



SMART VILLAGES

New thinking for off-grid communities worldwide

PRESS RELEASE

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Can new SDGS really impact last mile communities?

The Smart Villages Initiative publishes policy brief showing that off-grid renewable energy and technology leapfrogging can catalyse sustainable development in world's remotest and poorest regions

On the eve of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Summit** in New York, the **Smart Villages Initiative** has urged delegates to keep in mind the plight of remote off-grid communities, which account for most of the 1.2 billion people without energy access. Whilst considerable emphasis is being placed on grid extension, the Smart Villages Initiative strongly believes that modern renewable energy sources, such as **solar, wind, micro-hydro** and **biofuels**, can be effectively combined with ICT and technology leapfrogging to act as a catalyst for sustainable development—creating 'smart villages' even in the most remote of locations.

To help achieve this, the independently funded 3-year project is conducting a comprehensive global assessment of the barriers to off-grid sustainable energy for development in rural communities. The first stage has recently been completed with the publication of a policy brief delivered in Kigali prior to the UN meeting. **Lessons Learned from the Smart Villages Engagement Programme in East Africa** gives an up-to-date view from frontline practitioners, East African policy makers, development agencies and other stakeholders aiming to establish and deliver the Sustainable Development Goals.

"Providing sustainable energy access for all is one of the most ambitious of the new Sustainable Development Goals," says Dr. Bernie Jones, Co-Project Leader. "Of the 1.2 billion people without energy at the moment, most live in rural communities with little realistic hope of being connected to the grid by 2030. There is a growing consensus that renewable off-grid energy can provide a solution. We are identifying the barriers to this and ways of overcoming them through a unique bottom-up consultation process starting with villagers and local stakeholders themselves.

"The East African study has revealed both regional specific and general issues," he continues. "Over the next 18 months we will produce similar overviews from South East Asia, the Indian sub-continent, South America, SIDS and West Africa to create the evidence base to convince policy makers and other stakeholders that effective action can and should be taken."

The East African policy brief's findings and recommendations fall under six main headings:

Improved access to appropriate technologies

In respect to technologies such as solar homes systems and pico-lighting systems, a key concern is to continue to reduce costs while improving mechanisms for quality control. It is essential to eliminate poor quality products from the market. Batteries remain a weak link and should be the focus of international research and development efforts. While affordable and reliable technologies are necessary, the focus of energy access initiatives should be on the services and development benefits enabled by energy access.

More focused research and development

Including the development of improved control systems, 'plug-and-play' technologies, recycling of energy system components, and efficient energy using appliances. Closer links should be established between energy service companies delivering on the ground and university researchers.

Increased investment in Energy Infrastructure

In order to achieve the substantially higher rates of investment needed to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, governments should put in place policy and regulatory frameworks which provide confidence to the private sector to invest. They should also ensure that entrepreneurs can access working capital to expand their businesses and upfront investment capital at affordable rates. Governments should support home-grown businesses by reducing red tape, by creating sufficient breathing space to get businesses off the ground and by providing business incubation and by providing business incubation and advisory services.

Improved collaboration between funders

There is much benefit to be gained from sharing of information and experiences between countries. Mechanisms also need to be put in place to enable village-level energy projects to access international climate funds

Stronger capacity building

More attention should be paid to capacity building based on systematic analysis of the knowledge and skills required to implement and maintain energy services. There should be an emphasis on vocational training for local technicians.

Network creation

There is widespread support for the concept of smart villages and a view that national champions could usefully be established to promote them. The Smart Villages Initiative should do more to develop and publicise case studies of smart villages as inspiration to other rural communities.

“In addition to the briefs, we are working on creating new methods to operationalize and enhance the newly released Global Tracking Framework from SE4ALL and the World Bank and thus build an evidence base to further drive political and economic decision making,” continues Dr Jones. “For example we have just completed the first phase of a specially designed study to quantify and understand the impact of sustainable modern energy access on rural development outcomes in Rwanda. For the study our team has designed a suite of data collection instruments to allow quantification of the impact of modern energy access on, among others: livelihood activities, health, education, food security, vulnerabilities, and aspirations.



Lessons Learned from the Smart Villages Engagement Programme in East Africa. *Smart Villages*. September. 2015. Web. 24 Sept. 2015.

<http://e4sv.org/publication/lessons-learned-from-the-smart-villages-engagement-programme-in-east-africa/>

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To access the Smart Villages image library please follow this link <http://bit.ly/1GxCuKE>

Notes for Editors

Smart Villages

The Smart Villages Initiative is a three year project evaluating ways of providing off-grid energy as a catalyst for development for rural villages and encouraging the transfer of knowledge and experience between different developing regions. Through a series of international workshops and follow-up activities in Africa, Asia and Latin America, our aim is to provide policy makers, donors, entrepreneurs and other stakeholders with new insights into the challenges of supplying village-level energy and how they might be overcome.

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