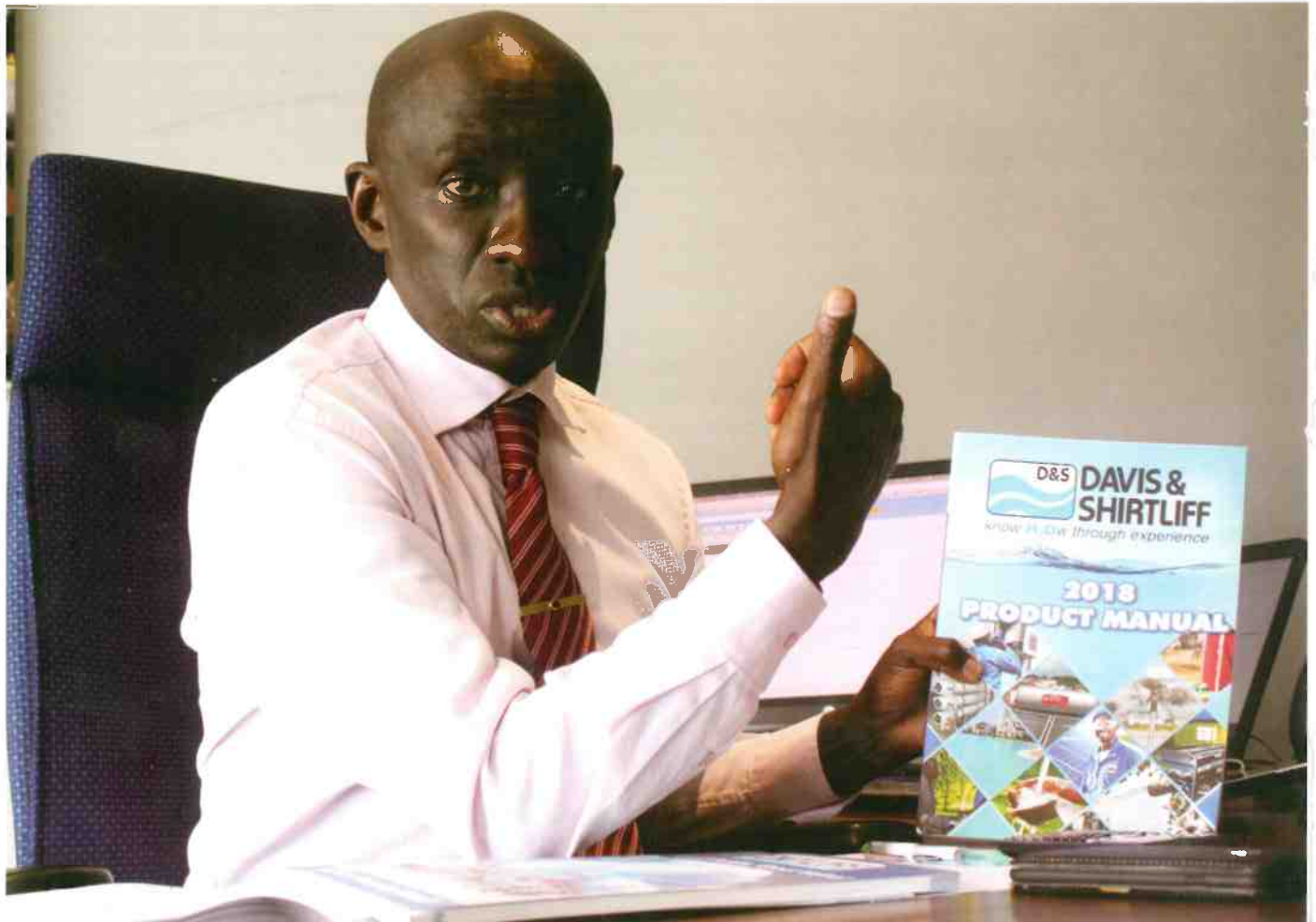


Mandatory Solar Water Heating is A Noble Idea; An Interview with David Gatende, C.E.O Davis & Shirliff.



