



SMART VILLAGES

New thinking for off-grid communities worldwide

East African Media Dialogue: Kigali Workshop Report



Workshop Report 3

KIGALI, RWANDA

November 2014

Key words:

Energy Access, Rural Energy, Solar Home Systems, Media, Journalism, East Africa

Smart Villages

We aim to provide policy makers, donors and development agencies concerned with rural energy access with new insights on the real barriers to energy access in villages in developing countries - technological, financial and political - and how they can be overcome. We have chosen to focus on remote off-grid villages, where local solutions (home- or institution-based systems, and mini-grids) are both more realistic and cheaper than national grid extension. Our concern is to ensure that energy access results in development and the creation of 'smart villages' in which many of the benefits of life in modern societies are available to rural communities.

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Publishing

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The Smart Villages initiative is being funded by the Cambridge Malaysian Education and Development Trust (CMEDT) and through a grant from the Templeton World Charity Foundation (TWCF). The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Cambridge Malaysian Education and Development Trust or the Templeton World Charity Foundation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

More than one billion people in the world still do not have electricity; over three billion cook on dirty, inefficient and harmful stoves; and four million people die prematurely each year as a result. The UN's Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) initiative aims to achieve universal access to modern energy services by 2030. The Smart Villages Initiative aims to contribute to meeting this goal by providing an insightful 'view from the front line' of the challenges of village energy provision for development and how they can be overcome.

Smart villages are proposed as a rural analogue to smart cities, and will shift the balance of opportunities between cities and villages. While we may expect that their particular features will be context specific, common features will include access to good education and health-care, better opportunities to earn a living, greater participation in governance processes, and more resilient communities. All these development benefits are enabled by energy access together with modern information and communication technologies.

The Smart Villages Initiative is evaluating the barriers to energy access in rural communities in developing countries and how those barriers can be overcome. Its focus is off-grid villages where local solutions (home- or institution-based systems, and mini-grids) are cheaper than national grid extension. Its aim is to generate new insights to inform the decisions and programmes of policy makers, donors and development agencies concerned with rural energy access for development.

As an integral part of that activity the Smart Villages Initiative aims to raise public awareness of rural energy access issues, sustainable energy technologies and entrepreneurial approaches to energy in the developing world. To help meet this goal, we seek to promote objective,

informed and balanced coverage of the issues, challenges and opportunities in both local and international media. In this way we hope the main stakeholders – including policy makers, funders, entrepreneurs, civil society and the general public, including potential smart villagers themselves – can be made aware of the potential of off-grid rural energy provision, and provided with appropriate information to permit informed discussion of the issue. We are targeting high profile international media outlets as well as the mainstream media organisations in countries where rural energy access is important.

By holding these regional media dialogue events, we hope to gain insights from local journalists themselves as well as introducing or updating them with some of the latest technological innovations in the area, as well as the regulatory, finance and entrepreneurship/business challenges and opportunities which apply in their region. In this manner we hope to encourage a greater focus on this complex area, which necessarily involves elements of technology, business, politics and rural development at the same time and which – despite its importance in terms of the magnitude of the affected populations – has hitherto not been a mainstream media priority.¹

¹ This approach derives, in part, from the successful Biosciences for Farming in America project (b4fa.org), funded by the John Templeton Foundation, which worked with local media organisations in Africa to encourage high-quality reporting of scientific and technical development issues through a combination of dialogue workshops, field trips and networking with the research community.

2. DETAILS

The workshop was planned over two days, and featured a mixture of background briefings and case studies by local and international technical experts and practitioners (including local entrepreneurs) and interactive discussions and professional development exercises, facilitated by independent media trainers and mentors. The workshop was followed with an optional one day field trip to see a rural energy installation first-hand, to experience some of the issues, benefits and challenges.

Rwanda was chosen as the location for this, the first regional media workshop held by the Smart Villages Initiative, for a number of related reasons. As part of its engagement in East Africa, the Initiative wished to involve as many countries as possible in the region. Other

events held in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania made Rwanda a logical choice, especially given the prevalence of interesting rural mini-hydro-power projects there, which had been presented among the most interesting case studies during the Smart Village Initiative's 2014 Arusha workshop – looking at the overall situation for off-grid rural energy in East Africa². Finally, the other East African Smart Villages workshops allowed us to interact with journalists from those countries, and begin to build a strong regional media network. Knowing the vibrancy of the Rwandan media community, we wanted to be able to include them in this process.

² See www.4sv.org/events/arusha-workshop/

3. PARTICIPATION

In our selection process we sought to identify journalists from countries in the region – Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda – who would take an interest in both energy provision in general and Smart Villages in particular. WE selected in particular those journalists – from print, broadcast and new media – who showed an interest in energy, science and technology or development reporting, to the extent that journalists in East Africa are able to specialise in a particular subject specialism or “beat” by their editors. We took recommendation from local partner organisations in the countries

(especially the Practical Action East Africa office, to whom we are particularly grateful for all their support in preparation for and during the workshop), and by research into the historical published portfolios of the candidates.

Interest was high and we were able to interact with 21 journalists from the four countries, providing a true cross-section of the region's journalistic community. The Smart Villages Initiative provided travel, accommodation and expenses for those who participated.

“Editors will always go for good stories, so make them good.”

— OTULA OWUOR

4. BIOGRAPHIES

Participants

Andre Gakwaya

Andre is currently Director of RNA since three years. He is a writer and a journalist. He has reported on war and genocide in Rwanda and the region in 1994. He has been awarded as best journalist reporter 2012 on tangible cases of reconciliation after genocide. He has been awarded too in 2013 as best reporter of activities of African Union for Rwandans and Africans. He continues to report on main sectors for development like energy, economy, food security, forestry, climate change, governance, justice, genocide in Rwanda, regional integration, Africa Agenda 2063. He is involved in writing books on Genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

Bonaventure Cyubahiro

Bonaventure works with Radio & Tv10 Rwanda. He is a senior Anchor & reporter, with 7 years of experience. 1st runner up journalist in the best TV documentaries/ Rwanda Media Awards prepared annually by the Rwanda Governance Board. Award of the annual best story sensitizing the entrepreneurship in Rwanda.

Francis Kagolo

Francis is a senior multimedia journalist working with The New Vision, Uganda's leading daily. He is widely published and has received numerous awards. These have included Best Agribusiness/Environment African Journalist of the year 2010, under the annual Diageo Africa Business Reporting Awards. He has a postgraduate degree in investigative journalism and a bachelor's in mass communication from Makerere University. In addition to his interests in journalism, Francis is a food rights activist, having been trained in hunger management by the UN World Food Program (WFP) and in change leadership for food security by the USAID. His main fields of interest are water, sanitation and hygiene; food security, agri-business, and environment.

Gerald Kitabu

Gerald studied at the University of Dar es Salaam. He writes for The Guardian and is a member of the Tanzania Agricultural Journalists' Forum.

