



Why govt should put in place a solar energy policy

ANGELLA TUSIIME > ENERGY

Can solar energy be used to power big scale energy needs in Uganda such as running industries or vehicles? Can solar energy indeed help to deliver energy access for all Ugandans, including those in far away areas by 2030? These are questions that every right thinking Ugandan should be contemplating on.

Just last month, I visited women and youth groups in Kasese, a district with one of the highest number of mini-hydro power plants, and was saddened to see that majority of households had no power.

"Electricity is expensive for people," some members of the groups explained. The other option is solar energy, but that too, is expensive for them. The biggest challenge facing solar adoption in Uganda is affordability. About 38 per cent of the population does not have disposable income to afford solar home systems.

Due to lack of power, majority of households have been forced to clear forests for charcoal and firewood to meet their energy needs. The narrative is not different in urban areas. Statistics show that in Uganda, only about 20 per cent of the population have access to electricity. More than 90 per cent of the population is still dependent on biomass such as firewood and charcoal to meet their energy needs.

It is necessary for every citizen to appreciate the social, environmental, economic and political impacts of depending on biomass for energy needs. In sub-Saharan Africa,

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about 600 million people are currently have no access to electricity (this is about 70 per cent of the population).

At the global, regional and national levels, electricity has been recognised as the social and economic engine of any society. No country in the world has developed and improved the lives of her people without guaranteeing access to sufficient, affordable and reliable clean energy.

Access to sufficient, affordable, reliable and clean energy sources, especially solar energy, has the potential to help the country meet the needs of citizens in many ways, including saving rural women’s time to engage in economic activities, reducing school dropouts, enabling schools to teach for longer hours, driving economic production, conservation of the envi-

ronment and healthy living for her people, among others. It is, therefore, necessary that government focuses on investing in solar energy to enable all Ugandans, including those in far away areas to access power. Solar energy has the potential to deliver energy access for all Ugandans and Africans in general by 2030. Statistics show that in 2009, just 1 per cent of unelectrified sub-Saharan Africans used solar lighting, and today, it is nearly 5 per cent. This number can increase if governments including Uganda’s government increases investments in solar energy.

Off-grid solar home systems are the best option for providing electricity services to scattered homes in rural areas and households with low energy consumption, as they do not require extension of grid lines, which is not only costly, but has become challenging in the Ugandan context due to the difficulties to the difficulties in acquisition of Way Leaves and the Right of Way.

Further more, a solar energy policy should be put in place to guide the distribution and consumption of solar energy equipment. Such a policy will also guide in solar energy-related legislation, incentives to investment, and solar energy taxation among others.

Government should also expedite the review of the 2007 renewable energy policy to provide for off-grid solar energy electrification in addition to providing affordable financing facilities for solar companies.

Ms Tusiime is the Just Energy Transition Project coordinator, African Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO).

29/35 8th Street, P.O. Box 12141
Kampala, Uganda

Phones 0312301100/1
Fax 041232369

Email editorial@ug.nationmedia.com
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bo C. Bichachi