

Solar can help address energy challenges in Africa

AMEET SHAH
ENERGY

Solar energy is arguably the cheapest form of energy today across all energy sources. Let's just consider the recent auction prices for the 800 megawatts (MW) solar power plant in Dubai that had the winning bid price of solar energy at a jaw dropping three US cents per kilowatt hour (kWh).

There is no doubt about Africa's thirst for energy with rising incomes across all segments of society and the need to have last mile connections to the grid (by an unforgiving voter class aided by social media) will stretch and challenge energy policy makers to no end in the coming

decade to meet the demands of their constituents.

Solar power solutions offer several important attributes. Today's solar power generation systems have flexibility in size to address different customer segments ranging from utility scale customers to industrial or commercial customers to residential customers who may reside either on-grid or off-grid and most importantly the solutions are now affordable to every customer segment that requires energy.

The paradigm shift in how customers look at solar is creating immense opportunity for the adoption of solar. Affordability in the world of solar is now looked at through the lens of future savings and the not the upfront entry price points because

customers across the spectrum are able to access credit facilities ranging from asset finance to leasing or term loans to purchase these solar systems.

These systems are now being financed across all the customer segments by banking and non-banking financial institutions in Kenya and the trend will pick up in the neighboring countries very soon. These savings are immediate, measurable and greater in value than the amount of repayment back to the lender for such projects.

The speed of solar adoption in East Africa is being catalysed by the availability and continuity of low cost capital for renewable energy and energy efficiency projects by many leading nations who

strive for Africa to have lower carbon footprint than their own.

We encourage the world's leading direct foreign investors (DFIs) to leverage access to a greater set of end users by providing more bi-lateral credit lines to local banks and financial institutions in all countries.

Such bi-lateral financing relationships create a win-win scenario for the end borrower with access to credit from a trusted local relationship and technical validation of the solar system by a third party expert.

The writer is co-founder of Astonfield Solar, which has operations in India, Oman, Mauritius and East Africa.

Devolution lessons from India that will help us



MESHACK JORAM
GOVERNANCE

The devolved system of government in Kenya promised to unlock the social, economic and political fortunes of the country promoting equitable development in all parts of the country. However, this system has been challenged by devolved corporate governance issues from corruption allegations to impeachment of existing leaders. India is the second most populous nation on earth, second only to China with a similar devolved governance structure as Kenya.

The Indian republic has 20 states and seven unions. The states, which can be equated to counties, are led by chief ministers equivalent to our governors. The current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, was formerly the chief minister of Gujarat State from 2001 to 2014. How did Modi end up becoming the Prime Minister of India? Well, partly due to his successful governance of Gujarat State when he was chief minister.

Gujarat State is usually described as the heartland of India's economy. Modi's leadership style branded as "Modi-nomics" forged one of India's most business friendly states. He cultivated a reputation of a clean government that embraced economic competence. India voted him as Prime Minister in large numbers in anticipation that he would uplift the fortunes of India as a whole like he did for the Gujarat State.

Economy

Gujarat is richer and enjoys higher GDP growth, greater intensity of jobs and industry than majority of other Indian states. Like several counties in Kenya, the Gujarat State was not endowed with any significant economic advantages. Poor rainfall made it difficult to scratch out a living out of farming.

However, its climate and geography, combined with a long coastline that favoured international trade, pushed the state towards commerce.

Modi leveraged climatic conditions and geographical positioning of the state to build the state's economy. For instance, he wholly embraced e-government making information technology a key driver in the delivery of government services.

On the other end of the spectrum is Bihar State, one of the poorest states in India. Bihar state has failed to break away from the past in implementing tenure and land reform changes. The state is characterized by acute poverty which can be traced to economic backwardness of both the agricultural and industrial sectors.

Modi spearheaded corporate governance in Gujarat state through increased transparency and accountability of the public resources. This in turn led to improved economies and corporate governance. Kenyan counties can borrow a leaf.

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Letters

The editor welcomes brief letters on topical issues. Opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the editor or publisher. They may be edited for clarity, space or legal considerations. Send via e-mail to bdfeedback2@ke.nationmedia.com

Taskforce should find alternative uses for miraa crop

Unfortunately, formation of a task force on the miraa industry has largely been overtaken by events outside Kenya.

Most countries around the world now classify miraa as an illegal substance.

As this classification is unlikely to change and the former major markets have been permanently lost, the focus should now be on helping farmers to transition to other cash crops and alternative economic activities.

Ogonda

I s miraa the only crop we have in Kenya?

Mark

Explore the possibilities of medicinal miraa. The Israelis are the best in turning plants into medicines. Liaise with the Israelis to explore the possibilities or potential of medicinal miraa

In the US, marijuana was seen as an illegal drug for decades but now things have changed whereby they



Faith Kagendo plucks miraa at Mailli Tatu in Igembe Central last week. PHOEBE OKALL

have found certain ingredients in marijuana that have very effective medicinal purposes by way of extracting the oil from the seeds or growing marijuana to smoke for patients suffering from various illnesses or pain that genetic drugs made from drug companies have failed.

Medicinal marijuana is now a 15 billion dollar industry as many patients have stopped taking synthetic drugs that have severe effects on them and resorted to marijuana.

Marijuana is a plant. All our medicines are plant based. With the exception of those made in labs that

are chemically based and have had drastic effects on patients.

We need to start looking at miraa in the same way. We should have started to explore the potential miraa may have in curing diseases or alleviating pain.

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Some courses taught in universities to blame for youth unemployment

I would like to add to Zackayo Ochieng's contribution in the Monday edition of the *Business Daily* with regard to solving the youth unemployment crisis in the country.

Even as the government works to put in place policies that will help the youth get employment, we also need to ensure that we are raising employable youth. Honestly, it's very saddening that a lot of our graduates today have the skills on paper, but are really not employable. You will get gradu-

ates who cannot send proper emails, mostly because their grammar is just not proper. Just sending a well-done CV and cover letter is a problem. Or you get graduates who cannot articulate themselves well in interviews because they have more sheng than proper English or Kiswahili in their speech.

When I joined campus, I was made to do courses in my first year that I felt were a waste of my precious time. One of those courses was English, the other

was Critical Thinking and yet another was Public Speaking. Today, I only wish I knew what I know now because I would have given those courses the seriousness they deserve.

It is so sad that you would have to hire an intern and spend more time teaching them how to write a properly worded email than actually imparting some more technical skills. I wish our institutions of higher learning would come up with a method of imparting such skills before releasing graduates

into the job market. Simple skills such as email and telephone etiquette, proper time management, simple communication and interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills among others would go a long way in making a candidate more employable.

Organisations and individuals could also come up with well-structured mentorship programmes to help curb this issue. Over to you!
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via email