Isaac Khisa

Isaac Khisa is a Ugandan business journalist working with the Nation Media Group's "East African" newspaper. Following special training in journalism in Nairobi with Nation Media Group, he worked with Monitor Publications Limited in Kampala as a freelance journalist, focusing on hard and soft news reporting, before moving to his current position. He has participated in the journalism training courses on climate change by the British Council Uganda and analytical news reporting by Makerere University.

Jean Claude Mutuyeyezu

Jean Claude Mutuyeyezu, is a Rwandan by nationality; he has a bachelor's degree in Journalism and Communications from Catholic Institute of Kabgayi/Rwanda and He is now the news presenter and reporter at Rwanda Broadcasting Agency (Rwanda television and Radio Rwanda). He is very interested in social and development news as Energy, small/medium businesses, renewable energy, transport and any story/news related to people's life/interest.

Leonard Magomba

Leonard David Magomba holds a Degree in Mass Communication from Tumaini Makumira University and a Diploma in Journalism from Time School of Journalism (TSJ). He has worked in the media industry for the past twelve years, having specialised in reporting on business, economics, financial, markets and agriculture news. He is currently the Bureau Chief of East African Business Week, a regional leading business newspaper, based in Kampala, Uganda, which circulates in Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and South Sudan. Before joining East African Business Week, Leonard worked

with The East African, a regional newspaper based in Nairobi, as a senior reporter. Leonard was awarded first prize in Journalism activities for the SADC countries in 2004.

Lominda Afedraru

Lominda is a science journalist based in Uganda, who has been working as a reporter at a local newspaper, the Daily Monitor, under Monitor Publications Ltd for the last seven years. Many of Lominda's articles have been further published on various websites that subscribe to our paper. Apart from science reporting Lominda also covers legal reporting. Lominda attained a higher diploma in Marketing but studied short courses in environmental reporting. She also completed a short training course in rural agricultural reporting courtesy of the International Women's Media Foundation in the United States of America. After undergoing a science reporting mentoring programme, she began to specialise more in this direction. Now the Secretary

General of the Uganda Science Journalists Association, Lominda also works as a freelance journalist writing articles on Agriculture, ICT, Health, Environment and Climate Change.

Maina Waruru

Maina Waruru is a freelance contributor for the Thomson Reuters Foundation, with an interest in science and climate change issues. He is based in Nairobi.

Mushimire Joseph

Mushimire is based in Rwanda and works for the Rwanda Broadcast Agency.

Olivier Rubibi

Olivier is based in Rwanda and works as a reporter for Custom Media Company.

Otula Owuor

Otula has worked with Nation Media Group in Nairobi, Kenya, as a science writer and editor for



(Top row) Richard Hayhurst, Olivier Rubibi, Otula Owuor, Bernie Jones, Maina Waruru
(Middle Row) [], Isaac Khisa, Bonaventure Cyubahiro, Leonard Magomba, Samson Kamalomo
(Bottom row) Julia Vitullo-Martin, Lominda Afedraru, Joachim Buwembo, Francis Kagolo, Gerald Kitabu, Simon Kamuzinzi, Sharon Schmickle, Andre Gakwaya

a decade. Currently he is involved in media training and consultancy and working as a writer and editor. Otula is a mentor and trainer with the World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ), a project designed to improve science coverage in Africa and the Middle East.

Samson Kamalamo

Samson is deputy managing editor of Ladyband Company Ltd., publishers of the newspaper Changamoto and producers of broadcast programmes. He is also chairman of the interim committee of the Tanzania Union of Journalists, an organization that supports the rights and welfare of journalists and media workers in Tanzania, and a member of the executive committee of the Dar es Salaam City Press Club. Before, he was a member of the executive committee of the Journalists' Environmental Association of Tanzania for three years (2009–2012), production editor of Changamoto for six years (2006–2012) and a reporter for the newspaper Mtanzania for nine years (1995–2004).

Samson holds a master's degree in development studies from University of Dar es Salaam, a bachelor's degree in journalism from Tumaini University in Iringa, Tanzania, and a diploma in journalism from the Tanzania School of Journalism.

Simon Kamuzinzi

Simon graduated from the National University of Rwanda in 2007. He has worked with different media houses and Government institutions in Rwanda as Journalist and General Reporter in different domains (politics, economy, social and many more) but put emphasis in covering environment, for seven years. He worked with Radio Salus, Radio Isango Star and currently Reporter for Kigali today and KT Radio. Simon is based in Kigali city.

Experts and mentors

Anthony Ndegwa

Anelas Investments LDT, Nairobi, Kenya

Dan Klinck

For more than ten years, Dan has worked as an entrepreneur and business leader in a broad range of industries including finance, manufacturing, biotech, construction and energy. Dan is the CEO of East African Power Ltd (EAP), a renewable energy investment and development company based in Kigali, Rwanda. He is passionate about expanding access to clean energy in developing countries and building local capacity in the sector and serves as vice-chairman of Rwanda's Energy Skills Council. Dan also serves as the executive secretary of Rwanda's Energy Private Developers Association.

He holds a BBA in finance and major in economics from the Williams School of Business, Bishop's University. He and his wife currently live in Kigali, Rwanda.

Denyse Umubyeyi

Denyse is the finance and business development manager at Practical Action in Rwanda.

Francine Munyaneza

Francine is managing director and founder of Munyax Eco, a company selling Munganeza home solar kits in villages. She has international and multicultural experience in both the private and non-profit sectors.

Buwembo Joachim

As a Knight Development Journalism Fellow in Tanzania from 2009–2011, Buwembo Joachim transformed agricultural issues throughout the country. He led a project to improve coverage of poverty and development issues in Tanzania by creating Kilimo Kwanza (Agriculture First), the country's

first agriculture supplement. A writer and media consultant based in Kampala, Uganda, Joachim has served as the editor of several major newspapers in East Africa. From 2005 until mid-2008, he was managing editor of *The Monitor*, Uganda's leading independent newspaper. Prior to his work at *The Monitor*, he spent a year in Tanzania, where he was the founding editor of *The Citizen*, a newspaper owned by the Nation Media Group, the largest media group in East and Central Africa.

Jonothan Berry

Jonothan graduated from Baylor University in August of 2014 with a BS in engineering and a minor in social entrepreneurship. In October 2014, he began working as an engineer for East African Power Ltd (EAP), a renewable energy investment and development company based in Kigali, Rwanda. He works as a site engineer for the Rubagabaga micro-hydro power plant. He is also responsible for putting together a community-based organisation in conjunction with local community members.

Julia Vitullo-Martin

Julia is a New York-based independent journalist who is a senior fellow at Columbia University's Center for Urban Real Estate, and also director of the Center for Urban Innovation at the Regional Plan Association. Her work focuses on development issues such as comparative economic analysis, planning and zoning, waterfront development, public housing, environmental review, and historic preservation and design. Her current project, *The Future of Urban Food*, looks at the functions and benefits of food in local economies. Vitullo-Martin has been widely published in a variety of newspapers and magazines, including the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *New York Review of Books*, the *New York Post*, the *New York Daily News*, *Monocle*, *Forbes*, and *Fortune*, as well as academic journals.

