



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Green Energy Systems Power Fight Against HIV/AIDS in Africa**

*Solar Panels Save Operating Costs and Transform Remote Clinic's Environmental Impact*

**Washington, DC – July 16** – The Solar Electric Light Fund (SELF) today announced the successful completion of the largest solar installation at a remote health clinic in Africa. The 10kW solar electric system provides 90 percent of the power requirements for the new Village Health Works (VHW) clinic in Kigutu, Burundi, an unelectrified village 95 kilometers from the nation's capital.

To power the clinic, SELF technicians built multiple solar arrays containing a total of 98 panels at 130 Watts each. Ersol Solar Energy AG (Ersol) donated the solar cells for the project, and Cermet Materials, Inc. contributed the labor and materials required to manufacture the solar panels. Without this system, the clinic's only alternative for generating electricity came from costly, polluting and unreliable diesel generators. Robert Freling, SELF's executive director, said: "Compared to the option of using only a diesel generator, it is estimated that the hybrid solar/diesel approach will save VHW approximately \$50,000 in annual operating costs — or \$1,000,000 over the life of a solar array's typical 20-year lifespan. Basically the photovoltaic system will completely pay for itself in 4 years, or less if the price of fuel goes up."

VHW is an international non-governmental organization that was established in 2007 by Deogratias Niyizonkiza, an American citizen born in Burundi, East Africa. Supported by Partners In Health, the NGO cofounded by Dr. Paul Farmer, VHW sought to bring high quality healthcare to the people of Burundi, reported in 2006 by the World Bank to be the world's poorest country. Burundi faces a public health crisis, with a life expectancy of 49 years and over 110,000 adults living with HIV/AIDS in the wake of the recent genocide and civil war. Mr. Niyizonkiza worked with community members to build and operate a model expandable health center in Kigutu, where the nearest hospital is a 14-mile walk. Initial services include comprehensive treatment for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other diseases; as well as prenatal care and prevention counseling for mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. The clinic expects to serve over 60,000 rural villagers in the surrounding area.

In describing VHW's founding, Mr. Niyizonkiza said: "You look into the faces of so many people, and you wonder how can they possibly experience happiness again. Could there be any better moment for change than when an entire population is exhausted by a bloody thirteen-year war, forced to endure the inevitable toll on their health from substandard care in an undignified environment, and then imprisoned when they cannot pay? I promised myself that with the help of my American friends and colleagues, I would do everything humanly possible to change the situation. This is how VHW was founded. VHW is new but many years overdue. We have an ambitious plan, but we had to begin somewhere and we have begun."

Martin Zippel, Head of Crystalline Modules Development at Ersol, said: "We were very pleased to be invited to make a contribution to this project. While Ersol's primary business groups serve the industrialized world, there are almost two billion people who currently live without electricity. Their needs are not going to be met with traditional fossil fuels. And if they were—the impact on the planet would be completely overwhelming. Realistically, solar is the only option."

SELF is a Washington, DC-based nonprofit working to combat climate change and reduce energy poverty by bringing solar power and wireless Internet access to remote rural villages in the developing world. SELF has pioneered innovative applications of solar power such as 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 18 countries, making it a leader among non-governmental organizations in realizing practical and cost-effective alternative energy solutions for rural villagers.

#### **About Village Health Works**

Village Health Works (VHW), a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization based in the U.S., was founded by Deogratias Niyizonkiza, an American citizen born in Burundi, East Africa. VHW's Board of Directors, Advisory Board, Officers and other friends work diligently to accomplish the mission of bringing high quality healthcare to the people of Burundi, reported in 2006 by the World Bank to be the world's poorest country. To this end, VHW is working with community members to build and operate a model expandable health center in the rural village of Kigutu, located approximately 60 miles (95 km) south of Bujumbura, the capital city of Burundi, situated on the northeastern shore of Lake Tanganyika. For more information, please visit [www.villagehealthworks.org](http://www.villagehealthworks.org).

#### **About SELF**

The Solar Electric Light Fund (SELF) is a Washington, DC-based nonprofit organization working to end global poverty by bringing solar power and Internet access to the world's poorest people in remote rural areas. SELF utilizes clean, renewable electricity to reduce greenhouse emissions while improving the health, education and welfare of the two billion people living in energy poverty. Since its founding in 1990, SELF has launched sustainable projects in 18 countries, including Benin, Brazil, China, India, Nepal, Nigeria, Rwanda, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. For more information, please visit [www.self.org](http://www.self.org).

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