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Regional research, innovation centre launched in Makerere University

Uganda recently unveiled the solar-powered Kayoola bus and Kiira EV car

By TAMALE RAYMOND
Special Correspondent

Makerere University has opened an East African Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency as part of efforts to increase research and innovation in alternative energy sources in the region.

The initiative is supported by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation and the Austrian Development Agency.

Uganda recently launched two innovative energy efficient projects, the solar-powered Kayoola bus and the Kiira EV car.

“The centre is mandated to contribute to increased access to modern, affordable and reliable energy services,” said Irene Muloni, Uganda’s Minister for Energy and Minerals, at the launch of the centre at Makerere University in Kampala.

The increasing threat of global warming is fostering more innovation and investment in cleaner energy alternatives for lighting and transport systems. It is this investment potential that the centre is hoping to tap into.

Innovations and competition have driven down energy costs, as solar photovoltaic and wind energy are now among the cheapest electricity sources in many countries.

While much attention has been paid to Uganda’s prospects of becoming a mass producer of solar-powered buses, the launch of the Kayoola bus has thrust the country into the limelight, with Kiira Motors Corporation saying their product could spur more innovations in the energy industry.

Uganda is keen on promoting the use of solar as it seeks to expand rural electrification. While much emphasis has been given to undertaking huge hydro projects, the government is starting to prioritise solar power projects.

Solar power is not a new concept in the country as a number of households with no connection to the electricity grid have opted to instal solar panels on top of their houses for their power needs.

Other renewable energy sources include bio-mass, wind energy, geothermal and hydropower.

According to the Ministry of Energy, the majority of house-



The Kayoola solar-powered bus. Picture: Morgan Mbabazi

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holds in the country still use charcoal to cook, which creates a huge demand for biomass.

The 2015 energy report for Uganda, commissioned by the World Wide Fund for Nature says the country can meet 100 per cent of its energy needs using renewable power sources by 2050 if there is commitment from the government and sector players.

Energy sources

Ms Muloni said a large number of Ugandans still depend on environmentally destructive energy sources. She hailed the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation and the Australian Development Agency for supporting the centre.

The minister said the project will be a key driver in Uganda and the East African region for the adoption of renewable energy, especially with the increase in the degradation of the environment.

The minister appealed to development partners to continue supporting the East African

AFRICA’S FIRST SOLAR-POWERED BUS

Kiira Motors’ Kayoola prototype electric bus is a solar-powered bus described by its Ugandan makers as the first in Africa.

One of its two batteries can be charged by solar panels on the roof, which increases the vehicle’s 80km range. The makers now hope to attract partners to help manufacture the bus for the mass market. The 35-seater bus is

intended for urban areas rather than inter-city use because of the restrictions on how far it can travel. If it is mass produced, each bus would cost up to \$58,000.

Kiira Motors grew out of a project at Makerere University, which is now a shareholder in the company, and it has also benefited from government funding.

Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency to enable it to achieve its mission and objectives and grow into a vibrant and sustainable organisation.

The Minister urged the College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology at Makerere to involve various stake holders and partners in implementing the centre’s programme in a bid to further strengthen regional co-operation. It will also expand the renewable energy market, which will transform businesses and create more jobs.

The minister also pledged that her ministry will provide the necessary support to ensure that the innovations are of a high standard.

The World Environmental Day was recently celebrated on June 5 under the theme “Go wild for life: Zero tolerance for the illegal wildlife trade.”

East Africa has been pushing for the use of renewable energy and several laws have been effected in partner states like the ban on importation of second-hand cars.

New TB treatment plan gets WHO nod

By VERAH OKEYO
Special Correspondent

A NEW treatment regimen that was recently approved by the World Health Organisation for drug resistant tuberculosis will reduce treatment time and cost by half.

The new plan — comprising tablets and injections — will last between nine and 12 months compared with the current 18 to 24 months.

According to Enos Masini, head of Kenya’s head of the National Tuberculosis, Leprosy and Lung Disease programme, the drugs cost \$1,000 per patient for the entire treatment, which is much cheaper than some treatments that can cost up to \$15,000.

Currently, some patients take as many as eight tablets a day as well as an injection every day.

Multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) is resistant to the two most potent drugs used to treat the disease. Drug-susceptible TB usually takes six months to treat, but MDR-TB can take almost two years to treat with injections and pills and causes horrendous side effects such as psychosis, deafness and liver toxicity.

Death rate

The 2015 World Health Organisation *Tuberculosis Report* said only 48 per cent of MDR-TB patients survive globally. According to the report, 39.5 per cent of those who developed this type of tuberculosis died.

WHO recently tested a standardised treatment regimen in 14 countries that included Rwanda and Burundi.

Based on the success of the studies, the global health body updated its treatment guidelines for drug-resistant TB in May 2016 and included a recommendation on the use of the shorter MDR-TB regimen under specific conditions.



The new treatment regimen includes tablets and injections. Picture: File