Solar mini-grid lights up Lamwo township

Leader say at least 2,500 households and over 100 businesses in Paloga Sub-county are using solar electricity.

BY TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

Businesses and communities in Paloga Township, an urban centre in Paloga Sub-county, Lamwo District, are reaping big, following the establishment of a multi-billion solar mini-grid that was commissioned in the area, more than three years ago.

Sources said at least 2,500 households and more than 100 businesses in the area are using solar electricity.

In an interview, Mr Denis Onyong, the Apyeta Village chairperson, explained that besides connections, the beneficiary villages have been fitted with solar-powered street lighting and improved water services through pumping and purification.

"Power from the mini-grid is a big boost; farmers can now add value to their crop produce and sell it at better prices. It has also created more employment opportunities because new businesses like welding workshops established are now employing and training our youth in hand skills," Mr Onyong said.

Built at Shs18billion, between July 2016 and June 2023, the mini-grid was set up to offer a viable solution since it can supply reliable and grid-like electricity in most villages where grid extension is unaffordable.

The construction of the facility was conducted with funding from the European Union as one of the components of the Development Initiative for Northern Uganda (DINU).

Today, 25 villages on Lamwo District, including refugee-hosting areas, have access to energy service through solar renewable energy-powered mini-grids, including schools and health centres.



Engineers conduct electrical tests at the Paloga off-grid solar plant in Lamwo District during a routine maintenance exercise last October. PHOTO/TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

The villages where the mini-grids have been installed are Tumanum B (Agoro Sub-county), Paloga Central, Ogili TC, Potika, Kapeta, Apwoyo TC, and Lelapwot West, among others.

In an interview, Mr Anthony Akera, the Paloga LC3 chairperson, told the *Daily Monitor* that: "Since 2022, there has been a rapid expansion of businesses in Paloga; tens of grain milling machines, milk storage facilities, and upscale recreational points have been set up because there is adequate electricity."

Mr Akera said several fabrication plants have also been set up in the area. "We used to buy doors fabricated from Kitgum Town because welding workshops were not here because of a lack of electricity, but once the mini-grid became operational, many have been set up lately," he added.

He noted that establishment of the mini-grid has now enabled Paloga Sub-county administration to realise a revenue growth of more than 300 percent over the past three years.

"Before, our revenues ranged between Shs2.5m and Shs3m per month, but now, we collect between Shs8m and Shs11m," Mr Akera said, attributing it to influx of businesses that have been connected to the mini-grid.

Also, schools and health facilities in the town have been connected to the mini-grid.

"Neighbouring schools like Paloga PS, Global PS, including Paloga Health Centre IV, now tap power from the grid," Mr Joseph Okwera, a resident of Pa[illegible] Town Board, said.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

In November 2021, the State minister for Energy, Mr Sidronius Okaasai Opolot, commissioned 25 mini-grids installed under the Promotion of Mini-Grids for Rural Electrification Project at Paloga Sub-County headquarters, Lamwo District. The mini-grids, powered by solar energy, were commissioned to consolidate the stability of Northern Uganda, eradicate poverty, and strengthen the foundations for sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development.

"This solar-powered mini-grid is proof that renewable energy technologies are cost-effective compared with grid extension in addressing both the energy demand of millions of underserved people across the country and combating global warming," Mr Sisto Ochen, Lamwo District chairperson, said last week.

The electricity generated by mini-grid can be used for domestic use, such as lighting, cooking, and for commercial purposes, such as milling, welding, and refrigeration, he stated.

Slightly over a half (53.4 percent) of households in Uganda have access to power (25.3 percent from grid and 28.1 percent from solar), according to the 2024 Census report by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics.

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