

Smart grid congo

With 80% of the population still without access to electricity in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nuru is defying the odds and investing in hybrid solar-powered metropolitan grids in the east of the country. For its co-founder and commercial director Archip Lobo, this solution could enable the DRC to catch up in terms of electrification.

AFRIK 21: Nuru has just raised \$40 million in a Series B round of funding to develop its hybrid solar-powered electricity grids in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). How do you feel about this round of funding?

We're very satisfied with our Series B closing. Especially as we were in a fund-raising phase that took us almost two years. The small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and households that are the main beneficiaries of this electricity were impatient. Civil society and politicians were trying to follow up so that this project could become a reality.

And so this mobilisation of 40 million dollars will enable us to start work. But it will be followed by another phase of 28 million dollars in debt, which could close shortly. With this funding, we will be deploying 8 MW of capacity in Bunia, which we expect to come on stream in the second quarter of 2024, 2 MW in Kindu in Maniema province and a further 3.7 MW in the city of Goma.

Our business model is based first and foremost on estimated demand. It's clear that the demand for electricity in Bunia is very high. That's why we chose to install the largest solar power plant there.

The situation has made SNEL a company in competition with the others. Otherwise, we are working well with SNEL as part of the liberalisation of the electricity sector. We see this as a win-win partnership that will help to tackle the problem of access to electricity, given that the DRC has an electrification rate of 20%. A great deal of effort has been made, as the regulatory authority emphasised in its latest report.

Apart from Somalia, where metropolitan electricity networks are fairly widespread, Nuru is one of the few companies to offer this service in the DRC. The DRC is one of the least electrified countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with a rate of only 20%. Can metro systems meet the challenge of providing access to electricity in this vast country?

We are in the midst of an ecological transition that requires us to keep our planet's temperature at 1.5°C. This requires decarbonisation through the reduction of CO2 emissions. To achieve this, we need to make the transition from polluting energies to clean energies, through solutions such as the large-scale mini-grids that we are installing. In a continental country like the DRC (an area of 2.345 million km², editor's note), this is an important solution that will speed up access to electricity, as it is deployed

right down to the last consumer.

Nuru operates mainly in the east of the DRC, a high-risk area. These include rebel groups and volcanic eruptions in Goma in North Kivu. How has Nuru managed to convince investors to support its electrification projects, despite these risks?

We have a group of partners who care about the development of the DRC. For our part, we are assessing the security risks, particularly in the supply chain for the project materials. As far as the city of Goma is concerned, we started the project before the most recent events exacerbated the security situation.

We have seen a real willingness on the part of the government, both diplomatically and militarily, to improve the security situation. These efforts are beginning to bear fruit. All this is helping to instil confidence in our investors, with Nuru, the group of investors and the authorities communicating openly on a daily basis. This confidence enables us to raise funds and continue with electrification. Nuru is also contributing to the safety effort by installing street lamps.

For the moment, Nuru's activities are concentrated in the east of the DRC. However, the problem of access to electricity affects the whole country. Do you plan to install your metropolitan electricity networks in other parts of the country?

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