She has authored and edited three books, including *Breaking Away: The Future of Cities* (Century Foundation Press, 1996). She served as co-director of the Templeton-Cambridge Journalism Fellowships at the University of Cambridge from 2003 through 2011.

Liliane Uwabyaye

Liliane works at the Tumba College of Technology. The Electronics and Telecommunications Department of the College is borne out of the Rwandan Government's desire to achieve 'Vision 2020' targets of producing a skilled, technical workforce. Courses are designed to help students specialise in a number of areas including the installation of solar home systems.

Sharon Schmickle

Sharon has been a journalist for MinnPost.com since 2007, and before that she worked for the Minneapolis Star Tribune where she reported from the paper's Washington bureau and covered wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Her awards include being a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the US court system, National Press Club's Washington Correspondent of the Year for coverage of the federal budget as it affected one Minnesota community, and OverseasPress Club of America's award for coverage of trade friction. She has taught writing and journalism at Macalester College, the University of St. Thomas and the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute. Since 2011, she also has worked as a journalism mentor in Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda and Tanzania. She is a graduate from the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism and she was a Templeton-Cambridge Fellow in science and religion at Cambridge University.

Smart Village Initiative Team

Bernie Jones

Bernie is co-leader of the Smart Villages Initiative. He was formerly the media programme director of the B4FA project, and has worked in the science policy and communications arena as head of international policy at the Royal Society, executive director of EASAC, and interim executive director of the InterAcademy Panel and the InterAcademy Medical Panel. Bernie has degrees in computer science, experimental psychology and cognitive science.

John Holmes

John is co-leader of the Smart Villages Initiative. He is a senior research fellow at the University of Oxford, concerned with enhancing the use of science in environmental policy making, and an independent consultant. He has a degree in natural sciences from Cambridge University, a PhD in mechanical engineering from Imperial College London, and an MBA from Brunel University. The early part of his career was in technology assessment and research management relating to the development of clean-coal technologies. He then worked as the director responsible for the science and engineering of the UK's radioactive waste-disposal programme. A further move to the Environment Agency, the

environmental regulator for England and Wales, as head of its science programme preceded his joining the University of Oxford in 2004. He has also served as secretary to the EASAC Energy Programme.

Meredith Thomas

Meredith works as communications officer for Smart Villages. He undertook a master's degree in biomedical engineering at Imperial College before going on to study science communication. He has worked as a writer for the Wellcome Trust and the Observer.

Richard Hayhurst

Richard is communications director for the Smart Villages Initiative. He has been involved in science and healthcare communications for over thirty years, having established and sold several leading agencies. He has worked internationally with clients across the spectrum, from early-stage biotechs to multinationals, the EU, countries, academic institutes and NGOs, formulating communication strategies for topics such as cloning, stem cell research, agbio, genetic testing, vaccines, HIV, renewable energy and nanotechnology. Richard has an MA (Honors) in modern history from the University of St Andrews.



Participants listen during a presentation by Dan Klinck

5. PREPARATORY MATERIAL

Prior to attending the workshop, journalists were provided with the following briefings, which are referred to in the appendices:

Media Deconstruction Exercise Case Studies



Off-grid energy reporting case studies: Media on Smart Villages – Presents three recent articles published in mainstream media on issues relevant to off-grid power provision and the Smart Villages. These were used in the training exercises run by Sharon Schmickle and Julia Vitullo-Martin.

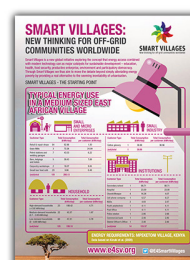
- 'There's a Place in the World that Is Fighting Poverty with Solar Power' by Tim McDonnell, Mother Jones, 15 September 2014
- '25,000 Villages to Get Electrified through Micro-Grids' by Anindya Upadhyay, India Times, 4 October 2014
- 'Clean Power, Off the Grid' by David Hayes, New York Times, 17 July 2014

Tanzania Energy Infographic



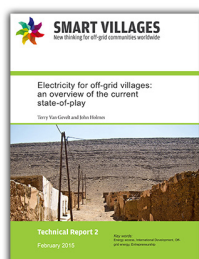
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Africa Energy Infographic



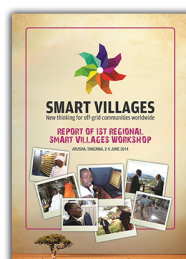
<http://bit.ly/19n9G03>

State of Play Report



<http://bit.ly/1HKzLoz>

Arusha Workshop Report



<http://bit.ly/1CrESqB>

Vision paper



<http://bit.ly/19BqLDn>

6. WORKSHOP SUMMARY

The workshop was held over two days with a comprehensive and varied programme of presentations, group discussions and breakout sessions. These are summarised below with copies of presentations available on the Smart Villages website www.e4sv.org.

Welcome

Dr Bernie Jones, Smart Villages Initiative

In giving the context of the overall initiative, Bernie Jones described the two years of scoping and pilot activity on village-level energy with the European Academies Science Advisory Council, how the current project arose, and how it would operate over the coming years. Introducing all the participants, he also summarised how important the Smart Villages Initiative felt engagement with media to be in each of the regions in which activity was taking place and summarised how the Initiative would like to work with journalists in each region.

The Smart Villages Concept

Dr John Holmes, Smart Villages Initiative

Setting the context for the Smart Villages Initiative, John Holmes pointed to the fact that more than 1.3 billion people – around a fifth of the world's population – have no access to electricity. In addition, more than 3 billion are under-served with modern energy, being forced to cook on dangerous and inefficient stoves and open fires. Many of them live in remote rural village communities. Until such communities have access to modern energy services, little progress can be made to develop their economies and improve their lives.

Through its Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) initiative the United Nations has the declared objective to achieve universal access to modern energy services by 2030. However, given the geographical distribution of some communities,

and the prohibitive cost and efficiency penalties of extending grid-electricity to all these communities, a large degree of off-grid energy solutions will be necessary to achieve this goal within the timescale and at an achievable cost. The Smart Villages Initiative aims to contribute to meeting this goal by providing an insightful 'view from the front line' of the challenges of village energy provision for development and how they can be overcome.

Smart villages are proposed as a rural analogue to smart cities, and will redress the balance of opportunities between cities and villages. Whilst the particular features of any one village will be context specific, common features should include access to good education and healthcare, better opportunities to earn a living, greater participation in governance processes, and more resilient communities. The rural population should be able to access all the critical services, and have the same opportunities, that urban populations are able to benefit from. All these development benefits are catalysed by energy access together with modern information and communication technologies.

Dr Holmes explained that the Smart Villages Initiative is being undertaken by a project team based mainly at Cambridge and Oxford Universities, working in collaboration with the national science academies and their networks, and with two organisations with extensive hands-on experience of village energy projects for development: Practical Action and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI). Following a preparatory phase lasting two years, the three-year project commenced in October 2014.

