

East Africa's largest solar plant starts operations

SOROTI, Uganda - D'Ujanga Simon, Minister of State for Energy, together with representatives of Access Power, EREN RE and donors have celebrated the inauguration of the solar power plant in Soroti - East Africa's largest solar plant.



Soroti Solar Plant

Made up of 32,680 photovoltaic panels, the new 10 megawatt facility is the country's first grid-connected solar plant and will generate clean, low-carbon, sustainable electricity to 40,000 homes, schools and businesses in the area. The project was developed under the Global Energy Transfer Feed in Tariff ("GET FiT"), a dedicated support scheme for renewable energy projects managed by Germany's KfW Development Bank in partnership with Uganda's Electricity Regulatory Agency (ERA) and funded by the governments of Norway, Germany, the United Kingdom and the European Union. The GET FiT programme helps renewable energy sources become more affordable and therefore more accessible in Eastern Africa.

The US\$19 million Soroti Solar Plant is in part funded by the European Union - Africa Infrastructure Trust Fund through the GET FiT Solar Facility equivalent to 8.7 million euros in the form of result-based premium payments per kWh of delivered electricity.

The project is financed by a mix of debt and equity with the senior debt facility being provided by FMO, the Netherlands Development Bank, and the Emerging Africa Infrastructure Fund (EAIF).

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Uganda's Minister of State for Energy; Ambassadors from the EU, Germany

and the Netherlands; as well as key stakeholders from Access Power and EREN RE; TSK, the contractor which built the plant; FMO and Private Infrastructure Development Group (PIDG) company; The Emerging Africa Infrastructure Fund (EAIF) as financiers; and other key officials.

Ambassador Kristian Schmidt, European Union Head of Delegation to Uganda, said in his speech: "Uganda is a good place to invest in solar energy. The regulatory framework is conducive and Government rightly recognises Uganda's energy future must be renewable. It is great that this is now triggering private sector interest in solar power generation. The European Union is proud that our grant contribution ensures the realisation of the Soroti Solar Plant, and I hope this is only just the beginning for many more to come."

David Corchia, CEO, EREN RE, stated: "Soroti solar plant is an excellent textbook example of how collaboration among key local and international stakeholders can result in the successful execution and completion of such a ground breaking project and in tangible progress in the spread of renewable energy across Africa. We wish to express our gratitude and thanks to the organisations and individuals who made the construction of the largest solar power plant in East Africa possible.

"As a global renewable energy independent power producer we take this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the African power sector and we look forward to replicating this model in many other African countries in other districts in Uganda and across the region."

Oscar Kang'oro, a non-executive director of the Emerging Africa Infrastructure Fund (EAIF) confirms EAIF's commitment to supporting solar and small hydro power projects in Uganda: "EAIF is fully engaged in Uganda and to date financed eight renewable energy projects in the country, including Soroti. I particularly want to congratulate Access and EREN on their vision and enterprise. Our funders at the UK government's DFID, at The Netherlands DGIS, Switzerland's SECO and Sweden's SIDA, see the great benefits that small and renewable generating capacity can bring, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas. This can unlock economic potential, create new economic development opportunities, grow the productivity of public services and improve energy security. Most importantly, the arrival in a district of more dependable and more affordable electricity can transform and enhance the lives of many thousands of men, women and children."

Located on a 33 acre plot of land in Soroti District, the power plant has the potential to increase its net output capacity by a further 20MW of solar energy. At peak construction the plant had over 120 local workers involved, including engineers recruited and trained by Access Power and EREN RE.

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