

Congo solar energy market

An international consortium led by Powergrids plans to invest \$100 million in three off-grid solar plants intended to power the cities of Gemena, Bumba, and Isiro, which are located in the country's northern region and currently have no connection to the country's power network.

U.K. government-backed electricity network company Gridworks, Madrid-based developer AEE Power, and Eranove, a French company active in the management of public services and in the production of electricity and drinking water in Africa, have secured three 22-year concession agreements from the Ministry of Hydraulic Resources and Electricity of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for the deployment of a \$100 million off-grid solar project.

The agreements will see the consortium develop, build and operate three large-scale, solar-hybrid, off-grid utilities, Gridworks said in a statement. The plants will supply power to three cities, Gemena, Bumba, and Isiro, which are located in the country's northern region and currently have no connection to the country's power network.

The consortium was selected as a preferred bidder in the frame of a tender held under the umbrella of the Easier Access to Energy (A2E) Initiative, which is a UK government-funded program launched in 2019 to support the DRC Government's mini-grid auction and project preparation process.

The company expects to reach financial close for the three projects within 14 months. The plants are to be built by the Moyi Power joint venture and are expected to be completed within 18 months after the start of construction.

According to the latest figures from the International Renewable Energy Agency, DR Congo only had 20 MW of installed PV capacity at the end of 2020. The country has one of the lowest levels of access to electricity in the world, with only 9% of the population being supplied with power. This percentage in rural areas drops to as far as 1%. It has an installed capacity of just 2.67 GW, of which 2.54 GW comes from hydropower and 135 MW from thermal power.

So how are they going to store enough power for three cities? No battery or series of batteries have ever been built yet to power a city overnight. Adelaide's giant battery can only power Adelaide for around four minutes.

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