

VIDA and IFC Announce Pioneering Congo Urban Electrification Project

MUNICH, January 25, 2022 – Multiple award-winning software startup Village Data Analytics (VIDA) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) announced on Tuesday the start of an ambitious project to map the renewable energy access potential of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The project is part of a shared mission to accelerate sustainable electrification investments across the developing world and undertaken under the new World Bank Group Scaling Mini-Grid (SMG) program

“VIDA uses satellite imagery, geospatial data, on-ground surveys and energy modeling that help identify electricity demand locations, suitable sites and reduce investment risk,” says VIDA co-founder Tobias Engelmeier. “Harnessed to the development of mini-grid systems, for example, this technology has great potential in helping achieve green electrification across Africa at a scale that can meet the urgency of our times.”

The DRC is upheld as a key country in Africa’s proposed green energy transition as it has a vast virgin rainforest to be protected alongside meeting ambitious development goals. The International Renewable Energy Agency last year estimated DRC had only 20 MW of grid-connected solar capacity. Energy in large cities is largely provided by polluting and expensive diesel power and only about 9% of the population as currently access to electricity.

The VIDA-IFC project is to analyze Mbuji-Mayi and Kananga, two large provincial cities, to identify the potential for decentralized renewable electrification. The outcome is a preliminary design of mini-grids and cost information. The project will also provide information on the mini-grid market potential across the entire country to help further prospective private developers and investors enter and develop the Congolese clean energy access market.

“Currently electricity is not reliable in these cities. It’s a major impediment to building a modern and sustainable economy and providing granular, up to date market data is key towards accelerating investments in clean energy access in DRC,” says Yann Tanvez, mini-grid lead for the Africa region at the IFC.

Launched in February 2021 and vetted by the European Space Agency, VIDA is already being used in 18 countries including Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Pakistan. The company’s mission is to help government planners, international lenders, investors and energy providers access and make use of reliable and sophisticated data to guide and scale investment decisions.

“VIDA has brought standardized electrification planning to the sector, which is key to scaling energy access,” says Engelmeier. “Data-driven development can ramp up our

current electrification rate of 5-8 million people per year to 100 million. The fact that there are very few legacy data systems in place means that these places can leapfrog to the very front of the technology revolution.”

VIDA is also being used to identify the potential to add solar to and expand existing electricity infrastructures in five cities in Sudan. Data from on-ground surveys and demand data of the existing network are being used to predict demand for expansion. VIDA algorithms utilize large data (some of the towns have more than a million buildings) to train its prediction model and identify the demand for electricity.

In Nigeria, VIDA is being used to identify high-priority off-grid healthcare facilities that need immediate electrification. In Kenya, VIDA is used to predict and validate monthly revenue from mini-grid sites. In Mozambique, VIDA was used to channel international funding into schools and increase their climate change resilience.

IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, is the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets. In 2021, IFC committed a record \$31.5 billion to private companies and financial institutions in developing countries, leveraging the power of the private sector to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity as economies grapple with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

About VIDA

VIDA is a map-based software that enables development decision makers to plan and monitor investments. VIDA allows users to fuse public data, such as satellite imagery, with own data such as on-ground surveys or sensor data. Based on unique proprietary algorithms and vetted by the European Space Agency, VIDA is currently used in 18 countries, from Sierra Leone to Colombia. It has processed more than 20,000 investment opportunities and channeled €1.5 billion in investments, mostly in electrification (grid expansion and mini-grids), but also in schools, healthcare systems and agricultural production. VIDA users are companies, global banks and governments. Founded just a year ago, VIDA has been awarded a Copernicus Masters, Falling Walls and Parsec prizes as well as the German government prize for innovation and climate.

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