



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Solar Energy Brings Gift of Water, Health and Hope to Rural African Villages**

*Solar Water Wells Save Labor and Help Reduce Waterborne Diseases*

**Washington, DC – December 23** – The Solar Electric Light Fund (SELF) today announced the successful installation of three Solar Water Wells (SWWs) in the villages of Bessassi and Dunkassa, Benin, West Africa. Each well will provide families in these communities with access to clean, safe drinking water year round.

Dr. Mamoudou Setamou, a Ph.D. in agricultural entomology and a native of Kalalé, said: “When I first approached SELF in 2006, I hoped only to end the suffering of my people. Now that I have seen first-hand what solar power can do, I know this is the beginning of not only health, but prosperity for my village. This is a very special Christmas for Kalalé indeed.”

Bessassi and Dunkassa, located in the Kalalé district of northern Benin, suffer drought conditions six months out of every year. Before the SWWs, families only had access to contaminated or inconsistent water supplies. Infant and child mortality rates were among the highest in West Africa mainly due to preventable illnesses, including diarrhea caused by dirty water.

According to the World Health Organization, in 2008 waterborne disease was among the four leading causes of death for children under five in Benin. The SWW project’s baseline survey indicated 58% of children under five suffered diarrhea in the prior month.

Each SWW is powered by a custom-designed array of solar panels ranging from 1.2 to 4 kilowatts. SELF’s project engineers matched the system size to the flow rates for each well to avoid taxing the groundwater supply.

The cost of providing each SWW was approximately \$18,000. This included finding and the drilling wells, along with purchasing, transporting and installing the solar equipment. To help ensure the sustainability of the project, SELF partnered with the Association pour le Developpement Economique Social et Culturel de Kalalé (ADESCA), a Benin-based NGO. Together, SELF and ADESCA trained local technicians to perform the installation and maintain the equipment.

Robert Freling, SELF’s executive director, said: “What’s particularly exciting is that this combination of solar power and water pumps is an effective, long-term solution since the systems are economical, reliable and easy to maintain. Additionally, this system can be replicated all over the African continent, and the world, thus saving many lives.”

The SWWs constitute the second piece of SELF’s Solar Integrated Development, or “whole village” model in Kalalé, where solar energy is already being used to power drip irrigation for the Solar Market Gardens. The next phases will include powering medical equipment for health clinics, lights for homes and schools, and electrical outlets for microenterprise centers.

“The positive impact of these wells will transform these villages. Just as the Solar Market Gardens changed the villagers’ lives by providing food security and increasing income, the Solar Water Wells will enhance the lives of the community by providing clean, safe water to drink and eliminating the labor-intensive task of hauling water from far distances,” Mr. Freling continued.

Kalalé, which has a per-capita income of less than \$1 USD per day, has a population of 104,000 people. More than 95% of the people are involved in agriculture and subsistence farming.

**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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