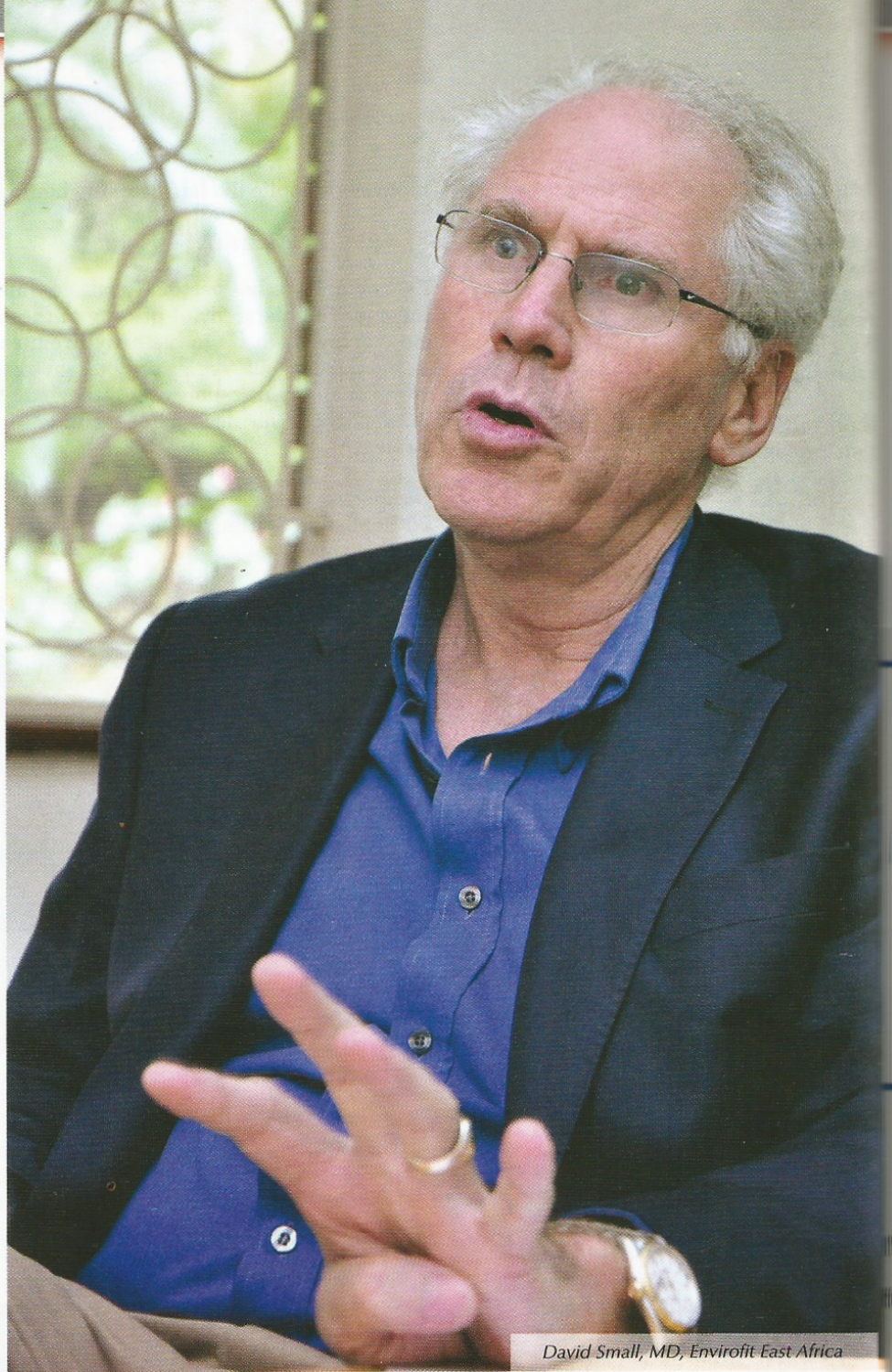


Efficient cooking Solution

Majority of Kenyans depend on firewood and charcoal for their cooking needs. Envirofit International is offering them efficient Jikos and the benefits are immense.

BY FRED NDUNG'U

Kenya and most countries in sub-Saharan Africa are grappling with a calamity of deforestation due to widespread cutting of trees for firewood and charcoal. In most of these countries, abject poverty has forced citizens to depend on wood fuel and charcoal for their cooking needs. The results have been devastating due to catastrophic effects of deforestation including flooding and drought. Worse still, use of firewood and charcoal has



David Small, MD, Envirofit East Africa



Envirofit charcoal Jiko

resulted in major health problems.

