



Organic Waste to Energy (OWE)

- ENTREPRENEUR:** Rosley Sibanda
- ESTABLISHED:** 2019
- TEAM:** 2-10 employees
- LOCATION:** Western Cape, South Africa
- CONTACT:** rosley@weoweourplanet.africa

www.weoweourplanet.africa



Organic Waste to Energy (OWE) provides sustainable waste management services with the added benefit of independent energy. It seeks to make use of the 22 million tons of food waste that end up in landfills each year and convert it to biogas. The company aims to build a circular economy business model that converts organic (food) waste into “clean and affordable energy”, thereby promoting positive societal behavioural change with regards to how we view and dispose of food waste.

“We owe it to our planet to become better stewards. Change is possible. We always must strive to be a better version of ourselves.”

Words and photography by Chris de Beer-Procter



ABOUT THE BUSINESS

Rosley Sibanda's life changed the day she asked herself, "what can we do about food waste?" Having lost her last corporate role due to redundancy and inspired by her studies towards a master's in leadership and sustainability, she was on the hunt for new ideas to implement the values of circularity.

"It started out of mere interest about my personal carbon footprint and wanting to know what I could do to save the planet in my own capacity," she reflects. After some research, Rosley found that there was a gap in the market. A meeting with the Western Cape Government revealed that there was a need for companies to assist with separating organic waste at a household and corporate level, "that's basically where OWE started," she says.

But Rosley was not about to send that waste to our rapidly expanding and environmentally harmful landfills. She had a far more circular purpose in mind. Using waste-to-energy technologies, like a biodigester, OWE could extract methane gas from fermenting organic waste, which can then be transformed into

biofuel or electricity. Additionally, left over slurry can be used as rich soil nutrients, which can replace chemical fertilizers.

“Our waste is no longer out of sight, out of mind, it's in our faces. Circularity can put a spanner in the works and stop this current trajectory because it is not sustainable.”

"It's a process that leaves nothing to waste," says Rosley, who believes biogas outwits other renewable sources of energy. "This is a good business model that promotes the circular economy," she adds, using food waste to produce energy as well as its by-product, digestate, that can be used to organically restore the nutrient content of our soils.

In terms of scaling up, we have a long way to go if society is to gain all the benefits of food waste in the future.

"Separating food waste at source does require a lot more effort," says Rosley. "We will need to dramatically change behaviours, encourage a culture of food waste separation throughout the food value chain. Everything affects everything else, and it is key to build a good foundation of incoming quality food waste to feed into our biogas plants and eventually into the national grid," she explains.

"Everything we produce is wasteful, it may be helping development, but it's a double-edged sword," reflects Rosley. But with "circularity we extend the life cycle of products as much as possible. It's all about preserving the future for generations to come," she adds. That

legacy is paramount to Rosley. And core to that is a commitment to conscientizing society about taking care of our planet. "In being conscious stewards, we become thankful and don't take anything for granted," she says.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

"We see ourselves eventually feeding into the national grid, although that's not the ultimate. The ultimate is seeing a change in behaviour when it comes to the disposing of food waste. Then, the success would be seeing all those different energy forms emerging - where mobility is being fuelled by biogas, electricity is being fed into different onsite and offsite solutions, and where we sell a rich nutrient compost to farmers to help maintain their water levels in our soils."



ADVICE ON CIRCULARITY FOR ENTREPRENEURS

“It's vital to constantly research and be abreast of what's happening.”

Join relevant associations or organisations because it's important to find like-minded people to strengthen and broaden collaboration amongst diverse stakeholders.