

Letters

LETTERS

On fulfilling universal electricity access by 2030?



On December 5, 2023, the Government of Uganda through the country's Energy minister, Ms Ruth Nankabirwa, launched Uganda's Energy Transition Plan (ETP) at COP28 in Dubai. The launch was supposed to signal Uganda's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 and ensuring universal access to electricity by 2030.

The ETP was launched at a time when Uganda was characterised by energy poverty, with access to grid electricity standing at 20 percent in 2024 and only 15 percent of Uganda's population having access to clean cooking technologies.

The ETP was also launched at a time when various countries across the globe are seeking to transition their energy and economic systems from being dependent on fossil fuels including oil, gas, and coal to renewable energy sources such as wind and solar, as well as lithium-ion batteries among others.

During the launch, the minister noted that the plan predicts that universal access to clean cooking in Uganda can avoid around 50,000 premature deaths from indoor air pollution per year by 2030 and save households two hours per day in collecting firewood. She added that it also predicts a reduction in the country's net greenhouse gas emissions by up to 17 Mt CO₂-eq by 2030, with potential to fund multiple projects via carbon credits.

However, in Uganda today 25 million people or 55 percent of the population have no access to electricity. Most of the people with access are concentrated in Kampala and in the central region where grid infrastructures are the most developed. Around six million of those with access do not reach the IEA's basic bundle of minimum level of electricity services. This low level of access is in contrast with the high natural hydro, geothermal and solar resources in the country, and the already existing electrical overcapacity.

Currently, around 1.4 GW of electrical capacity is available but cannot be fully used as it is unable to reach the final consumers due to a lack of proper transmission and distribution infrastructures.

Therefore, as Uganda plans to achieve universal access to electricity and clean cooking by 2030, there is a need to work with financial institutions to develop standard models for accessing financing to streamline investments for grid extensions and off-grids systems, including models like mass procurement of solar home systems.

In the ETP, Uganda will need to attract investment for a wide array of energy and related plans, ranging from power generation and electricity access, to supporting consumer spending on efficient stoves, appliances and electric cars, among many other initiatives. This means that the country will need to prioritise and commit to significant annual investments of around \$850 million per year if it is to achieve universal access to electricity and clean cooking by 2030, in line with UN Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG7).

In conclusion, therefore, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD) needs to reinforce institutions working on clean cooking, and strengthen their mandate to engage across agencies to address gaps in clean cooking.

Furthermore, it needs to develop an implementation plan that incorporates best practice on clean cooking programs, including peer-to-peer learning, awareness campaigns, mass procurement, and building up local supply chains.

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