David Gatende, C.E.O Davis & Shirliff during the Interview

Briefly introduce yourself to our readers.

I was born and raised in Nairobi. I went to Kilimani Primary School where I was the head boy and then to Lenana School before going to McGeal University and that is where I got my first professional qualification as an agricultural engineer back in 1984. Two years later, I joined Davis and Shirliff as a field engineer. What is interesting is that over the years, I have been adding to my education; I have a Masters degree Business Administration focusing on strategic management from USIU-A and then lastly got another Masters degree in Counseling and Psychology. So looking at my professional background, you can see that I have a strict

science, management and psychology, which are three completely different things.

What has been your experience like at the helm of Davis and Shirliff so far?

It's an interesting question because I have been involved in senior management since 1990, which is a very long time. When I joined as a field engineer, I did some work in operations and then became the sales manager in 1990. I then became a Sales Director in 1995 and in 2001, I became the Managing Director. Few years later, I became the deputy Chief Executive before taking over as the Chief Executive last year. So it's been long being involved in the leadership of the



A view of the showroom at the Head Office located in Industrial Area.

organization but at the helm, I've only been for the last eighteen months and I feel very supported. The executive team that I work with is a very dedicated group of people, very mature, very experienced and professional. I am supported by the staff at large and I have to say the board and the Chairman as well. So it has been an evolution and there has not been any disruption in the way the company is led.

Could you briefly discuss both the social and economic or business objectives of Davis and Shirliff.

Our vision is to have a world-class organization; that is what we are about.

Whichever areas we are involved in, we want to offer a professional service that is a very good example of the highest international standards. We do this working predominantly with local indigenous Africans in different countries. We are now in eight countries and have over 50 branches. So what we do in that process is focusing on seven segments. Water pumps is the main one and we are very well known for that. Borehole service is another one we have been doing; we don't drill boreholes but supply borehole equipment, which we have been doing for very many years and also swimming pools and their equipment. What is not very well known is the water treatment and we supply all kinds of treating water, including waste water. We

also supply generators mainly for backup power and to work with pumps as well. We supply solar equipment for solar heating, solar lighting, solar pumping and backup power. This year, we launched the seventh segment which is irrigation. It entails irrigation equipment for using drip and sprinklers.

Would you identify irrigation as a major milestone for you? If not, what are the major milestones in your short stint as CEO thus far?

That's an interesting one. We have a number of milestones I have to say. We have just made some expansion plans for the company. We have made an investment into Tatu City so

that is also interesting and significant. We have introduced a new segment, irrigation which is one of the milestones. We have some new franchises; some German franchises like SMA inverters, shelter structures from Germany and solar world modules. We have a new app that we are using on our phones. It's called the DNS Go App which we are going to launch to the public next year. So you will be able to get some basic information about pumps on your phone. We have also opened a number of new branches; we have opened in Doodoma, Tanzania, we have opened in Eastleigh, we have opened in Bungoma and in Mtwapa. We are using some syncrotim. It is a software where our technicians don't have to ask the customers to sign the worksheet anymore when they visit the sites. What they do is send all the information on the computer and then use that to communicate to the customers.

You mentioned the DnS Go App...What objectives do you intend to achieve with it?

David Gatende: The app has got a lot of information. It also acknowledges the making of technological advances. We have a price list in there and can also do quotations to our sales engineers and send them through whatsapp. We are however going to produce a version for the public which can be used to give all basic information about swimming pools, solar pumps and so on.

Could you kindly tell us what key changes you have observed in the water sector over the years, and how they have affected Davis and Shirtliff.

I first have to say that the Kenyan water sector is a very progressive one because we first had the 2002 Water Act and then we have had another one in 2016 that was signed into law last year. We also have bodies like WASREB and the water basins. We have a

regulatory authority who issues licensing for drilling boreholes or abstracting water from the water source. This has also been decentralized, meaning it is no longer being controlled from Maji house; it can be done from the counties. I would say that over the years that I have been involved, I have seen opportunities increase for Kenyan citizens to get better service due to the decentralization. When you have 47 counties and each of them has a water minister, that is just phenomenal.

