

**Project Proposal for the  
Creation of an Enabling Agency for the Expansion of Multifunctional Platforms in  
Rural West Africa**

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**Summary**

The project is proposing to create an *enabling agency* that would have three main objectives: to (1) co-ordinate, (2) manage, and (3) expand the Multifunctional Platform (MFP) Programme in West Africa. The MFP is an inexpensive, decentralised energy system that provides a wide range of energy services and income opportunities to the rural poor. It is a tried and tested technology used in countries mainly in West Africa in particular Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Guinea. The technology itself is very simple. The platform is mounted on small diesel engine. Different mechanical engines corresponding to different end use equipments such as grinding mills, oil presses, hullers, as well as alternators for electricity generation for lighting, battery charging, welding, carpentry, joinery and water pumping are attached to it.

The creation of an agency to manage entrepreneurial activities linked to the Multifunctional Platform has several benefits that are intricately related to sustainable development, the provision and improvement of energy services, economic security, rural development and, perhaps most importantly, gender equity. Women in rural Africa have over the years suffered from absence and severe deficit of energy especially household energy. They often have to rely on their own human energy, which remains largely invisible, to meet their daily domestic responsibilities in cooking, food processing, drawing and collecting water and woodfuel, as well as expending energy for more formal productive activities (i.e agricultural or livestock production). Whilst urban women to some extent have enjoyed the role of operational agents to lessen their human energy output, for example improved stoves, rural women still rely on labour-intensive energy measures, such as traditional fuels for cooking. to meet their daily energy needs.

The expansion of the Multifunctional Platform Programme through an effective agency that would manage, oversee and co-ordinate its activities would mean that thousands of women, men, and children would benefit significantly through new sources of incomes and available and expanded energy services. The delivery of energy services in Africa remains highly underdeveloped and often left to governments who are unable to equip rural communities with the necessary energy infrastructure. Private sector enterprises are primarily motivated by profit and concentrate on areas where they are best likely to make

business sense and where the provision of extension grids and transactions costs will not prove to be too taxing. Potential for rural development will remain low if basic infrastructure in particular energy remains under-utilised and underdeveloped.

Although it would be wrong to qualify the Multifunctional Platform as a technological “quick fix” or a panacea to energy problems, it has both the potential and ability to change the dynamics of rural life through the creation and delivery of improved energy services managed and owned by women. The gender benefits are indeed huge, transforming the roles of women from mere beneficiaries to managers and agents of energy delivery services. These benefits help to level the gender “playing field” by giving women a new role and by serving as an engine for rural development through the creation of jobs, enhancement of agricultural productivity, energy efficiency and a whole host of cross benefits that are translated in the health, sanitation, and education sectors. As such the MFP is in total harmony with development goals of the NEPAD and the Millenium Development Goals.

The enabling agency would seek to provide energy services at a much bigger scale through effective installation of the MFP and relevant after sales activities. The agency would use the existing work conducted by the United Nations Development Programme to help in its creation, management, and expansion of MFP activities. The agency would, in the first phase, concentrate on countries where the MFP activities have been implemented (Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Guinea and Cote d’Ivoire) to improve and expand on MFP activities in these countries. In the second phase, the agency would include new countries using experience learnt from the above countries to initiate, expand, and manage MFP activities. In the final phase, the agency would seek to include countries where political context were initially unfavourable to determine the need to implement MFP activities.

The agency would be a subsidiary of the United Nations Development Programme who already has strategic and financial ownership of the project. It would have four main programmes: research and development, business development, maintenance and technical assistance, and a strategic advisory unit. The enabling agency would be based in Dakar and would gradually extend its nodes to other countries with Dakar serving as the co-ordinating base.