

INCREASING GRID CONNECTIONS THROUGH PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS: THE ELECTRICITY CONNECTIONS POLICY IN UGANDA

Uganda has one of the lowest electrification rates in the world, so bringing electricity to more than 40 million Ugandans is a critical national and regional objective. Despite significant efforts over the last 20 years, the rate has remained low—around 24%. Although power is available in Uganda, many communities, homes, and businesses do not have access to electricity due to expensive grid connection fees, including high house wiring costs. To fast-track and scale electrification

access, the Rural Electrification Agency (REA), working with several donor organizations including USAID and Power Africa, developed the national Electricity Connections Policy (ECP). Operationalized in November 2018, the ECP removes electricity connection fees (at least \$165) and significantly reduces the inspection charges for customers. To rapidly scale this program, REA needed implementation support to purchase thousands of poles and miles of wires while making ordinary Ugandans aware of the policy and its value.

USAID and Power Africa, through the Power Africa Uganda Electricity Supply Accelerator, provided the Government of Uganda with resources and know-how to scale this program nationally. Embedding advisors in REA to accelerate the procurement of thousands of poles, meters, and ready boards, USAID and Power Africa provided critical logistical assistance to REA. Power Africa also developed business systems to help REA manage and track the hundreds of thousands of new connections made possible by the ECP.



Logistic support was only part of the answer. Convincing ordinary Ugandans to access the benefits of this program was another critical obstacle—and the success of the ECP depended on it. Through REA, the Power Africa Uganda Accelerator created and initiated a public awareness campaign to increase ECP participation.

CONVINCING ORDINARY UGANDANS TO ACCESS THE BENEFITS OF THIS PROGRAM WAS A CRITICAL OBSTACLE.

The messages were simple and effective: **electricity will benefit you and your family. The free connection policy means electricity for all Ugandans.** Funding from the Power Africa Uganda Accelerator enabled REA to promote ECP benefits through continuous television campaigns and targeted advertisements in

A wireman installs an electricity connection on a residence. Photo: Barnabas Mugabi/Power Africa Uganda Accelerator.

newspapers, radio, and on billboards. The results were quite impressive.

When **Steven Onamuna** heard a radio advert promoting the free electricity connections, he visited the area utility company and asked how to obtain a connection for his school in Tuba Parish, Tororo District. *“I applied for the connection because we needed reliable power. We were using solar lanterns at the time and these were easily broken by the children. I paid a small fee for inspection and was promised a pole and a connection. These came a few weeks later. Thanks to the connection, the children can study at night, and we are hopeful that their academic performance will improve as a result.”*

Mercy Achakalong runs a hair salon in the eastern border town of Malaba, in Tororo District. She learned about the ECP from television, noting, *“When I saw the advert on TV, I saw an opportunity that I couldn’t miss. I talked to my friend who knew more about electricity. He encouraged me to go and apply for the connection. After I applied, we were connected in only a month. I thank the government and USAID for making it possible for me to get power.”* With her new connection, Mercy provides uninterrupted services to her clients and can work longer hours to grow her business.



Wiremen install a new pole thanks to the ECP. Photo: Barnabas Mugabil/Power Africa Uganda Accelerator.



Mercy Achakalong using an electric hairdryer at her salon. Photo: Barnabas Mugabil/Power Africa Uganda Accelerator.

To date, the Power Africa Uganda Accelerator-supported advertisements and awareness strategy have reached every region of Uganda, creating awareness for the policy and boosting demand for electricity. Connecting ordinary citizens to electricity is an invaluable service to the country. But there have been other unexpected benefits to the government: the ECP is increasingly recognized as a successful program. This has boosted citizen confidence in the program and reinforced positive views on the government’s commitment to transforming the lives of all Ugandans.

In its first year, the ECP connected more than 200,000 homes and business to electricity. How do we know? The Power Africa Uganda Accelerator assisted REA

develop a national electrification tracking system. This state-of-the-art system provides policy makers and government agencies with timely information on current ECP connections which allows accurate tracking of ECP investments, payments, and progress.

Although the achievements of Uganda’s ECP over the last year are significant, USAID and Power Africa are working with REA to sustain momentum. Increased customer demand has created a backlog of orders requiring large volumes of connection materials. The Power Africa Uganda Accelerator is creating processes that streamline procurement and ensure that ECP initiatives are rolled out successfully so that electricity can help transform the lives of all Ugandans.

ECP BY THE NUMBERS



223,058
electricity connections made (100% on-grid)



1,059,526
people with access to electricity



US\$41,689,526
mobilized



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