

Sustainable News – 25th November, 2016

Solar Panels are beginning to build their numbers

Power Africa Coordinator Andrew M. Herscowitz has announced \$4 million in new investments in eight companies that are revolutionizing household power across Africa through the ‘Scaling Off-Grid Energy: Grand Challenge for Development.’

“The Grand Challenge for Development is designed to support innovators like these eight companies who are scaling up their inventions,” said Herscowitz. “The options for powering your home and business are changing and these types of innovations will create opportunities to transform the power sector in homes across the planet.”

The Grand Challenge is a \$36 million initiative by Power Africa, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) and independent charity, Shell Foundation.

It aims to empower entrepreneurs and investors in achieving 20 million connections to provide households in sub-Saharan Africa with clean, modern and affordable access to electricity by 2030.

The Scaling Off-Grid Energy Enterprise Awards are expected to create up to 120, 000 additional connections in off-grid communities by providing seed funding to the eight solar start-ups to support geographic expansion throughout Africa, test new business models and tap into private and public financing.

The awards will enable these companies to expand their home solar power solutions in existing and to new African markets; improve payment and distribution processes; and bring down costs for customers.

The recipients are:

Greenlight Planet – Nigeria, Uganda- expanding sales of low-cost solar home solutions through state of the art pay-as-you-go technology and deep distribution networks.

d.light – Kenya-developing and expanding on software, training materials, and a call center to support a direct distribution model.

Fenix – Zambia- expanding energy access through its expandable solar solutions kits that include options to power phones, lights, radios, televisions, and other appliances.

Orb Energy – Kenya- establishing partnerships with banks and microfinance institutions to finance consumer solar system purchases.

VITALITE – Zambia- distributing pay-as-you-go solar home systems, televisions, solar lamps, and appliances for rural, off-grid communities.

PEG Africa – Ghana- testing new digital payment tools that will help rural customers more easily pay for their solar home systems using mobile money.

Shinbone Labs – Benin, Ghana- directly selling pre-packaged, expandable, low-cost solar kits that can be remotely activated, monitored and, in the future, paid by mobile phones.

Village Energy – Uganda- building a last-mile solar distribution and servicing network in rural Uganda by training young men and women to become technicians and retail shop managers in their communities.

Microsoft, Acumen, and the United Nations Foundation have the Grand Challenge for Development as aligned partners committed to leveraging their investments, capabilities, and networks.

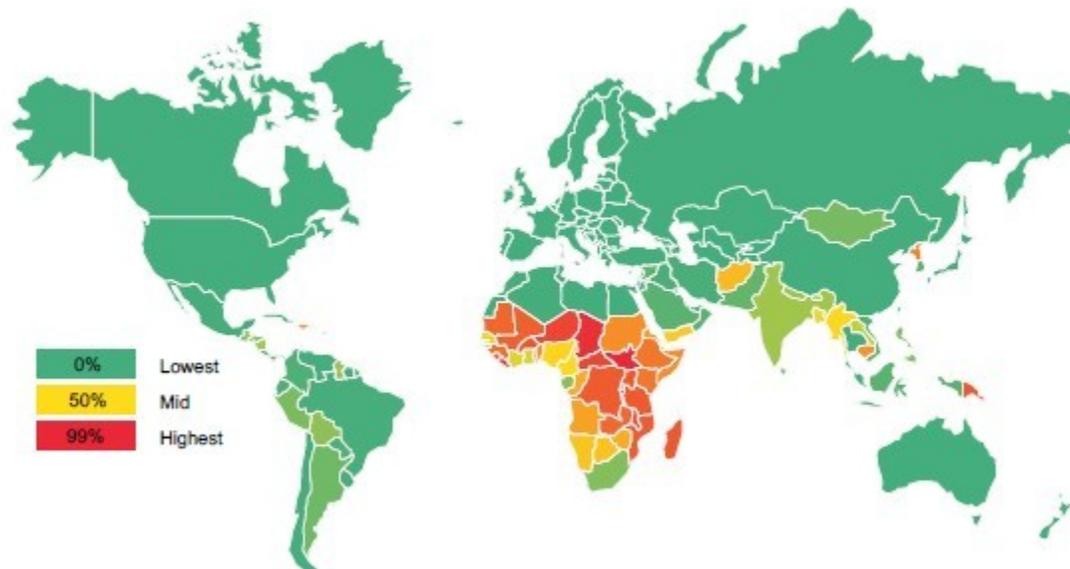
“With aligned partners who are investing in or supporting the off-grid solar sector, we can accelerate the growth of the household solar sector in Africa,” Herscowitz added.

The Scaling Off-Grid Energy Grand Challenge for Development founding partners work together to align existing investments as well as collaborate on new efforts to address market barriers or failures in the African energy access market, and speed the introduction and growth of new, innovative products and services by enterprises and other actors.

The Grand Challenge for Development will initially focus on the household solar market, as the most immediately scale-able and investment-ready segment of the off-grid market.

Off the grid in Africa: Why distributed power is becoming a key source of electricity

November 17, 2016



This map from the Bloomberg report shows the share of the population without grid access, with red being the highest.

About 1.2 billion people live without access to an electrical grid. The overwhelming majority of them -- about 95 percent -- live in Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the [Off-Grid Solar Market Trends Report 2016](#) released earlier this year by Bloomberg New Energy Finance. In certain countries in Africa, less than 20 percent of the population has grid access.

The report, which took an in-depth look at several aspects of the off-grid market, from technology trends to financing trends, projects that by 2020, about one third of all the world's off-grid households will use off-grid solar.

In addition to the large off-grid population in Africa, the report notes that there are other factors that make off-grid power the most practical way to deliver electricity in many parts of the continent, the report notes.

- **Africa's off-grid population is growing.** Despite investments to extend electrical grids to reach more people, the number of people in Africa living off the grid has grown by 114 million since 2000, and that number is growing by several million each year, the report notes. While many households pay cash for their off-grid solar systems, pay-as-you-go solar systems have also contributed to affordability. Off-grid solar costs are also competitive with kerosene lanterns, battery-powered torches, and even candles.
- **Off-grid power is affordable to many low-income households.** While most people living off the grid are poor, the report estimates that tens of millions of households in Africa have an annual income that – while modest – is high enough for them to afford simple solar lanterns as well as some larger solar-powered appliances.
- **Technology and quality is improving.** As the off-grid solar market have grown multiple quality assurance and verification programs have set a baseline level of quality and durability for products being sold.

John

25th November, 2016.