Tell us about Dayliff

For many years, Davis and Shirtliff has been known to supply quality equipment but is said to be expensive. If you ask any ordinary person about the company, he will most likely be familiar with it but also speak on the issue of being expensive. So that is how Dayliff came up. What we did is we went to the Far East that is China, Taiwan, India and other places, where we found outrages products which are as good but affordable. So Dayliff makes that same range of quality products affordable.

What about iDayliff?

iDayliff is another important one. As I said, we are continuing with mobile technology so iDayliff allows remote monitoring of a pump in a borehole, which is sometimes 300 meters down the ground so you cannot tell what is going on there. But now if there is a power issue, we get a message telling us that the power is not working and we can call the customer and tell him to contact the Kenya Power and Lighting Company to fix the power disconnection. In solar pumps, we can also switch them on and off using iDayliff.

How would you describe the role of engineers at Davis and Shirtliff?

David Gatende: The products that we sell are technical and you need to understand, because if I showed some of the things to

an ordinary person, he might not know. So I think we are one of the highest employers of engineers from all universities, not just in Kenya but from the whole region. We use the engineers to sell technical products where the customers can get solutions that work. So the role of engineers is to give the comfort and understanding of our products because they are problem solvers

What is your experience with quality of engineers from our universities?

David Gatende: I have no complains. We only take the best; that is those with upper second and first class honors, and they are very many. They do a very good job so I cannot complain.

Do you provide opportunities for them to advance their studies?

Yes we do. We have an education programme where people can take a loan from the company and then if they complete the studies and get a certificate, we give them a refund of 50% of the cost upto Kshs. 100,000. We also pay the interests of their loans, thus cost sharing the loan. If there are also professional fees for our accountants, engineers and sales people, we pay it for them.

What are your ideas on how we can increase technical output in engineering firms?

David Gatende: I think what normally happens is you have professionals in leading companies like ours pushing everything towards the phone. If one company starts doing it, then the others will also be pushed to deliver on the apps. So when a leader does it, the rest of the industry is pulled towards the same that direction. So it's all down to technology.

I have read this morning about the ISO



Davis & Shirtliff Technician inspecting a Dayliff Reverse Osmosis Plant.

90001 2015 that you were certified this year...

We first did ISO certification in 2004, then upgraded it to ISO 9001 in 2008. Recently, we got the 2015 one and it is important because what it does is assuring customers that the experience they will enjoy is standard and of the same high level, thus removing the variances. It also blends in with our values; which are integrity, quality and Continuous improvement.

What will be your output in 2018....I mean what should the customers expect?

They should expect continuous pushing of boundaries of what is possible by a company like ours. We are going more and more into e-communication and the use of technology because we want to get closer to

our customers so that they can know what products are available. We are also working with the county governments not just in Kenya but also in other countries to make sure we move closer to our customers. We are also moving more digital, opening more branches in three new counties, expanding the irrigation project and hiring more people.

Could you talk about the solar water heating Regulation.

David Gatende: Well , the deadlines has already passed so if you don't have one in your house you could be in trouble. What the government is doing is a very noble thing of trying to reduce the carbon footprint because the way we get energy is quite expensive.

Global warming is real and so anyone like Davis and Shirtliff who is involved in the

energy and water sector and is reducing the amount of carbon footprint is doing a good thing. So we have been supplying many solar water heaters and I expect that even though the deadline has passed, people will continue complying with that going into 2018.

What are your closing Remarks?

One thing you didn't ask me that i would like to add is about our community activities. We have a lot of community activities and are very big on supporting the community.

We have done projects all over the country and donated to the less fortunate including children's homes, old people, people with disabilities and so on. We very much believe in giving back to the societies and our staff rally enjoy this.