It will run 12-month programmes of engagement activities in six regions (East and West Africa, South and Southeast Asia, South and Central America), which will gather and synthesise the views of leading practitioners and

stakeholders in off-grid village energy for development in these regions on existing challenges and how they can be overcome. Advice will consequently be communicated to policy makers, donors and development agencies on what further steps need to be taken in order to accelerate progress to meeting the SE4All target. Dr Holmes concluded with a summary of the main findings of the previous international workshop held in Arusha, Tanzania, in June 2014.

Plenary Discussion: Off-grid Villages - Painting the Picture

Facilitator: Bernie Jones

After the introductory presentations, workshop participants were asked to imagine what life in an off-grid village under situations of energy-poverty is like for rural populations. The issue turned out to be one that was easy for most participants to relate to. Many of them had been born in remote, off-grid villages and/or still had close relatives living there. In addition to highlighting issues familiar to many who work on these issues – lack of access to information, affordable lighting, educational resources and healthcare – participants shared

compelling stories about their own childhood experiences; for example, running home from school to “beat the sun” so that they could still do some homework before sunset made studying impossible. But they also highlighted the long-term inequitable impacts of that situation when later they had to compete for college admission places against urban children who had been able to study for longer every day, because they lived in houses with electric lights. Others told of missing out on what some might regard as everyday essentials, such as hairdryers, or simple luxuries such as television.

The Village-Level Energy Situation in East Africa

Denyse Umubyeyi, Practical Action Rwanda

Denyse Umubyeyi from Smart Villages’ partner Practical Action summarised the energy supply, energy use and energy policy frameworks in four East African countries: Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda. She pointed out that electrification rates in East Africa are still very low in rural areas, resulting in a high rate of biomass dependency and therefore more effort is needed



Attendees participate in a discussion on data-driven journalism, led by Ugandan media trainer Joachim Buwembo

regarding efficient and sustainable biomass technologies.

Looking at other sources, Denyse explained that solar PV technologies have great potential and need further support, especially for the development of larger systems and application to productive uses such as agricultural irrigation. Mini-grids have been piloted successfully, but models need to be developed to take them to scale. Mechanical power and productive use of energy are still underserved and need greater focus and investment.

She recommended that East African energy policies increase the focus on rural energy supply, setting targets for a range of energy markets (solar PV, improved cookstoves, mini-grids and mechanical power services) and establishing capacity-building programmes. Lessons should be learned and shared within the region on a range of technologies and approaches:

- Solar PV lantern and solar home systems programmes (in particular, the experience of Kenya).
- Improved cookstove technologies and sustainable biomass supply (Uganda and Rwanda).
- Mini-grids (Tanzania).
- Innovative distribution, marketing and finance models.

In the ensuing discussion, the drive for industrialization in East Africa was judged to tend to drive energy investments towards big projects, serving industrial and urban loads. It was proposed that the pressure must therefore be kept up for complimentary investments in energy for smart villages. The wide scale problem of illegal charcoal production was mentioned and debate centred on whether it should be legalized and consequently regulated

to ensure sustainable production. However, concerns were also expressed that it is difficult to define what would actually constitute sustainable production.

Private Sector Renewable Energy Investments in East Africa

Dan Klinck, East Africa Power

Dan Klinck of East Africa Power, which is heavily involved in planning and building innovative power supply solutions in the region, talked about how mini-hydro schemes were ideal for combining with solar and create minigrids. He believes that they offer a win-win situation, being attractive to investors, while providing access to electricity for previously disenfranchised rural populations. However, he also did not downplay the obstacles, in particular the continuing high cost of capital, lack of trained human resources and non-conducive regulatory environments.. He finished by outlining a new project, the first of its kind to be organised on a PPC based – private, public and community – minihydro project in Rubagabaga, a remote off-grid Rwandan village, that he hopes will overcome many of these issues.

Training students in renewable energy engineering

Liliane Uwabyaye, Tumba College of Technology

Liliane Uwabyaye from Rwanda's Tumba College of Technology then outlined the educational and training initiatives being introduced to provide the human resources needed to create sustainable renewable energy sector, vital to this landlocked country. Impressively in the short space of time since establishment in 2007, Tumba has started courses, including entrepreneurship modules, in Micro Hydro Power, Solar (PV and Solar Thermal and Biomass. Technicians are trained to design and install solar systems with repair and maintenance skills the next area to be tackled.. Some initial products have also been produced and are already been sold

locally, in particular solar water heaters. Interestingly the college sees outreach as part of its remit and works in local communities and institutions such as high schools, hospitals, government offices and prisons to explain the benefits of using renewable energy.

Discussion and mentoring on rural energy reporting

Facilitators: Sharon Schmickle & Julia Vitullo-Martin

The first practical session aimed to tackle the issue of how to introduce a new topic, such as Smart Villages and off-the-grid solutions, to journalists. The problems are two-fold: first, to get them interested in the substance, and, second, to work through the practical challenges in presenting an unfamiliar topic to editors in the high-pressure environment of daily and weekly journalism. And because, like politics, much of journalism is local, Sharon Schmickle and Julia Vitullo-Martin started by asking the East African journalists to discuss their knowledge and experiences with off-the-grid approaches in their own villages and towns.

This scene setting highlighted how relevant energy issues are in the everyday lives of Africans — and how many stories are waiting to be told. From the outset of the workshop, the journalists indicated that the smart village concept was of interest and something they would like to cover. While rural village life was thought to be a topic with which audiences would be familiar, it was agreed that there is relatively little coverage linking rural life to issues of national energy policy or technological entrepreneurship. Already after having been given the basic background information on off-grid rural development and Smart Villages, journalists felt there was plenty of material to work with.

In the ensuing discussion, journalists mentioned many possible angles for such stories, including renewable energy, challenges of off-grid

communities, disillusionment with city life, rural–urban migration, health and education needs, and economic opportunities provided by technology and innovation. However, the journalists, while clearly enthusiastic about reporting on these issues, noted the widespread difficulty they experience in obtaining financing for travel away from their offices to research stories. They also remarked on the challenges they faced in influencing the set agendas and views of many editors and media proprietors.

Ugandan media trainer and veteran editor-in-chief Joachim Buwembo then wove in the challenge of producing data-driven journalism, which can be especially difficult in a new field. To start building awareness of the topic some key questions had he believed to be answered. What precisely is known about off-grid energy in Central and East Africa? What are current, on-the-ground entrepreneurial solutions? What are the measurable consequences of leaving masses of people off the grid? Are any of these worth writing up and, if so, for what audiences? However, the consensus was that despite the paucity of data, this was something the journalists could rise to and in fact relished as an opportunity to break new ground.

Group exercise: analysing rural energy stories

Facilitators: Sharon Schmickle & Julia Vitullo-Martin

To provide practical advice, Sharon Schmickle and Julia Vitullo-Martin took participants through three rural energy stories from international media which had been circulated in advance of the workshop.

