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The project by Equatorial Power and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the German international development cooperation agency, aims to solarize at least 27 health care facilities in villages in the West Nile region of Uganda.

These small stand-alone solar power plants with a combined capacity of 150 kWp will be connected to battery storage systems with a total capacity of 1.2 MWh. According to Equatorial Power, the solarization of these clinics is expected to have an impact on the health of 250 people in the West Nile region. With this project Equatorial Power is strengthening its foothold in East Africa.

The company based in Kampala, Uganda, is involved in the electrification of island villages in Lake Victoria. This is particularly the case for the 68,000 km2island of Lolwe. The company, headed by Riccardo Ridolfi, has recently been operating a mini-electricity network there, powered by a 600 kWp solar photovoltaic plant. These installations were set up in partnership with Engie Energy Acces, the subsidiary of the French giant Engie.

The company has also installed mini-grids in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Tanzania. Recently, Equatorial Power agreed with the investment company InfraCo Africa to deploy and operate solar mini-grids in the DRC and Rwanda at an overall cost of $1.7 million.

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When Dennis Halpape and Alexander Krug journeyed to East Africa for the first time with Kassel-based association TOGETHER - Hilfe f?r Uganda [Aid for Uganda] to install a solar system twelve years ago, there was rarely any light to be found for many kilometers in every direction in the region of Kooki after sunset. Today, when it gets dark, there are significantly more lights on in the houses there.

The TOGETHER association is among those that have played a part in this. For more than 20 years, association members and aid workers have been implementing infrastructure projects there for purposes such as installing water supplies and building hospitals and schools for children, as well as vocational schools, all with the help of sponsors. They have also installed solar solutions that supply the new buildings with sustainable solar power. Dennis and Alexander have been there and assisted a few times. The latest trip was scheduled for November 1, 2021.

This trip, however, turned out to be a lot more complicated than on previous occasions. Many months had passed by the time the installation team, comprising Dennis, Alexander and SMA employee Juri Billinger as

well as two engineers from electrical company GreenVesting, finally boarded the plane for Kampala, Uganda. The culprit was COVID-19 - the cause of countless delays all over the world.

"The government in Uganda intends to step up the expansion of renewable energies and energy infrastructure enormously in the coming years," said Alexander, who also used to work at SMA Solar and has been committed to the TOGETHER association for more than ten years. "Part of that will involve significantly increasing the role of PV and other renewable types of energy, such as hydropower. At the same time, the utility grid is being expanded to improve supply."

The Bulyansungwe health center does have a connection to the utility grid, but the unstable grid power was putting it at the mercy of frequent power outages. An energy system with a battery connected now ensures a stable and reliable electricity supply. This required the team of five to install not only the PV modules on the roof but also three Sunny Boy solar inverters, two Sunny Island battery inverters and a 70 kWh battery storage system, which can be relied upon to make electricity available even on days when sunshine is in short supply.

All installations, including repair and maintenance work on PV systems erected on previous occasions, took the five-strong team around two weeks in total. They spent the rest of the time on leisure activities and talking to local people, which left them with plenty more experiences that they are not likely to forget any time soon.

Thanks to the PV system, the vocational school can now operate a smoke-free kitchen, without soot particles dirtying the walls, cabinets and electrical equipment as well as the air itself.