

# Indian investors to light up villages with solar

By John Odyek

A number of Indian investors have expressed willingness to light up villages and set up solar pumps to supply clean water to villages across Uganda.

This was during the closure of the two-day Confederation of Indian Industry-EXIM Bank Regional Conclave on India and East Africa. The function took place at the Speke Commonwealth Resort Munyonyo, Kampala.

"We should put more emphasis on drinking water and solar energy for lighting and reading, so that people can have a decent life. We should use the sunlight power God has given us. In villages people do not have clean drinking water, but we can drill and pump clean water from underground," Er Balbir Singh, the chief executive officer of Super Solar Energies, said.

Singh said his company can set up mini solar power plants and distribute the power in villages. He explained that if a village has about 5,000 people, it can cost about \$2.5m (sh9b) setting up a 1MW solar power plant. He added that setting up a solar water pump in a similar village could cost the same amount.

He noted that the rural folk can draw water directly from the tank where water is pumped and piped water can be distributed in the village. He said NGOs, governments and financial agencies such as the World Bank could fund these investments which can improve the lives of rural folk.

Prime Minister Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, who closed the meeting, said pioneer foreign investors in Uganda who included Indians faced many challenges, but they were successful.

"If people built successful businesses without mobile phones, Internet and modern methods what is stopping us from being successful today?" he asked.

Rugunda welcomed the donation of two 38-seater Ashok Leyland buses from Ashok Leyland Company. The two buses were donated to the army's Senior Command and Staff College, Kimaka in Jinja.

Rugunda called for the speedy implementation of regional projects. "Since we use modern methods we should ensure investment cycles do not take too long. We should eliminate delays and red tape in the cycle of doing business because it affects job creation," Rugunda said.

Brig. Proveen Kairy VSM, a security advisor sponsored by the Indian government to facilitate training of military students at Kimaka, said every year they have 40 military officers coming from different parts of Africa with the majority coming from the Uganda People's Defence Forces.

Ravi Shanar, the High Commissioner of India to Uganda, said India has decided to invest heavily in solar energy and technology. Shanar said India also wants to increase use of ICT in government, which Uganda can gain from.



Ruhakana Rugunda

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