One of the articles (There's a Place in the World That Is Fighting Poverty with Solar Power, Mother Jones, Sept. 15, 2014) reported entrepreneurial ventures spurred by a solar energy project in Kenya, a Tanzanian village. At the journalism workshop, the article served as a

platform for discussions of techniques involved in explaining technology for non-scientists and also of effectively targeting stories for different audiences. Other discussion topics included the persuasive use of statistics to set off the costs and benefits of new energies like solar versus the deprivations associated with doing nothing.

Another article (Around 25,000 villages to get electrified through micro-grids, India Times, Oct. 4, 2014) stimulated discussions about quality coverage of new energy developments: finding sources beyond the press release, explaining technology, providing context and finding comparative data. This article's less analytic use of the data led to an excellent discussion of how the report could be improved.

The third article, (Clean Power, Off the Grid, New York Times, July 17, 2014), illustrated the opportunities for opinion and analysis pieces to provide informed coverage of smart energy needs and developments. It also provoked debate about using local stories as hooks for international policy initiatives.

Together, participants analysed how the journalists involved had introduced the topics and

presented them to their readers, and how issues of technology, development, entrepreneurship and politics were woven together to engage and interest their readers.

The journalists then discussed how these techniques could be employed in bringing the same stories to a local audience, and the similarities and differences in approach that would be needed. Journalists engaged the seismic issues while also comparing their daily problems with recalcitrant editors, house style, limited resources, etc.

Breakout group exercise: Imagining a Smart Village

Facilitator: Richard Hayhurst

Participants were asked to split into two groups, and to brainstorm the benefits and impacts of modern energy provision for rural communities. Both groups had a lively discussion. In addition to the expected focus on education, health and business opportunities, participants also noted a number of additional socio-economic benefits catalysed by energy access. Their conclusions are reproduced here.



Rwandan journalist, Simon Kamuzinzi leads a discussion on the advantages of energy access.

Group 1

The members of group 1 identified benefits in 7 key areas:

Education

In addition to longer study hours, the group felt that provision of computers, in particular laptops would both encourage children to explore and expand and increase their knowledge, as well as developing general literacy.

Agriculture

Widespread benefits were seen, firstly greatly increasing incomes by making agro-processing, together with storage and preservation of agricultural products possible at village level. This in turn would lead to growth in trading. Overall veterinary services would also improve.

ICT

ICT access was seen to have great social value through the potential establishment of internet cafes and the opportunity to play music in bars, cafes and at home. For farmers and traders, the ability to achieve market info in advance was regarded as a major advance and in general it was thought ICT would stimulate business through the ability to perform mobile phone banking and shopping. Key to all of this was of course phone charging.

Health

In health a wide range of benefits were predicted, in particular the possibility of bringing not just primary but also some aspects of secondary care to the village by establishing local laboratories where vaccines and medicines could be safely stored and operating facilities. Tele-medicine and electronic patient records were also predicted to lead to major improvements. Overall a reduction in disease was predicted and with faster more local treatment a subsequent reduction in downtime for villagers and increase in productivity.

Security

One major benefit unanimously agreed by the group was increased security through the provision of lighting, alarms and CCTV cameras.

Social

Through increased access to information through the internet and tv, the group was confident that both general social cohesion would improve and gender equality grow. Having electricity for cooking, washing and ironing would also help greatly. Overall health and well-being would improve though better sanitation and access to clean water.

Tourism

The group was also alert to the potential of tourism and that access to electricity would enable hotels and restaurants to be established at village level.

Economy

From an overall economic point of view, the group predicted that in addition to mobile banking continuing to expand, financial institutions and services could be provided at village level, especially banks and ATMs. Villagers themselves would then be able to enrol in savings schemes, get insurance cover etc.

Governance

Finally improved governance was seen as a major benefit in the African context. Villages would gain increased access to services, while government and other official bodies would in turn be able to increase communication with often difficult to reach constituents through greater use of public information systems, computers, mobiles and tablets.

THE SMART VILLAGE: AFRICAN VISIONS

HOW SUSTAINABLE ENERGY COULD CATALYSE DEVELOPMENT IN OFF-GRID RURAL COMMUNITIES

IMAGINING A SMART VILLAGE: Leading East African journalists at a workshop in Kigali, Rwanda were tasked with identifying the advantages of a Smart Village with sustainable off-grid energy and electricity. As well as the expected focus on education, health and business opportunities, they also stressed the improvements in security and governance this would bring as illustrated below.



SMART VILLAGES

New thinking for off-grid communities worldwide

GROUP 1

ADVANTAGES OF ENERGY

EDUCATION

Children will explore with laptops
Develop reading skills



SOCIAL

Gender equality can grow
Access to info increased - e.g. watching TV
Access to clean water improved
Ironing, washing, cooking all improve



SECURITY

Improved though lighting, alarms and cameras



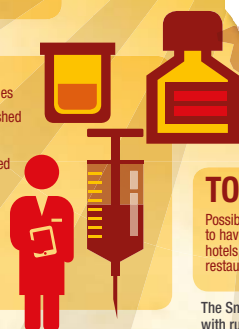
ICT

Internet cafe
Music
Charging phones
Obtaining market info
Job creation, banking on mobile phones



HEALTH

Conserve medicines and vaccines
Local laboratory can be established
Telemedicine
Patient records can be conserved
Governance in reporting can be introduced
Info sharing
On site operations reduce down-time for villagers
Disease reduced



TOURISM

Possible to have hotels and restaurants



ECONOMY

Development of financial institutions and services - banks, ATMs, savings schemes, insurance possible
Mobile banking increases



GOVERNANCE

Access to services increased
Use of audio systems, ipads, computers, tv in public offices improves communication with public
Citizen/government relationship improves



AGRICULTURE

Added value to farming, agro-processing possible
Conservation possible
Improved veterinary services
Develop trading



The Smart Villages Initiative aims to provide policy makers, donors and development agencies concerned with rural energy access with new insights on the real barriers to energy access in villages in developing countries – technological, financial, social and political – and how they can be overcome. We have chosen to focus on remote off-grid villages, where local solutions (home- or institution-based systems, and mini-grids) are both more realistic and cheaper than national grid extension.

www.e4sv.org

[@E4SmartVillages](https://twitter.com/E4SmartVillages)

Group 2

The second group was just as excited by the potential benefits of sustainable energy and electricity but presented them under just 3 headings.

Domestic

The immediate focus was on the general impact of lighting in homes, schools and local facilities and the accompanying increase in productive hours. Following on from that the group highlighted the benefits of individual access to tv, radio and the internet in homes rather than on a communal basis. Phones could also be charged at home and as with group one, there was enthusiasm for the prospects of increased security through alarms, lights and cctv.

