

as well as fish, chicken and dairy products.
"The coffee is now flowering at 12 months instead of 18 because of drip irrigation,"

agencies and neighbouring communities on productive use of farm land for wealth creation.

The four-acre model is a household income formula to eradicate poverty through rational and frugal use of space available for farming

on security and high value crops such as vegetables.

The President also has a farm in Kisozi, Gomba district.

Sh2.2 trillion set aside for free rural power connections

By Samuel Sanya

Ever since Scovia Auma, a single mother from Kanoni village in Gomba district got free electricity connection under the grid based output aid project, her children's grades have improved.

With better lighting, Auma's children study for longer hours.

Under the Rural Electrification Agency's grid based output project, over 100,000 households in various parts of the country received free electricity connections.

The Government has now secured more funding to connect every Ugandan home and small business free of charge, starting June.

This follows the approval of the 10-year (2018-2027) Electricity Connections Policy by Cabinet in January, according to Godfrey Turyahikayo, the Rural Electrification Agency (REA) executive director.

REA has already secured

The electricity connections policy aims at increasing access to electricity from the current 20% to 60% by 2027 in the country

\$90m (about sh333b) from the Government and partners such as the World Bank, the French Development Agency, the African Development Bank, KFW and GIZ to start free connections in June.

In total, REA expects to get \$540m from the Government and donors towards the free connections project.

Parliament has approved an additional \$200m that will be borrowed from the Chinese Exim Bank in the next two months. An additional \$300m from the World Bank is also expected towards the project.

How to get connected

In order to get free connection, one must first ensure that

their house is properly wired. Households and small businesses that cannot afford wiring costs will be given free ready boards that can support about two bulbs and a single power socket.

Businesses that require a three-phase electricity line will be required to pay for their wiring and connection fees and then get their money paid back through the tariff.

"We are first targeting Ugandans who live next to an electricity pole, but are unable to connect. We will then connect those that need one pole to their house or business," Sylvia Birungi, the principal connections officer at REA, said.

"We will carry out grid expansion, distribute poles and transformers and connect entire communities. We are also looking at upgrading some of the medium voltage transformers as government continues to provide medium voltage and high voltage transformers," she added.

Birungi said Ugandans who need the free connections will go to offices of Umeme, Kilembe Investments Limited, Bundibugyo Energy Co-operative Society, Pader-Abim Community Multi-Purpose Electric Co-operative Society Limited, Kyegegwa Rural Electricity Co-operative Society, Kalangala Infrastructure Services, WENRECO and the Uganda Electricity Distribution Company Limited, among others.

The Government will pay 30% of the estimated connection costs to the service providers upfront to enable them purchase and store materials and then complete payments once connections

are successfully completed. It takes approximately \$160 (about 560,000) to make a single connection, so service providers will pocket at least \$48m (about 178b) every year.

Free connections

REA expects that with the funding, at least 300,000 households will get free connections every year for the next 10 years.

Turyahikayo said it would be possible to achieve up to 500,000 new connections each year once all planned funding partners get on board.

The electricity connections policy aims at increasing electricity access from the current 20% to 60% by 2027 in Uganda. The Government's Vision 2040 target is to achieve 80% access to electricity.

Turyahikayo said the electricity connections policy had been developed to make it possible for low income Ugandans to get electricity connections.

"We have put infrastructure

in place and have provided transformers to communities, but only 10% to 20% of the people have electricity after five years. That was not giving value to the infrastructure that we are giving. We were not realising the intended economic and social value," he said.

"After looking through a number of options, we arrived at the conclusion that we had to provide free connections to achieve our objective of economic and social transformation," Turyahikayo said.

"Usually, we want to make a return on what we invest but in this case, without people connected, there is no financial return," he said.

In addition to extending electricity to over 287 sub-counties around the country, REA intends to extend power to homes and businesses that are not close to the electricity grid using stand-alone solar power units and solar and hydro power mini-grids.