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SOLAR ELECTRIC LIGHT FUND RECEIVES ENERGY INSTITUTE AWARD FOR BEST COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

Washington, D.C. – November 22 – The Solar Electric Light Fund (SELF), a Washington, D.C. based nonprofit working to eliminate energy poverty through the use of solar power, today announced that it has received the Energy Institute’s (EI) Community Initiative Award for its Solar Market Gardens™ (SMG) drip irrigation systems in Benin, West Africa. The EI Awards, given annually by the London-based Energy Institute, recognize innovation and excellence amongst individuals and organizations working in the global energy sector.

SELF’s SMGs are innovative, unique solar-powered drip irrigation systems that were designed and implemented for women farming collectives in the villages of Dunkassa and Bessassi in northern Benin. The gardens have resulted in a significant increase in food security among the women farmers who are now able to grow high-value fruits and vegetables year-round.

“We’re honored to receive this award and thank the Energy Institute for considering our work,” says Bob Freling, executive director, SELF. “Our plan is to build on our progress in Benin by replicating the SMG model throughout the world to continue empowering women farmers to create impactful change in their communities, and fight energy poverty in the remotest of villages.”

A two-year study conducted by Stanford University’s Program on Food Security and the Environment and published in 2010 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* found that SELF’s SMG model, “significantly augments both household income and nutritional intake, particularly during the dry season, and is cost effective compared to alternative technologies.” According to the study, each garden has supplied nearly two tons of produce per month; about 20 percent is kept for home consumption and the balance is sold at market, earning an extra \$7.50 per week for the women selling fresh produce. Not only has nutrition improved in Dunkassa and Bessassi, but income levels have also risen, helping to pay for other economic development initiatives, school fees, and medical treatment.

More information about SELF’s SMGs can be found at <http://self.org/benin.shtml>.

About SELF

The Solar Electric Light Fund (SELF) is a Washington, D.C. based nonprofit working to eliminate 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 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.

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