Industrial

Here the group predicted the growth of small-scale enterprises ranging from milling to welding. For agriculture, the possibility of improving irrigation was seen as a major breakthrough

Health and Social

Here the group presented a variety of ideas, starting by using electricity to tackle the major health problem caused by using wood and kerosene for cooking. Again they thought primary and secondary care could be introduced through clinics with the ability to store vaccines stimulating vaccination programmes. On social benefits, the increased penetration of sports programming was predicted to lead to more socialisation and sports betting.

Conclusion

The participants embraced the Smart Village concept to a striking extent. As urban-dwelling media professionals, they might well have expressed some scepticism. But they found the notion of connected and empowered rural communities, as an alternative increasing urbanisation, to be a compelling vision.

Rwandan journalist Simon Kamuzinzi from Kigali Today summarised participants' views on the benefits of energy access, but went beyond the more obvious ones, such as improved education, healthcare and sanitation, and opportunities for micro-enterprises. In addition, he cited improved personal and community security, and the ability to create a functioning relationship between citizens and government.

“It’s about information, which is our business.”

— JOACHIM BUWEMBO

THE SMART VILLAGE: AFRICAN VISIONS

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SMART VILLAGES

New thinking for off-grid communities worldwide

GROUP 2

ADVANTAGES OF ENERGY

DOMESTIC

Light in homes, schools, local facilities
Access to TV and radio in homes
Access to internet
Phone charging
Security systems - alarms, cameras



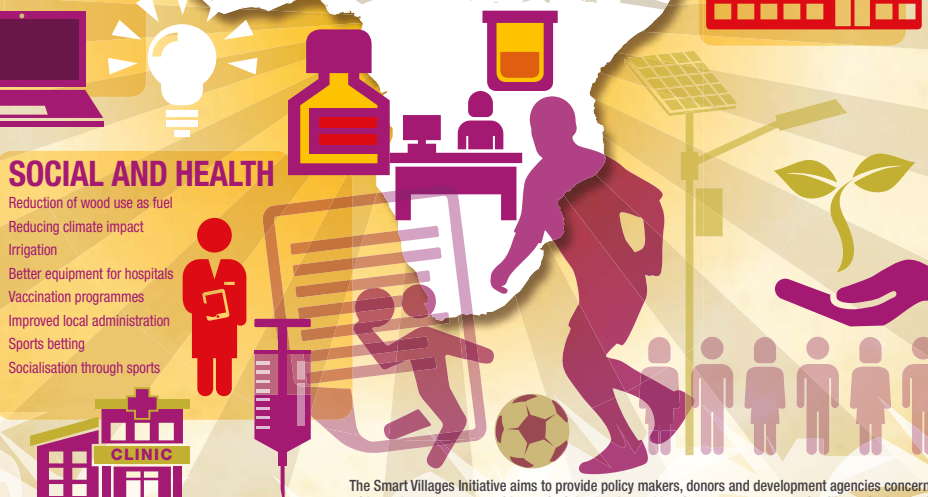
INDUSTRIAL

Welding
Milling grain
Small-scale enterprises



SOCIAL AND HEALTH

Reduction of wood use as fuel
Reducing climate impact
Irrigation
Better equipment for hospitals
Vaccination programmes
Improved local administration
Sports betting
Socialisation through sports



The Smart Villages Initiative aims to provide policy makers, donors and development agencies concerned with rural energy access with new insights on the real barriers to energy access in villages in developing countries – technological, financial, social and political – and how they can be overcome. We have chosen to focus on remote off-grid villages, where local solutions (home- or institution-based systems, and mini-grids) are both more realistic and cheaper than national grid extension.

www.e4sv.org @E4SmartVillages

Group 2 - Imagining a Smart Village

Group discussion: journalism skills and approaches to rural energy reporting

Leaders: Sharon Schmickle, Julia Vitullo-Martin, Joachim Buwembo & Richard Hayhurst

In round-table discussions and one-on-one conversations during breaks, Julia Vitullo-Martin and Sharon Schmickle explored the following key steps perceived as common to all areas and their relevance to future rural energy and potentially smart village reporting with the journalists:

- Research the topic online; collect scientific papers (including peer review comments) and examples of proven innovative approaches; surf scientific web sites to identify potential sources
- Interview government regulators, lobbyists, corporate leaders, NGO officials, academics, credentialed local scientists and quotable entrepreneurs working in the field.
- With informed views in hand, interview local citizens and residents on the daily consequences of the problem
- Keep track of potential conflicts of interest including institutional resistance on the part of those who stand to gain by preserving the status quo
- Research the big international stories (think global) and reflect on your local counterpart (write local)
- Identify the target audience, thinking both local and global; then craft the story to address that audience, taking care to translate jargon and scientific terms into everyday language and meaningful metaphors
- Use the inverted pyramid when useful, but don't hesitate to try narrative, tick-tock, and hour-glass
- Take all your technology with you and use it—still camera, video camera, audio devices; international editors increasingly want podcasts and iPhone-length videos to show real people in action.



Attendees were provided with a pack of documents including the report of our first workshop in Arusha.

Further, both led the group through analysis of story pitching—presenting these new ideas to reluctant editors. Because African editors like official events such as press conferences, we discussed how to convert a routine, controlled press conference into an exciting story, emphasizing that opportunities can be mined even from the most mundane events.

Pitching was also discussed, specifically how to present these new ideas to reluctant editors. Because African editors typically like official events such as press conferences, we discussed how to convert a routine, controlled press conference into an exciting story. In that context, they also analysed sample stories for the creative approaches they could offer.

Buwembo Joachim also emphasised the use of social media. It can be an immense technological gift to journalists in developing countries, who are writing for smaller markets. Correctly handled, social media allows journalists to put forward their work directly and cleverly, garnering the attention of important people in the field worldwide. Mentors shared their insights in effective and impactful techniques for social media and maximising impact.

Richard Hayhurst then suggested a number of international media organisations that could potentially be interested in local reporting of rural energy stories and identification of future smart village case studies.

Final Presentation – Seeing is believing **Francine Munyaneza, Munyanx**

The final presentation of the workshop from Munyanx served to summarize the key message of Smart Villages for the journalists—the ability of sustainable renewable energy to transform lives in rural communities. Munyanx is a Rwandan-German social enterprise providing solar home systems in Uganda and Rwanda and as a returning Rwandan founder and CEO

Francine Munyaneza was able to paint a wider picture of the impact of the systems together with practical insights on removing barriers to introduction – from pay-as-go revenue models to creating trade associations and standards to deal with government concerns. However the lingering memory from this session is the practical demonstration of the products with many of the journalists wishing to take them home!

Concluding Session **Summariser: Richard Hayhurst**

Richard Hayhurst closed the workshop, summarising the main discussion points and highlights. He emphasised that the Smart Villages Initiative saw this moment as the start of a long term relationship with the participating journalists, together with colleagues back at their media houses, in continuing to work to bring important rural energy and related stories to national and international attention. With the workshop concluded, the journalists were enthused to write about the need for off-grid solutions in their own countries and to seek out examples of villages on a journey to becoming ‘smart’.

7. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The workshop received positive feedback from journalists participating and also from those experts who contributed their time and insights to the discussions. Journalists confirmed that, whilst they found the topic of off-grid energy access to be one that had definite local resonance, it was not an issue that they had ever heard emphasised, or seen workshop or media engagement on. Similarly, expert practitioners in the area had rarely had the opportunity to engage with the media on their activities, and the economic and development benefits their brought to rural populations.

The Smart Village Initiative team leading the workshop therefore believes that it was correct to include this emphasis on media engagement in the project activity, and that the exercise can and should be repeated in the other regions in which the project will be active: Southeast Asia, South Asia, South America, West Africa and Central America and the Caribbean. The format is also flexible enough to respond to particular local needs and levels of journalistic and technical sophistication.

Building on previous experience, we were able to achieve a good balance between formal learning and interactive aspects. While participants did indicate they would have liked to have more time for the exercises and discussions, the pace and variety of the workshop did ensure that interest and engagement were maintained. The case studies were particularly welcome and perhaps should be extended in the future, along with any local equipment or research mini-exhibits, as was done for the main East African workshop in Arusha.

The journalists also expressed a desire to interact not just with their colleagues in other African countries, but also those from the other regions in the Smart Villages Initiative. We believe there maybe value in bringing

key journalist participants to present relevant Smart Village stories and case studies from their countries in subsequent workshops, and to participate in future media workshops to ensure a cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiences across different regions.

Some practical problems remain in effectively covering rural energy stories, however. In particular, the budgetary constraints under which many media houses place their reporters, mean that it is almost impossible for them to travel up-country to cover stories first-hand. The Smart Villages Initiative therefore undertook to consider how it might allocate a small portion of its funding to support reasonable local travel requests to research relevant stories and case studies, which could then also be featured on the project website.

Overall the Smart Villages Media Dialogue was enthusiastically received. Many of the participants personally identified with the goals, having grown up in villages without electricity. Their reactions reaffirmed the value and potential impact of the project, and the importance of bringing the issues to wider public and decision-maker attention.

ANNEX 1: WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Sunday, 9 November

- 0900 Welcome and introductions**
- 0950 The Smart Village Concept**
Dr John Holmes, Co-leader of Smart Villages Initiative
- 1000 Group discussion: Off-grid villages: Painting the picture**
Facilitators: Dr Bernie Jones, Smart Villages
- 1100 Break**
- 1130 Energy situation in East Africa**
Denyse Umubyeyi, Practical Action
- 1215 Mini-hydro in Rwanda**
Dan Klinck, East African Power
- 1300 Lunch**
- 1400 Training students in renewable energy engineering**
Liliane Uwabyaye, Tumba College of Technology
- 1600 Effective use of data, and data-driven journalism**
Joacham Buwembo
- 1700 Smart Village story analysis**
Facilitators: Sharon Schmickle and Julia Vitullo-Martin

Monday, 10 November

- 0900 Recap of day 1; 'Journalism Challenge'**
- 0930 Group exercise: Imagining a model smart village**
Facilitator: Richard Hayhurst, Smart Villages
- 1030 Break**
- 1100 Journalism brainstorming and mentoring**
Facilitators: Sharon Schmickle and Julia Vitullo-Martin
- 1300 Lunch**
- 1400 Final Presentation – Seeing is believing**
Francine Munyaneza, Solar in Rwanda
- 1530 Conclusion**
Richard Hayhurst, Smart Villages

ANNEX 2: PRESENTATIONS



Sharon Schmickle

How can data be used to drive stories about energy access?

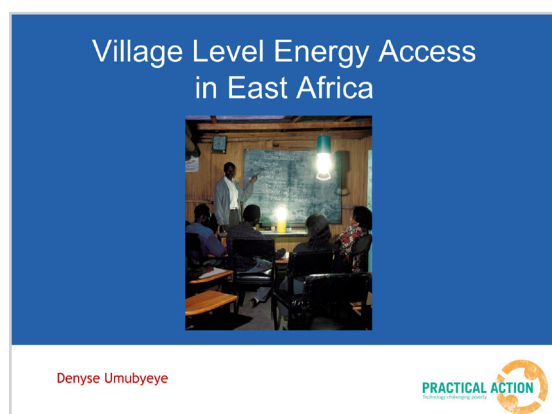
<http://bit.ly/1FLheI2>



Sharon Schmickle

Writing stories about energy access, how can we make the subject engaging?

<http://bit.ly/19TZvkw>



Denyse Umubyeye

Characterising the energy access situation in East Africa.

<http://bit.ly/1EXKKrj>

ANNEX 1: ARTICLES

Journalists participating in the Media Dialogue were requested to submit copies of any relevant stories they produced and filed in the future, which we undertook to publicise further on our website and in our newsletter. The following three pieces are sample of the output produced by participants in the weeks following the Dialogue workshop, as a result of their discussions.

Kenya moves to rein in solar cowboys



Stephen Mutua, a trained solar technician and solar entrepreneur, works in the Eastern Kenya county of Mwingi. THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION/Maina Waruru

Ojuang's only choice for power was to have a solar photovoltaic (PV) system installed.

But "the task was not easy," remembers the father of three. "The technicians my contacts referred me to displayed little knowledge of PV systems and were basically electricians keen to earn an extra shilling at the expense of quality work."

In a country where only 23 percent of homes are connected to the electricity grid, according to a 2010 World Bank report, solar energy is increasingly seen as an affordable and reliable source of power.

The government is so confident in the benefits of solar that it has introduced incentives to encourage uptake, including removing duty on solar panels.

Lack of skilled technicians

But the growth in solar power use in Kenya has been stunted by a lack of skilled labour. There are only 120 technicians in the country who are licensed to install solar electrical systems - not nearly enough to cope with the business available.

To help feed Kenya's need for qualified solar-energy technicians, the government has launched a training program that aims to create jobs and give clean energy a boost.

Author: Maina Waruru

Publisher: Thomas Reuters Foundation

Date: 18/11/2014

Region: Kenya

Language: English

URL: <http://tmsnrt.rs/1HUtGTV>

When he retired from his publishing job in Nairobi six years ago, Joseph Ojuang moved to a house he had built in Siaya, western Kenya.

The home was more than 30 kilometres (18 miles) away from the nearest electrical grid, so

At the same time, it is working to weed out those who only want to make a quick buck out

of the country's fledgling move to renewable, experts say.

Run in partnership with the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the solar training programme will offer 100 trainees grants of up to \$100 each to help cover the cost of a course at one of seven selected government-owned technical schools across the country.

Beneficiaries will have two weeks of intensive training, after which they will have to apply for licensing from the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC).

"Interest from potential candidates has been huge," said Cliff Owiti, head of the Kenya Renewable Association, an independent non-profit also partnering in the programme.

According to Pavel Oimeke, the ERC's director for renewable energy, by mid-2015 the country should have around 580 certified technicians, including those trained by the government and others who have gotten qualified on their own.