One firm, however, is trying to arrest the problem of cutting trees by providing communities with an alternative solution for cooking that is safe, environment-friendly and cost effective. Envirofit International is a global firm that develops well engineered technology solutions that improve human conditions all over the world. The company designs and sells high quality, affordable consumer driven products that especially meet the needs of people in the developing world. Among its products are cookstoves (Jikos) which are helping local communities and creating large-scale sustainable impacts.

Envirofit International is a social enterprise firm focusing on designing, manufacturing, and selling clean Jikos that help save on firewood and charcoal. "In East Africa, our desire is to help citizens make better and more efficient use of their cooking and warming

fuels," says David Small, the Managing Director, Envirofit East Africa. He adds the firm's focus is providing people with solutions that help them save fuels, such as firewood and charcoal and also save money. The ultimate goal is to enable people save money and lead healthier more productive lives.

With its headquarters and laboratory in the US, Envirofit products are available in India, Africa, Europe and South America among other markets. The firm is guided by the motto 'performance matters' and a vision to contribute to a world where everyone can enjoy durable, affordable, inspirational and well-engineered technology products that are affordable, health and environment-friendly.

Today, the company is among the leaders in the cookstove industry with multiple models that have sold over one million items in more than 45 countries. It manufactures its products in China, Eastern and Western Africa and Latin America and has an extensive distribution network.

Envirofit started operating in Kenya as the hub for Eastern Africa in 2009 and opened a manufacturing plant in 2011. Already the firm has consolidated operations in Kenya and intends to expand into other countries gradually. Plans are in the pipeline to venture into Ethiopia, South Sudan, Zambia and Mozambique next year. In East Africa market, Envirofit provides a range of five products namely two charcoal stoves (econo and premium), two wood (firewood) (econo and premium) stoves, and an institutional stove whose pot size is 100 litres and which is meant to feed about 200 people.

In many parts of the developing world, demand and sale of Envirofit's products are driven by the prevalent use of fossil fuels especially firewood and charcoal as contrasted to use of liquid petroleum gas and electricity in the developed countries. The company is aggressive in research to improve its current products and solutions for more enhanced efficiency. Envirofit stoves save 50 per cent to 80 per cent of fuel cost depending on different factors including design and cost. "Our R&D and quality analysis teams earnestly collaborate to expand our range of products, improve their efficiency as well as lower costs," David avers.

With the quality of its products maintained by its supply chain personnel in Colorado through regular audits, the ISO certified company locally partners with the Kenya Bureau of Standards for certification and verification of its

products. Its plant in Kenya is labour-intensive to create more employment for local people and less capital-intensive.

According to David, high quality standards and the need to withstand high temperatures in the stoves force the plant in Nairobi to import high quality steel. This ensures two and five years warranty for the household and institutional stoves respectively. Production in different markets is influenced by the different cooking habits and cultures. In the Honduras (South America) for instance, people cook on flat tops as contrasted to other markets where cooking pots have round bottoms calling for stoves to accommodate the pots. In Africa, the production caters and support both round and flat bottom pots.

The firm has partnered with institutions like the Kenya Union of Savings and Credit Organizations which facilitates Kenyans to acquire the stoves through their savings and credit cooperative organizations loans, Equity Bank which also provides customers' loans, Kaluworks which provides pots for the institutional stoves and members of Association for Cooking Stoves of Kenya (CCAK) and ARTI Energy of Tanzania. Makini School in Nairobi and another ranch school in Machakos are also partners having bought the institutional stoves. Envirofit is exploring more partnerships even with the government and its agencies to further penetrate the market.

In Kenya, competition is stiff given



Envirofit wood (firewood) Jiko

Despite enormous potentials in the Kenyan market, Envirofit has to contend with challenges. These include high import duties for raw materials, high transport costs and high costs energy supply leading to power outages and recourse to use of generators.

Another challenge is that its target customers are people at the bottom of the pyramid who are unable to afford the collateral for loans as demanded by the microfinance and lending institutions. "Most of our customers earn low, irregular incomes or are totally unemployed meaning they are often unable to buy the stoves in one instant. Therefore, they often depend on loans which they can gradually off-set, meaning that credit facilities are critical for them," explains David. He urges microfinance and lending institutions to lessen the currently too stringent requirements.

the many traditional Jiko sellers. The problem, is that majority of Kenyans still opt for *Juakali* stoves even though they are immensely energy-inefficient, environment unfriendly and not long lasting. "People do not realize how harmful the household smoke from cooking and warming fires is. Inhaling smoke from an open fire when cooking a single meal is equivalent to smoking two packets of cigarettes," explains David.

David joined Envirofit in January 2015 having worked in different markets in Africa, Middle East and Russia with fast moving consumer goods giant Colgate Palmolive and Solar Energy entity retailing the Delight Solar. He is inspired by a passion to help the poor in accessing the best quality products and solutions that help improve their livelihoods.