

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF UGANDA'S SOLAR SECTOR THROUGH THE UGANDA SOLAR ENERGY ASSOCIATION

Developing a strong solar sector requires a strong industry association. The establishment of the Uganda Solar Energy Association (USEA) in late 2015 was a key step in building a strong solar energy market throughout Uganda. However, as a new non-profit association, USEA faced significant organizational and membership challenges that reduced its effectiveness in growing the solar sector. USAID and Power Africa understood these challenges, and in 2017, committed multi-year support to USEA through the Power Africa Uganda Electricity Supply Accelerator (Power Africa Uganda Accelerator). The work progressed from improving USEA governance and operations, to providing USEA members with critical industry capacities, ultimately

establishing USEA as Uganda's premier solar industry partner.

The Power Africa Uganda Accelerator focused on building USEA's governance and operations—by assisting USEA hire a highly capable CEO, expanding the USEA Secretariat (the governing body of USEA), and training USEA leadership on rules, ethics, and business practices. The Power Africa Uganda Accelerator also supported USEA through seconding staff to kickstart planned solar market development activities. Other support included public awareness and promotion, undertaking impact studies, participating in advocacy activities as well as business and technical capacity building. These efforts paid off quickly. In just over a year, USEA membership increased from

75 members (with only 25 of those paying) to over 180 members; USEA rapidly became the de facto voice of the solar industry working with government and other donor partners. When the Ugandan government proposed taxes on specific solar products and batteries for solar systems, USEA intervened to ensure members were exempt from taxes that could harm solar sales.

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USEA CEO Joyce Nkuyahaga noted, *“The support of the U.S. government, through Power Africa, has elevated USEA to a fully functional organization that is able to offer membership value. Our members trust us more and now new firms are eager to join the association. The USAID/Power Africa team has supported us to increase USEA visibility among our membership and the public.”*

Public outreach was critical to increasing solar market sales. The Power Africa Uganda Accelerator supported USEA on a large public awareness campaign: Let's Go Solar. This campaign, conducted in partnership with the United Nations Capital Development Fund, promoted a wide range of solar products in rural areas through 10 nationwide exhibitions. USEA CEO, Joyce Nkuyahaga remarked, *“These exhibitions, and the Let's Go Solar campaign, not only catalyzed USEA's*



USEA CEO Joyce Nkuyahaga.
Photo: USEA.

reputation throughout the country, but also sold and installed over a million off grid solar systems. Solar firms now realize that USEA can help them open new markets and improve their bottom line in Uganda.”

USEA member SoloGrid participated in five of the USEA-supported exhibitions. A company representative noted that, “These activities provided a perfect opportunity to leverage our regional distributor network to build and create market awareness on our company, brand, and new products aimed at productive use. Our demonstration stall attracted visitors from around the region and as a result, our distributor has extended their market area.”

To successfully grow and sustain early stage organizations like USEA, it is necessary to create revenue streams that provide essential services to the solar sector. For example, the solar market in Uganda has been challenged by poor quality products and insufficient skills among small- and mid-sized solar PV companies. To alleviate these challenges, the Power Africa Uganda Accelerator supported the development of a Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for Uganda to ensure that products and workmanship are consistent with internationally



An exhibition participant tests a solar-powered sewing machine at SoloGrid’s booth. Photo: SoloGrid.



A USEA member company booth at Let’s Go Solar highlights solar water pumping. Photo: USEA.

accepted standards so USEA members can satisfy consumer expectations and reach new markets.

In only a few years, with Power Africa Uganda Accelerator support, USEA moved from an underfunded volunteer organization to one with a full-time CEO, six staff, a dedicated office, a fully functioning board, and over 180 fully subscribed and active members. USEA tracked over a million solar products sold from 2017 to half way through 2019. Additionally, USEA is now able to attract support from organizations like the United Nations Capital

Development Fund and the Global Green Growth Institute because it has better governance systems and structures. USEA estimates that it will become a fully self-funded organization by the end of 2020 with membership dues, membership advertising, and other initiatives. The Ugandan government and energy sector recognize USEA as a key solar resource center in the country. USEA’s activities and existence have greatly improved the functioning of the solar subsector in Uganda and provided a route for rural Ugandans to access electricity using solar power.

USEA BY THE NUMBERS

- More than **100%** membership increase with USAID support.
- Over a period of three years, USEA members sold and installed over **a million** solar systems to **a million** households impacting over **5 million** Ugandans.



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