That number should grow to about 1,000 by 2016, he said.

Huge solar potential

According to Oimeke, the potential for solar energy in Kenya remains relatively untapped, with the current installed capacity exploiting only 1 percent of the power that the country could generate.

But the government knows that if it is going to motivate more Kenyans to install solar-energy systems in their homes and businesses, it not only needs to increase the number of trained technicians but also make it harder for untrained installers to undercut them.

"We had a big problem with untrained people undertaking works for clients. But over the past

two years we have moved in strongly to regulate this growing field of renewable energy," Oimeke said.

According to the ERC director, regulations introduced by the body in 2012 state that anyone installing, manufacturing, importing, designing or distributing solar PV systems must be licensed by the commission.

And in what Oimeke calls a milestone in regulating the sector, the commission has been working with the National Industrial Training Authority (NITA) to develop the first-ever national curriculum for student solar-energy technicians.

New regulations have also been put in place to tackle the sale and use of poor quality materials and equipment, whether made locally or imported, he said.

Convincing local authorities

One of the biggest remaining challenges, says Oimeke, is convincing local authorities to follow the ERC's lead. Too many are turning a blind eye to licensing when it comes to hiring people to install solar-street lighting projects being implemented around the country, he said.

"This goes against the law," Oimeke said. "You simply cannot award any contracts involving solar PV systems to persons or companies not licensed by the ERC. We need county governments to stop this."

Tanzania scales up rural power supplies



COMFORTING: The government has been trying to fulfill its pledge to extend electricity to as many people as possible.

Author: Leonard Magomba

Publisher: East African Business Week

Date: 15/11/2014

Region: Tanzania

Language: English

URL: <http://bit.ly/1xk3Hoe>

Tanzania is set to spend over Tsh4.59 billion (\$2.66 million) to connect thousands of villagers with electricity in the Southern Highlands by next year.

Those living in rural Mbinga District in Ruvuma will benefit first when this phase is underway.

This is being overseen by the Rural Energy Agency (REA) as the Rural Electrification program.

The government plans to connect all off-grid villages around the country with electricity, the Deputy Minister for Energy and Minerals, Dr Charles Kitwanga said last week in Dodoma.

“Over 1,100 people will be connected with electricity next year through the Rural Energy Agency,” he replied to a query in Parliament.

He said the project which is implemented under the LTL project, started in October, last year, and is expected to be completed in June 2015 at a total cost of Tsh4.59 billion (\$2.66 million).

Kitwanga said the project involved construction of an 80-kilometre, 33-kilowatt power line and installation of 17 transformers.

He said the government has been trying to fulfill all its pledges for power connections, depending on the availability of financial resources.

The majority of pledges had so far been implemented and a good number of people were now

connected with electricity compared to a few years back.

“At the moment Tanzanians who had access to electricity stood at 36%, up from only 10% registered in the year 2010,” he said.

He said the government had been taking various measures aimed at increasing the percentage of people connected with power. Like the rest of the EAC countries, Tanzania electricity supply has lost ground to the demand side.

He said the government had come up with the Power System Master Plan (PSMP) that aimed at increasing the number of people with energy.

Commenting about the benefit of rural power in one of the documents released during the Smart Villages workshop, Head of Smart Villages Project, Sir Brian Heap said, “There is no doubt that reliable off-grid electricity provision is central to eliminating energy poverty in rural communities in developing countries.”

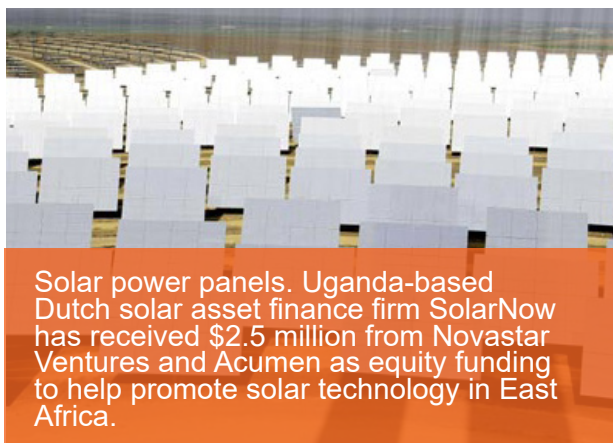
Sir Heap told East African Business Week, “We believe that it can also stimulate technology leapfrogging and transformational improvements in education, health, economic activity and productivity.”

He said in effect, enabling the growth of ‘Smart Villages’ as a sustainable alternative to urbanization.

According to Kitwanga, Tanzania is implementing power projects under the REA Phase 2.

He added that areas to benefit from the project in the district included Mbagamao, Dee Paul Secondary, Kigonsera, Kitanda, Kigonsera Mission, Lusonga, Mkumbi, Utiri, Mkumbi mission, Mkako, Kihaha, Masumuni and Matarawe.

Solar firm receives \$2.5m to light up EA



Author: Isaac Khisha

Publisher: The East African

Date: 18/10/2014

Region: Uganda

Language: English

URL: <http://bit.ly/1xCvLoC>

In summary

The Mauritius-based Novastar Ventures plans to invest \$80 million in equity and near-equity investments in East Africa in early-stage businesses serving the mass market and with the potential of growing rapidly.

Uganda-based Dutch solar asset finance firm SolarNow has received \$2.5 million from Novastar Ventures and Acumen as equity funding to help promote solar technology in East Africa.

Providing a range of modular 50-500 watt solar home systems and direct current appliances through a franchise model to mainly rural customers in Uganda, the Fund will also help the firm expand into Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda next year.

SolarNow chief executive Willem Nolens said the firm plans to focus on fulfilling the growing demands of its customers and expand to underserved areas of the country, as well as into other East African markets.

“Our business has high working capital demands. The more we sell, the more money we need,” Mr Nolens said.

Renewable energy products

He said the funding from the two equity firms is an acknowledgment of SolarNow’s business model, and a shared assessment of the future plans in bringing together affordability and distribution of renewable energy products to consumers.

Duncan Onyango, East Africa director at Acumen, said they are excited over SolarNow’s investment aimed at improving the lives of rural households in Uganda.

The Mauritius-based Novastar Ventures plans to invest \$80 million in equity and near-equity investments in East Africa in early-stage businesses serving the mass market and with the potential of growing rapidly. The US-based Acumen has invested more than \$87 million in 81 companies across Africa and South Asia.

SolarNow Services (U) Ltd, a subsidiary of SolarNow BV from the Netherlands, distributes solar energy solutions to off-grid customers with an 18-month credit facility.

So far, the firm has distributed more than 5,000 solar systems across Uganda, and plans to extend its network to the 112 districts countrywide by end of next year.



SMART VILLAGES

New thinking for off-grid communities worldwide

This publication was made possible through support from the Cambridge Malaysian Education and Development Trust and the Templeton World Charity Foundation. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Cambridge Malaysian Education and Development Trust or the Templeton World Charity Foundation.

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