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Millions of people to receive solar energy access through UN-backed initiative



Photo: UNDP

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A Mauritius-based company announced today that it will provide access to low-cost solar energy for 33 million people in Africa and Asia for the next four years, as part of a United Nations-backed initiative to fight poverty.

The solar energy provider, ToughStuff, will expand access to low-cost, durable solar panels and solar battery packs to low-income communities in 10 African countries (Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, South Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe) and four South Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal).

The company's efforts are part of Business Call to Action ([Bcta](#)), a global initiative supported by the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) that encourages private sector efforts to develop inclusive business models that can have both commercial success and a positive impact in development.

The company estimates that some \$520 million will be saved by consumers by switching from kerosene or biomass fuel to solar energy. In addition, carbon emissions will be reduced by up to 1.2 million tons by 2016.

To provide its services, the company will rely on a network of village-level entrepreneurs that are provided with training on how to sell, rent, or provide access to affordable energy services.

“Companies like ToughStuff invest in communities by providing cleaner, healthier energy options through core business operations,” [said](#) Susan Chaffin, programme manager for BCtA. “This commitment will help to boost development and improve social equity in a sustainable way that is good for the environment and good for business.”

Nearly half the world's population lacks reliable access to modern energy services and more than 20 per cent of the global population – 1.4 billion people – remains without access to electricity. According to a recent UNDP report, household air pollution from the use of biomass fuel is expected to cause more than 1.5 million deaths a year by 2030.

The initiative will also help to further the goals of the Sustainable Energy for All initiative, launched by [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon in September, which seeks to ensure universal access to modern energy services, double the rate of improvement in energy efficiency and double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix, all by 2030.

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