

Press release: British expertise boosts innovative solar technologies across Africa

- British expertise to help small UK and African energy businesses grow
- Two thirds of sub-Saharan African population has no access to electricity

UK aid is supporting the growth of innovative solar technology companies which are providing clean energy to off-grid households in Africa, Minister for Africa Harriett Baldwin announced today (Wednesday 29th August) as she accompanied the Prime Minister on a visit to Nigeria. This will improve the lives of over 11 million people while boosting UK business opportunities.

Approximately two-thirds of the population across sub-Saharan Africa have no access to electricity. Innovative off-grid technology such as pay-as-you-go household solar systems can provide this much-needed modern energy.

This technology empowers women by reducing their need to travel for energy, helps children study in the evening, boosts small businesses which can operate more efficiently with reliable power, and reduces the need to use dangerous, polluting fuel sources such as kerosene.

To boost opportunities for businesses in this growing market, UK aid, through the Department for International Development, is:

- supporting early stage businesses in Africa to design innovative household solar technologies and break into new markets through the Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund. This programme will help up to 1.5 million poor people in sub-Saharan Africa access clean, affordable modern energy by 2022, with a focus on women and children;
- using British expertise to help governments break down barriers to the growth of solar companies in Africa and lay the groundwork in 14 partner sub-Saharan African countries for innovative solar companies to grow, increasing access to modern, clean energy for 10 million people; and
- scaling up its support to the Energise Africa impact investment platform, to help 1,500 new UK small investors provide the critical finance needed to connect 125,000 more African people to affordable, reliable and clean solar energy.

Minister for Africa Harriett Baldwin said:

Africa's solar industry is vibrant and exciting, full of potential to transform the lives of millions of people who are still living off the grid.

By sharing British expertise we're allowing this industry to flourish, helping the poorest to access clean, sustainable energy,

while also opening up opportunities for UK business and investment. This is a win for African countries and a win for the UK.

The innovative solar sector is vibrant and booming in some areas of Africa, but the growth of companies is often restricted by market barriers such as a lack of access to finance and business support, high tariffs on essential components, lack of infrastructure for mobile payments, and lack of appropriate disposal facilities.

Enabling these companies to grow is not only benefitting some of the poorest households with life-changing access to energy, but creating jobs and boosting local economies to trigger long-term sustainable economic development.

Strengthening the solar market in Africa is opening up opportunities for the UK's own pioneering solar industry to access the untapped potential offered by African markets. Proven examples of this include Sollatek, a Slough-based firm which, working in partnership in Africa and with investment via Energise Africa, has become one of the leading providers of specialist solar electronic equipment in East Africa.

- A new round of the Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund (AECF, £16 million) is being launched, providing grants, loans and business development support to small businesses creating innovative household solar products and appliances in five sub-Saharan African countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Somalia, Senegal and Ethiopia).
- This will help up to 1.5 million poor people in sub-Saharan Africa access clean, affordable modern energy by 2022, with a focus on women and children.
- Support to DFID's Clean Energy Technical Assistance Facility (£15.5 million) will work across 14 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria and Kenya, to create a regulatory environment in which solar companies can flourish, increasing access to modern energy for 10 million poor people, with a focus on women and children.
- An additional £1.6 million of capital to the Energise Africa platform will work alongside partners such as Virgin Unite to crowd investment from 1,500 new small UK investors, and connect at least 125,000 more people to clean, reliable energy – allowing the programme to reach a total of 325,000 people.
- In addition to household systems, the programme will also help provide power to schools, hospitals, and farmers – boosting vital services and economies. The funding can be returned and used over and over again, which means its impact will grow further for many years to come, maximising value for money for the UK taxpayer.
- Energise Africa to date has raised £4.8 million from 1,000 investors to help more than 195,000 people in Africa access affordable solar energy.