

UK, UN organisations partner to enhance solar energy access

by Faridah Kulabako

The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) has partnered with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) to support the Uganda Solar Energy Association (USEA) to increase access to clean solar energy in Uganda.

The agreement signed on Tuesday will see DFID and UNCDF support off-grid solar industry-led advocacy and co-ordination to facilitate increased access to clean, reliable and affordable energy, especially to poor and most vulnerable Ugandans.

With DFID's support, the UNCDF CleanStart programme will assist USEA to build on the work already achieved through the Uganda Energy Africa Compact.

The CleanStart Programme seeks to incentivise renewable energy dealers. It supports low-income consumers to transition to cleaner and more efficient energy.

The Ugandan Government and the UK signed the Uganda Energy Africa Compact in 2016 to improve access and innovation in the solar energy market and facilitate energy access for all by 2050.

UNCDF CleanStart will work with USEA to review and reform its governance and management structures and build capacity in USEA to provide members with value-added services, such as market intelligence, big data customer research and business development training for solar companies and other industry stakeholders.

These activities are expected to ultimately raise the industry's capacity to better serve the many Ugandans that still do not have access to electricity.

Vincent Wierda, the UNCDF CleanStart Programme manager, said the agency will use its experience in energy financing in Uganda, research



The British High Commissioner to Uganda, Peter West, launches DFID's support to the Uganda Solar Energy Association, in partnership with UNCDF on Tuesday. The increasing demand for electricity makes such off-grid technologies an ideal solution for electricity access

and development and capacity building in data analysis to ensure USEA puts the right structure and tools in place to advance the off-grid market for all.

This partnership is expected to last 15 months, until early 2019.

The head of DFID Uganda, Jennie Barugh, said: "I am proud that the UK is at the forefront of this energy transformation that enables the less privileged to access clean energy to improve their lives. A well-functioning USEA will lead to an increase in the number, performance and investment in solar home system companies.

He added: "Combined with other initiatives of the 'on and off-grid small scale renewable energy in Uganda' project, this work will contribute to

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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improved clean energy access for over 200,000 households and businesses."

The USEA interim chairman, Emmy Kimbowa, said the private sector needs co-ordination and joint

advocacy to facilitate growth and increased access to off-grid energy solutions.

"Uganda is a model country when it comes to having a dynamic solar market led by the private companies. That is why we are excited about the opportunity to rebuild USEA into an industry that better serves its members and ultimately our customers," Kimbowa said.

The numbers

While Uganda targets to achieve a national electrification rate of 30% by 2020, there is only about 15% access to grid electricity and just a few access solar energy currently. Over half of the rural population is reported to be still using kerosene

lamps to light their homes.

Electricity generation capacity in Uganda currently stands at 870MW, while peak requirements are estimated at about 550MW, yet the demand is said to be growing by 10% annually.

The increasing demand for electricity makes off-grid technologies, such as solar, an ideal solution to accelerate access to electricity.

According to Wierda, achieving energy access for all is crucial to Uganda's developing economy and improving people's livelihoods.

Lack of energy access is said to be stifling economic growth, with power outages costing countries like Uganda 1% to 2% of the annual gross domestic product.