

# The LVEMP II Civil Society Watch E-bulletin

A Monthly from the **East African Sustainability Watch Network** comprising: Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD), Tanzania Coalition for Sustainable Development (TCSD) and Sustainable Environmental Development Watch Network (SusWatch Kenya)

**September 2015**

## UCSD Joins Global Call for Community Renewable Energy Systems in Uganda



With over 90% of Uganda's population depending on biomass energy that is affected by unsustainable use and Climate change, a swift and just transition to public and community renewable energy systems (like biogas for cooking and lighting) is an urgent reality which should not be dwarfed by the oil and gas investment plans. (Photos: UCSD)

Energy is a vital requirement to fulfil basic human needs and rights. The global consumption of energy is huge and rapidly rising yet there are more than 1.3 billion people with no access to electricity, and many more with barely enough energy from biomass. This is further exacerbated by the increasingly erratic weather with some areas of the world suffering floods (due to El nino conditions for example) while others endure drought that affect biomass the key source of energy for millions across the world.

In this regard more than 40 movements, local groups, networks and NGOs from across the world have since 2013 come together to strengthen the links between energy and climate struggles under a campaign: **'Reclaim Power'**. This is because the energy sector is also the largest and fastest growing contributor to climate change. About 35% of all human Green House Gas emissions come from the burning of fossil fuels. Climate Change is harming Oceans, Lakes, food systems, water and causing more frequent and destructive extreme weather events that destroy homes, livelihoods and communities.

In East Africa and Uganda in particular, energy is the driver of social and economic development, with all partner states depending wholly on imported petroleum requirements on one hand to drive the transport, industry and other sectors on one hand. On the other hand, at community level, dependence is on wood-based energy by over 90% of all communities especially cooking. However, this region is vulnerable to adverse effects of climate change because of the low adaptive capacities. 'Reclaim Power' that spans continents and cultures therefore, has been working to intensify collective and coordinated actions for transformation of the global energy systems as a vital part of ensuring people's right to clean and renewable energy and confronting the climate crisis.

Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development -UCSD joins the Global Day to 'Reclaim Power' on October 9 and October, 2015. This campaign is relevant to Uganda and East Africa with regard to a key demand that calls on the East African Community - EAC Partner States to ensure universal access to energy (based on the available decentralised possibilities and options including biomass, hydropower, solar, wind, biogas and Liquid Petroleum Gas-LPG).

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Relatedly in Uganda, it is timely to have a swift and just transition to public and community renewable energy systems as an urgent action that should not be overshadowed by planned oil and gas investment plans in the Albertine rift, given the reality that over 90% of the Uganda population is dependent on biomass energy that is threatened by climate change impacts.

UCSD applauds the rest of the Reclaim Power campaign demands at the regional and global levels: ban new dirty energy projects; End government subsidies and public handouts to dirty energy; and stop excessive energy consumption by corporations and global elites. **Read more and follow the Global Day to 'Reclaim Power' on October 9 and 10, 2015: <http://reclaimpower.net/>**

## Uganda Energy Minister Encourages Use of Solar Energy as Communities Ponder on Reusing Waste from Energy Technologies to Enhance Soil Fertility



1. Solar panels on display at the event 2. Exhibitors displaying new energy technologies at the event 3. Impact of Bio-char on plants root development (Photos: UCDS & NPF)

The Uganda Minister of State for Energy and Mineral development - Peter Lokeris urged Ugandans to utilize sunshine and tap it for energy. He noted that with plenty of sunshine in Uganda, solar power has emerged as the market's most viable option. He said the solar penetration rate is at 27% but can increase. He said this during the 2015 energy week exhibition at Lugogo UMA show grounds in Kampala where more than one hundred exhibitors showed off various clean energy and energy efficient technology products. At the exhibition was the launch of the clean smart programme with a fund targeting 40,000 low income earning households to start using clean energy. The fund is supported by the United Nations Capital Development Fund. Lokeris said that Uganda has a vision to meet the energy needs of every Ugandan in an environmentally sustainable way. However, only 17% of the population has access to electricity yet hydropower grid alone cannot realise that target. More people can access energy through the renewable energy sources he said. The launch started with a match from the Ministry offices at Amber house to Lugogo UMA show ground.

Among the exhibitors was the Uganda Energy Credit Capitalization Company that offers financial solutions and technical assistance to facilitate renewable energy development and access. The company offers serves as a solar refinance facility to participating financial institutions (PFIs), a connection loan refinance facility to PFIs and technical assistance and transaction advisory services. The 2015 energy exhibition realised increase in the number of exhibitors offering briquettes made from agricultural waste. According to David Nkwanga from a NGO - Nature Palace Foundation, there are many benefits from farm waste beyond the briquettes as the waste can be used to enhance fertility in farms, if applied adequately.

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He acknowledges that “most people in Uganda take bio-char to be a by-product or waste from the briquette-making process, which is not true; it is actually the main ingredient. It is the way that this substance is prepared and decided to be used that determines if it will be used as cooking energy or as a soil enhancement material.” He notes that biochar is a fine-grained, carbon-rich, porous product remaining after plant biomass has been subjected to thermo-chemical conversion process (pyrolysis) in an environment with little or no oxygen. Bio-char is made through a similar process used in making charcoal.

Mr Nkwanga explains the relationship between bio-char and soil fertility enhancement noting that biochar’s physical and chemical nature, gives it a unique ability for attracting and holding moisture, nutrients, and agrochemicals even retaining difficult to hold nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorous. He further notes that biochar’s immense surface area and complex pore structure provides a secure habitat for micro-organisms and fungi. Certain fungi form a symbiotic relationship with plant root fibres, which allows for greater nutrient uptake by plants.

Biochar is therefore one of the materials with astonishing properties to improve the quality of degraded soils while sequestering carbon. This is based on proven properties of Biochar such as improving cation exchange capacities and decrease acid saturation, improving water-holding capacity of especially sandy/weathered soils, decreasing the leaching rate of nutrients, hence improving effectiveness of fertilizers and manures to the crops and the capacity to reduce carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and nitrous oxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. While bio-char may be a rather simple substance, it also represents a complex and multifaceted strategy which is gaining attention of farmers, energy experts, and climate scientists around the world, and could provide sustainable solutions especially in the developing world. The use of bio-char as a soil enhancement agent, however, is not widespread in Uganda. There is therefore a need to determine how best this can be promoted.

## Upcoming Events and Announcements

### UNCCD COP 12 from 12 October to 23 October 2015

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will host its Twelfth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP12) in Ankara, Turkey, to discuss solutions to issues related to desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD). More: <http://bit.ly/1FL37nO>

### World Food Day Oct.16, 2015: “Social Protection and agriculture: breaking the cycle of rural poverty”

This year’s World Food Day video explores the theme of Social Protection and how it can contribute to the eradication of hunger and poverty by 2030. FAO has stepped up its efforts to help governments and partners incorporate social protection into national development strategies and policies. More: <http://www.fao.org/world-food-day/home/en/>

### Fifth Climate Change and Development Conference (CCDA-V)

To support Africa's preparedness for the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21), CCDA-V will be held on the theme “Africa, climate change and sustainable development: what is at stake at Paris and beyond?”. More: <http://www.climdev-africa.org/ccda5>