



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Solar Electric Light Fund Named a Winner in Ashoka's Changemakers Challenge**  
*Innovative Solar Market Garden Transforms Women's Lives through Technology*

**Washington, DC – July 1** – The Solar Electric Light Fund (SELF) has been announced as one of three winners in the [Women | Tools | Technology Challenge](#) sponsored by [Ashoka's Changemakers](#) and [ExxonMobil](#) in partnership with the [International Center for Research on Women](#) (ICRW). Other winning entries were submitted by Bicycling Empowerment Network Namibia, Namibia, and Lua Nova Association, Brazil. The winners were selected from 268 project entries from 67 different countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

"It is inspiring to see such a wide range of innovative solutions catalyzing women's economic advancement through technology around the world," said Diana Wells, Ashoka's Changemakers' president. "We are thrilled to have received so many worthwhile ideas through this Challenge, and we are honored to be able to support the groundbreaking work being done by the winning innovators."

SELF's Solar Market Garden (SMG) project in Benin, West Africa is changing women's lives in a variety of ways. Without access to an electric grid or municipal water infrastructure, women and girls in the villages of Bessassi and Dunkassa previously relied on carrying water by hand—sometimes over great distances—to grow their food, a process that consumed many valuable hours of labor each day. Each farmer's plot was small and produced an inadequate supply to support a family's nutritional needs. SELF partnered with the Niger-based International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) to devise the marriage of solar-powered water pumps with highly efficient drip irrigation tubes, delivering water and fertilizer directly to plants even during the six-month dry season. The SMGs allow women farmers to cultivate larger plots and grow crops year round, breaking the cycle of starvation and malnutrition that accompanied traditional rainfall patterns in the Kalalé District.

The public was invited to vote online for the three best solutions from a group of 10 finalists previously selected by an expert panel of judges. The Challenge criteria included excelling in the areas of innovation, social impact and sustainability.

"The innovative concepts from the Challenge will make significant improvements in the lives of women in developing countries, allowing them to become key economic players in their communities and better provide for their families," said Suzanne McCarron, president of the ExxonMobil Foundation. "We look forward to helping these innovators gain traction for their ideas so they can ultimately reach more people with their Challenge solutions."

Robert Freling, SELF's executive director, said: "The cash prize will help us provide more women with training in advanced agricultural techniques through ICRISAT. Using a 'train the trainer' approach, we'll be able to leverage the prize into greater training for all the women in the three farming collectives and help them continue to reduce labor requirements, improve nutritional yield, and increase crop size. We're also very excited about the recognition that comes with this award. Ashoka's Changemakers' tremendous renown will help us both elevate the visibility and increase the credibility of this project as we seek to raise the funds necessary to take it to scale and develop its commercial viability."

“These innovations meet women where they live. They are practical, and they will be catalytic in addressing the demands women have in their home life, in their work life and in their community life,” said Anju Malhotra, vice president of research, impact and innovation at the International Center for Research on Women. “We’re excited to see how these creative ideas will trigger generations of change for women and economies. This is a teachable moment for the world.”

#### **About SELF**

The Solar Electric Light Fund (SELF) is a Washington, DC-based nonprofit working to reduce energy poverty and combat climate change by bringing solar power and wireless Internet access to remote rural villages in the developing world. SELF has pioneered innovative applications of solar power for drip irrigation in Benin, telemedicine in the Amazon rainforest, vaccine refrigeration in Rwanda, online distance learning in South Africa, and microenterprise development in Nigeria. These successful pilot projects culminated in SELF’s whole-village approach, or Solar Integrated Development model. Since 1990, SELF has completed projects in 20 countries, making it a leader among non-governmental organizations in realizing practical and cost-effective alternative energy solutions for rural villagers. For more information, please visit [www.self.org](http://www.self.org).

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