

Beat: Travel

2nd edition of Unlocking Solar Capital Africa will take place in Abidjan

After inauguration in Nairobi

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USPA NEWS - Solarplaza (www.Solarplaza.com) and GOGLA (www.GOGLA.org) are proud to announce the second edition of Unlocking Solar Capital (USC) Africa (Africa.UnLockingSolarCapital.com). After hosting last year's inaugural edition in Nairobi, Kenya, we'll be organizing its follow-up in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. The high-level 2-day conference centered around unlocking capital for new solar project development in Africa provides an original and exclusive international platform and will take place on the 25-26th of October, 2017. In preparation for the event, Solarplaza analyst Marco Dorotheal speaks with 3 of the event's main driving forces - Lydia van Os and Adriaan van Loon of Solarplaza and Eveline Jansen of GOGLA discussing the challenges and opportunities for African solar development in the region.

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The story of "Unlocking Solar Capital" did not start in Abidjan. Why did you choose to hold the first edition in Nairobi and what were the main lessons learnt?

Eveline: "The unique design of the USC Africa conference characterizes how partnerships and collaboration can strengthen the solar sector: The Nairobi edition was the first investor conference to bring the off-grid industry together with on-grid and mini-grid segments of the solar sector. While the needs and demands of the three sectors are diverse, it is vital to maintain open channels of communication in order to effectively advocate for beneficial policy environments and work together towards the shared goal of increased electricity access. The success of this first edition was a testimony of catering to a new demand for a more holistic approach - and clear indication that there is a need to keep that momentum going."

Adriaan: "Nairobi was chosen to host the first edition of Unlocking Solar Capital because it is the business capital of East Africa. As Eveline mentioned, a truly unique factor was the unique involved mix of on and off-grid players. The fact that a lot of industry players are already established in Nairobi enabled us to grow the conference bigger than we ever imagined. However, as a conference that aims to cover the whole continent, we learned that the best way to have both a strong international and continental presence is to move to other regions as well to be able to reach a larger and more diverse audience and address different markets."

Lydia: "Currently, we see an extremely promising growth of the solar industry on the African continent. To increase our impact we want to be close to the developments and aim to take our international network to the local sources where opportunities arise. We have a holistic vision regarding the joint potential of on and off-grid energy, as we think both are crucial to work towards fully electrifying African countries. To accomplish this vision we have chosen to organize the conference in Africa, for Africa." Now, moving on to Abidjan, what are the differences between the locations and how are you building on the success of the previous edition?

Eveline: "Moving the second edition to West Africa is not only essential for a truly holistic approach to the Sub-Saharan Africa market, but also a recognition of the rapidly developing solar market in the region."

Lydia: "This year the event is going to take place in Abidjan as we want to expand upon the success of last year, while at the same time involving more of the francophone community and investors. Hosting the event in different markets allows us to not only bring the conference platform and our relations to exciting new regions, but also allows us to leverage the knowledge and experience of our previous editions by sharing them with regional partners and attendees."

HOW DID YOU REFLECT NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN YOUR PROGRAM ?

Lydia: "Our program focuses on opportunities for both established as well as upcoming market players. With the Solar Incubator,

which is co-organized with Phanes Group PV, smaller players in the African solar market are challenged to pitch their projects with the chance of winning mentorship and co-development facilities. At the same time, we will host sessions that focus on utility-scale projects. For instance, we have a panel in which we'll discuss the bankability of solar projects, which is a recurring challenge, featuring leading regional experts from Standard Bank, Scatec Solar, the EU commission and Africa50. "Adriaan: "Compared to our previous event, we did see a need for more collaborations between development financial institutions (DFIs) and the private sector in order to spearhead the growth of the solar sector in the more challenging countries. Furthermore, the advancements in mini-grid technology will be represented in our "Generations" track, focusing on bigger mini-grid projects, as well as in our "Connections" track, which focuses purely on micro-grid developments."

How do you see the future unfolding for the African region; what are the most important things that need to be achieved in order to succeed and how will you hope that USC Africa can contribute to this?-----

Eveline: "There is a clear need for greater communication and understanding between the different stakeholders in the solar sector, as well as recognizing the patterns and shared challenges in the hugely diverse individual markets. Unlocking Solar Capital Africa accelerates this process by providing opportunities for focused interaction between these stakeholders."

Adriaan: "We aim to contribute by providing people with a platform to share best practices and meet the stakeholders that you need to further your business. With the conference platform, we seek to solve Africa's solar energy funding gap by connecting financiers and developers, and having key market players share their practical experiences. Furthermore, the floor will be given to innovative startups to pitch their business models and secure financing."

Lydia: "There is a lot of dedication among solar industry players to bring electricity to the 600 million Africans that currently do not have access to modern energy solutions. This dedication is easy to understand from both a market perspective, which is obviously very large, as from the conviction that everyone should have access to electricity and that we shouldn't burden the environment through the use of fossil fuels, while great alternatives are readily available at a competitive price point. We want Unlocking Solar Capital Africa to be the driving platform for Africa's solar revolution moving forward."

Learn more about the challenges and solutions to financing of solar projects in Africa at Unlocking Solar Capital Africa, the African region's largest and foremost conference on unlocking capital for new solar development. The 2-day conference will be held in Abidjan, Ivory Coast on the 25-26th of October, 2017 and will be aimed at bringing together hundreds of solar stakeholder, such representative from solar developers, development banks, investment funds, EPCs, IPPs and others. For more information on Unlocking Solar Capital Africa, With apo, Solar Africa

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