

KAMPALA: In order to strengthen the clean energy entrepreneur ecosystem within Uganda and across the East African region, New Energy Nexus and ENVenture have merged to form New Energy Nexus Uganda. **Aneri Pradhan, Founder and Executive Director of ENVenture**, spoke to **Daily Monitor**.

Give a condensed background of ENVenture operations in Uganda?

ENVenture is a social enterprise that incubates and accelerates sustainable clean energy enterprises in Uganda. We do this through partnerships with Community Based Organizations (CBOs). At ENVenture, we have a unique and innovative model that provides financing, where CBOs receive small loans, capacity building training, business coaching and ENVision - a mobile app that enables CBOs to set up their own clean energy businesses. As a social enterprise, our model operates under three main activities:

Finance. Rural distributors lack access to up-front capital to wholesale volume clean energy from suppliers. ENVenture delivers downstream distributor inventory financing to qualified CBOs. Through a unique step-ladder approach unlocking credit at each step, our credit line enables CBOs to purchase from ENVenture's catalogue of high-quality solar products, water filters, fuel briquettes, and improved cook stoves, ensuring they have the means to buy stock from the start.

Capacity building. Since business acumen is low, CBOs tackle the energy access problem in their communities through giveaways and project-based donations. We have three inputs to build the capacity of CBOs to launch sustainable distribution businesses:

Business 101 Boot camp: ENVenture hosts all our partner CBO staff regional entrepreneur boot camps covering topics such as finance, marketing, sales, accounting, and business management.

1:1 Mentorship: We recruit recent graduates of university business programmes to serve as business development fellows.

Network: As CBOs grow more and more experienced in their businesses, the power of the network and community grow stronger.

Technology. We have launched ENVision, an open source simple pictorial mobile app to track inventory, sales, and orders in 2G and edge networks for low-literate sales agents and micro-entrepreneurs. This helps users manage their sales and performance effectively and provides real-time product updates to help monitor and measure success.

I understand New Energy Nexus and ENVenture are merging to form New Energy Nexus Uganda. What does this merger mean to company operations?

Yes, we are merging with New Energy Nexus! New Energy Nexus is a non-profit international organization that supports clean energy entrepreneurs with funds, accelerators and networks. The organization started in California and also operates programs in New York, China, India, Southeast Asia, and now East Africa. New Energy Nexus strives towards an abundant world with a 100% clean energy economy for 100% of the population in the shortest time possible. Both of our organizations are deeply driven by the desire to support diverse entrepreneurs to create sustainable enterprises and create energy access for all.

While leveraging on New Energy Nexus' expertise in the sector, ENVenture will play a critical leadership role in strengthening the clean

New Energy Nexus and ENVenture merge operations



MISSION

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energy entrepreneur ecosystem within Uganda and across the East African region.

What are the main objectives of the merger?

The main objective of the merger is to increase the energy access footprint in Uganda and East Africa.

How will this be achieved?

Well, through business incubation and strategic partnerships at the grassroots level that tackle clean energy challenges, cleantech manufacturers, funders and academic institutions. The merger will enable New Energy Nexus to extend its support in East Africa and highlight the pivotal role both organisations play in accelerating the success of small to medium businesses. This work impacts greatly on the lives of people in Uganda that lack access to electricity and modern fuels for cooking.

How will the merger help people with ideas of clean energy but lack finances?

Providing financing to entrepreneurs with innovative ideas for clean energy solutions is what defines New Energy Nexus and ENVenture's existence. We need \$52 billion in capital to achieve universal energy access. Needless to say, there is an enormous deficit in the amount of capital being provided to clean energy entrepreneurs, especially ones of Ugandan descent.

At ENVenture, we have been providing much needed long-term loans to local grassroots entrepreneurs and New Energy Nexus has already catalyzed millions for energy entrepreneurs with the vision to scale up. The merger will enable hundreds of Ugandan entrepreneurs access to New Energy Nexus' resources, toolkits and best practice guides, such as *Accelerate This! A Super Not Boring Guide*

to Startup Accelerators and Clean Energy Entrepreneurship. Together we will accelerate the success of local distributors and manufacturers with financing and access.

What partners do you work with to ensure that rural people access clean energy?

Our primary partners are CBOs operating in different regions of Uganda. Uganda has more than 10,000 registered CBOs. Our innovation lies in tapping into this powerful network to reach rural consumers at the base of the pyramid. ENVenture's unique position is that it does not only focuses on micro-entrepreneurs, but finances small and eventually medium local enterprises that specifically cater to the base of the pyramid.

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How does a person access your products?

We recommend people source our products from our 100 plus-strong network of CBO partners that are selling these products across the rural areas of Uganda.

What other products does ENVenture deal in?

The major cleantech products we work with are improved cook stoves, solar, non-electric water filters and briquettes. It is our plan to expand this line of products to include different innovations in energy such as solar water pumps that meet international standards, while also creating social value in the local communities.

ENVenture is facilitating grassroots organisations to have the means in acquiring the products they sell to their local communities at payment terms that the discussed and formulated between individual and CBO.

How does the public benefit from your organisation?

The beneficiaries of our programme are the rural customers who have limited access to clean energy technologies. Beyond energy access, our programme specifically aims to empower beneficiaries to create sustainable solutions through entrepreneurship.

Since 2014, we have managed to extend clean energy products to 87,000 people in Uganda. We have partnered with more than 100 CBOs and provided a business in box solution to achieve a more socioeconomic impact in the communities they operate. Due to that, many of the organisations have set up clean energy enterprises that have gone on to become independent post-ENVenture.

Urban people are also experiencing challenges of accessing clean energy. Do you have any plans of extending your services to them?

Given the global reach of New Energy Nexus, we anticipate the merger will open up many new opportunities and expand our market reach. Currently, ENVenture supports CBOs to set up clean energy businesses and this has largely been due to limited funds.

However, with the merger, we will be able to diversify our programming to reach a range of entrepreneurs, including individual entrepreneurs and small to medium companies running clean energy businesses. We believe this is a sure way to drive innovation and build equity into the clean energy economy in Uganda and expand our reach into neighbouring countries.