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Arlington, VA - Today, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency announced grant funding for technical assistance to help Beninese company Sherlock Grids SAS expand and improve clean energy access to rural communities across the country.

"This project embodies USTDA's commitment to deploy innovative solutions that connect more of Africa's citizens to clean, reliable power," said Enoch T. Ebong, USTDA's Acting Director. "By leveraging U.S. technologies, USTDA's engagement will help mitigate the climate crisis while supporting Benin's goal of universal electrification through solar power."

Sherlock Grids will work with Washington, DC-based technology provider SparkMeter to analyze the feasibility of bringing solar-powered minigrids online for tens of thousands of Beninese. The project will also demonstrate the benefits of implementing a digitalized system to fully integrate and remotely manage multiple minigrids. The system will consist of smart meters, digital models of the minigrids and their distribution networks, and software for real-time outage management, asset management, and planning.

"Grid edge technologies are a powerful but underutilized tool in emerging markets. By developing a grid analytics platform for Sherlock Grids, the utility can provide its end users with reliable power and ensure financial sustainability for the project," said Dan Schnitzer, CEO of SparkMeter. "We're confident that USTDA's forward-thinking investment in utility digitalization in Benin and throughout the region is a prelude to larger-scale investment within the minigrid sector."

Tristan Kochoyan, CEO of Sherlock Grids, said: "As a social enterprise, what motivates us is the impact electricity can have on rural communities. This is also very much aligned with our minigrid operator business: the more useful and transformative our services are, the more electricity people will consume. Both technological and business model innovations are key to trigger this kind of virtuous circle of economic and social development. We strongly believe that what USTDA is helping us achieve in Benin can contribute to solving the electricity access crisis for millions more."

The U.S. Trade and Development Agency helps companies create U.S. jobs through the export of U.S. goods and services for priority infrastructure projects in emerging economies. USTDA links U.S. businesses to export opportunities by funding project preparation and partnership building activities that develop sustainable infrastructure and foster economic growth in partner countries.

Enabling remote management of green mini-grids. This is the aim of the project that SparkMeter will be implementing in West Africa in the coming weeks. The smart metering and analytics technology provider has received a \$1 million grant from the US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) to deploy a comprehensive digital analytics platform to improve the operation of solar mini-grids in rural areas.

The SparkMeter remote management system will be operated by Sherlock Grids SAS. This special purpose company is being set up by mini-grid operator Power:On and Akuo Energy Africa, the subsidiary of French independent power producer (IPP) Akuo Energy. The joint venture between the players is involved in the deployment of off-grid solar systems that contribute to the electrification of rural areas in Benin.

More than a year ago, the two electricity providers were selected in a call for projects by the Off-Grid Clean Energy Facility (Ocef) to build, operate and maintain 10 grid-connected solar hybrid mini-grids in 19 localities in the Atacora and Donga departments in the north of the country. As part of its project, SparkMeter plans to provide advice on developing geospatial models of utility assets and an electrical model of the grid.

Cloud-based software will combine these models with SparkMeter's smart meter data to produce advanced analyses of grid performance. According to the Washington, D.C.-based company, these services go a step further than traditional feasibility studies. That's because SparkMeter will use system modelling to provide analytics that provide utilities and other stakeholders with operational information that explains the root causes of network anomalies, tracks trends, shows impacts and suggests improvements.

By digitising a mini-grid at inception, utilities are able to more easily integrate grid analysis into regular operations. Utilities can then remotely measure, visualise and operate their system, which will replace charcoal stoves, paraffin lamps and diesel generators with clean, renewable energy," explains Dan Schnitzer, SparkMeter's CEO. The implementation of these intelligent mini-grid management systems is set to expand in Benin and beyond. For these decentralised systems facilitate and accelerate the electrification of rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa.

In Benin, the results of the Off-Grid Clean Energy Facility (OCEF) call for projects are known. At least eight projects for the construction, maintenance and operation of mini-solar and energy efficiency grids have been selected for an overall investment of more than \$69.5 million. These projects were proposed by 11 companies.

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