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Ebonyi hails REA, as FG commissions first solar hybrid power plant

Nigeria is gradually improving in harnessing solar energy for development. The emerging renewable off-grid energy sector, being driven by the Rural Electrification Agency, is poised to generate significant impact for Nigerian markets, unserved and underserved communities, teaching hospitals, and institutions of higher learning.

Determined to provide uninterrupted electricity to Nigerian students through off grid power plant, Ebonyi State stood still for the President Buhari-led administration, when on Friday August 2, 2019, Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo led other dignitaries to the commissioning of 2.8MW first solar hybrid power plant at Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (FUNAI) in Ebonyi State.

The multi beneficial project is the first to be commissioned of the 37 universities and 7 affiliated teaching hospitals under its Energizing Education Programme (EEP), which was implemented by Rural Electrification Agency (REA). EEP is a federal government intervention focused on developing off-grid, dedicated and independent power plants, as well as rehabilitating existing distribution infrastructure to supply clean, reliable power and renewable energy.

Over 7,700 students and 1,819 faculty staff at FUNAI will have access to clean reliable energy. This programme will undoubtedly improve the quality of education, research and health care services at the federal universities and teaching hospitals across the country.

The commissioning culminated in the graduation of twenty all female STEM participants who received certificates of completion for renewable energy training, launching of 7.5 KM of solar powered street lights for illumination and safety, as well as a world class training center for renewable energy. FUNAI is one of the Energizing Education Programme Phase 1 university projects that will deliver clean and sustainable energy to nine federal universities and one University Teaching Hospital using solar hybrid and/or gas-fired captive power plants.

The multi-million naira solar power plant under Energizing Education Programme (EPP), which parades state-of-the-art facilities such as 2.8MW first solar hybrid power plant, 8mwh capacity battery bank, inverters and power panel, world class training centre and transformers, is the outcome of collaboration between the Rural Electrification Agency, Ministry of Power, Works and Housing, the Federal Ministry of Environment, the National Universities Commission, and executed by Sterling & Wilson, a solutions and services provider that provides business solutions for solar, wind energy, transmission & distribution, hybrid energy storage and turnkey data centers to organizations across the world.

In his remark, Vice President Yemi Osinbajo said the project being commissioned would provide sustainable decentralized energy to the entire campus, improve education and create a better university experience for both students and staff.

"Gone are the days when students read at night with candles, lanterns and torches. Our young people are willing to learn and they have great aspirations. It is our duty to aid them to accomplish their goals by providing a conducive learning environment for them. I am glad to be a part of this great feat. As additional components of this remarkable project, we are also commissioning a renewable workshop/training center to promote renewable energy training and installed over 7.5KM of street lighting to enhance security and safety within FUNAI campus. Our students will not only reap the benefits of clean, reliable and affordable electricity, they will also receive hands-on training on



■ L-R Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, Gov. Dave Umahi, Damilola Ogunbiyi and Prof. Chinedum Nwajiuba at the unveiling ceremony



■ FUNAI Solar Panel

renewable energy which can be applied beyond the walls of this university."

Commending the federal government's efforts in promoting and encouraging women, Osinbajo gave kudos to Damilola Ogunbiyi-led administration at the Rural Electrification Agency for initiating female STEM internship under energizing education programme. "We hope that this experience will inspire them to undertake STEM related careers, including careers as engineers and project managers. I want to use this opportunity to congratulate all of them for this great achievement."

Emphasizing the government's assurance not to rest on its oars until electricity becomes accessible to every Nigerian student, Osinbajo stressed that the multi beneficial project under Energizing Education Programme would last for the next four years as the train of progress moves to Bayero University Kano (BUK), Kano State and Federal University of Petroleum Resources Effurun (FUPRE), Delta State, where it would commission other projects over the next couple of months.

In her remarks, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Rural Electrification Agency, Damilola Ogunbiyi, said it was a great pleasure to commission the pioneer project under the Energizing Education Programme. Stating the importance of this laudable project under EEP, Ogunbiyi noted that everyone recognized that the youth are the most important resource for future socio-economic development. "With this in mind and fully aligned with this administration's Next Level Roadmap, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, Muhammadu Buhari, approved the Energizing Education Programme (EEP) which was conceptualized by the immediate past Honorable Minister of Power, Works and Housing, Babatunde Fashola SAN, in 2016."

Ogunbiyi said the project is to provide

reliable, affordable and sustainable power to 37 federal universities and 7 teaching hospitals through solar hybrid and gas-fired power plant solutions, rehabilitation of existing distribution infrastructure, installation of street lights for illumination and improved security within the beneficiary university campuses and construction of training centres to train students on renewable energy technology.

"The first phase which comprises 9 federal universities and 1 teaching hospital, which cut across 6 geo-political zones in Nigeria, is fully funded by the Federal Government. This project here in FUNAI is the first to be commissioned today. EEP projects in Bayero University, Kano State and Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun, in Delta State, will follow with commissioning scheduled within the next couple of months.

"This project is a testament to this administration's commitment to increase energy access, promote the use of renewable energy solutions, improve the quality of education within secure and safe learning environments, empower female students and create jobs. The solar hybrid power plant being commissioned today has a total installed capacity of 2.8MW, which will result in 8,139,208lbs of annual carbon dioxide savings. This is sustainable, clean and efficient energy at its finest; ultimately improving Nigeria's ecological footprint.

"As we step into a future filled with smarter and cleaner technologies, we look forward to continuing to energise education and creating jobs through the remaining phases, for which the REA has secured funds for Phase 2 and Phase 3 from the World Bank and African Development Bank respectively, under the Nigeria Electrification Project."

Expressing his institution's gratitude to the federal government for its kind gesture in providing comfortable environment for students to learn, FUNAI Vice Chancellor, Prof. Chinedum Nwajiuba, said it is a privilege that FUNAI is one of the



■ FUNAI Inverter House

flagship learning institutions paving the way. "You may be unaware, but Ebonyi State used to be among one of the educationally disadvantaged states. But over the last 8 years, since the establishment of this university, we have grown by leaps and bounds. We have developed a learning and research center that offers students the latest in computing technology, new library facilities and a sports village. We are now, also proud to add, the first solar hybrid power plant to be commissioned at a Federal University in Nigeria, in addition to a renewable energy workshop/training centre and streetlights across the entire university that will provide a secure and safe learning environment. We are indeed privileged to be the first set of beneficiaries of the Energizing Education Programme under implementation by the Rural Electrification Agency. It is already transforming the way we teach, learn and live," he stated.

The Permanent Secretary

Federal Ministry of Education, Arc. Sonny Echono, said "It is no secret that good education has the power to change a life. Education empowers minds to be able to conceive good thoughts and ideas. Combined with technologies that continue to develop at breakneck speed, the result is a world that has the want and the means, to learn at scale. The challenge therefore is not just about providing access to education, but also ensuring progress in improving the quality thereof."

For Kalu Oluchi, a 200 level Agriculture undergraduate and Ogah Affiong, a 300 level Mechatronics undergraduate, who were among the twenty all female STEM participants who received certificates of completion for renewable energy training, it was a wonderful experience. According to Ogah, "my participation in the programme has broadened my horizon. I think I have ventured into another area. I see my future in the energy sector."

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