

Report on the Olwekobaano and Energy Expo 2023

Executive summary

The Olwekobaano and Energy Expo 2023 was successfully held in Kaliro town in Kaliro District. There was a strong response from the local leaders, the community and various stakeholders. The three core elements of the event – exhibition, conference and health camp, were all well attended. The event was a great opportunity to restart BY's grassroots engagement after the period of absence that was conditioned by the pandemic. Hosting it on the strategic theme of improving access to energy proved to be a timely, strategic decision. We entered new partnerships that are already the basis for the development of project proposals. Research data was also gathered that can inform not only these partnerships, but also inform the organising team in preparing for the next edition of the event later this year. We are especially delighted that a local energy resource hub is starting to take shape as an extension of the activities of the office we opened to interact with the community.

Introduction

The Busoga Olwekobaano and Energy Expo was held from the 14th to the 16th of December 2023 in Kaliro town in Kaliro District in eastern Uganda under the theme: **Leveraging access to affordable, reliable and clean energy for improved health, education, agriculture and trade (HEAT) in Busoga region**. This was the 8th edition of the Olwekobaano, which is a trademark development event hosted by Busoga Yaiffe (BY) : www.busogayaiffe.org

While previous editions of the event have had other thematic priorities, a theme based on the ongoing global transition to renewable energy was considered strategically timely and appropriate for this latest edition of the event. After the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, this was the first time BY was actively organising a major event and reviving its engagement on the ground. It was also the first time the NGO was hosting the event outside the region's two leading urban centres – Jinja and Iganga. Consequently, the latest event was a strategic opportunity not only for a revamp after the pandemic, but also for extending engagement in the region and deepening the grassroots outreach. An analysis of data that was gathered by a group of researchers that supported the event as well as the organisers' own assessments indicate that the event was successful. Its most important achievement was successfully hosting in a new location. The mix of feedback from various stakeholders, including the most senior local government leaders, cultural and religious leaders, diverse community leaders, education and health institutions, business enterprises, farmers, civil society and many others, was eye opening and will serve to inform plans for this year's 9th edition of the event at the same location.

Background

The theme of the event recognised the critical importance of access to affordable, reliable and clean energy in enabling the provision of basic services and the development of sustainable livelihoods at the onset of the **global energy transition**. It further acknowledges the potential that improved access to sustainable energy has in bringing about **socio-economic transformation** and **sustainable development** in the region. With one of the lowest rates of access to energy on the African continent, Uganda still has a long way to go in achieving the UN's SDGs, especially universal access to energy (SDG

7). The Olwekobaano explored the issue from diverse angles and recommended strategies for making SMART progress in the 7 remaining years to the expiry of the UN's SDG initiative in 2030.

The event was even more important given a recent World Bank poverty report for Uganda that indicated that poverty rates were highest in eastern (includes Busoga) and northern regions at 42% and 40% respectively. The report further showed that these rates substantially varied from those of the western region (27%) and central region (15%) and were also above the national average of 30%. Economists at the World Bank attributed these high poverty rates to **limited access to critical infrastructure and services like electricity, erratic rainfall (drought), low levels of education and small markets**.

Source: https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/eastern-northern-regions-top-in-poverty-wb-report-4231850#google_vignette

Project planning and organisation

Planning and organising the event provided an opportunity to bring together a strong mix of diverse talent from across the region and beyond. The profile of the organising team can be studied on BY's website. Given that this was voluntary work as it has always been, it was commendable to see the extent of commitment displayed by the team. It was also motivating to observe a much wider level of interest to be part of the organising team, especially from the youth. The team therefore involved them as much as possible in planning and organising the event. Some of these were students on vacation and therefore had an opportunity to develop new skills of strategic planning, team working, resource management and operations, time management, leadership, among others. These are skills that can help them in their professional and life development.

The planning and organisation also involved identifying and interacting with a cross-section of service providers, support institutions and other stakeholders in the nascent sector. We came to the conclusion that there is a high level of interest to help the region make progress as part of the national effort to improve access to energy, especially in rural areas where access is as low as 20%. Some of the stakeholder engagements culminated in a commitment to a deeper strategic partnership to do more systematic to support the acceleration of access to electricity at various levels, not least households, education and health institutions, farms, enterprises and the community at large.

The organising team had some members who were mainly located in and around Kampala and others who were mainly located in Busoga region. While the initial activities of engaging service providers and other key stakeholders focused on Kampala as the national capital, activities in the latter part of preparations were naturally located in the host region itself.

Implementation

The team worked very well together to deliver the event. The level of response from various stakeholders, especially in the hosting community, was consistent with previous first-time hosting in a new location. The mix of service providers offering different technologies and services was appealing to the participants, enabling them to learn about the possibilities on the market. Here is an overview of the feedback that some of the participants provided in a survey about the benefits of the event:

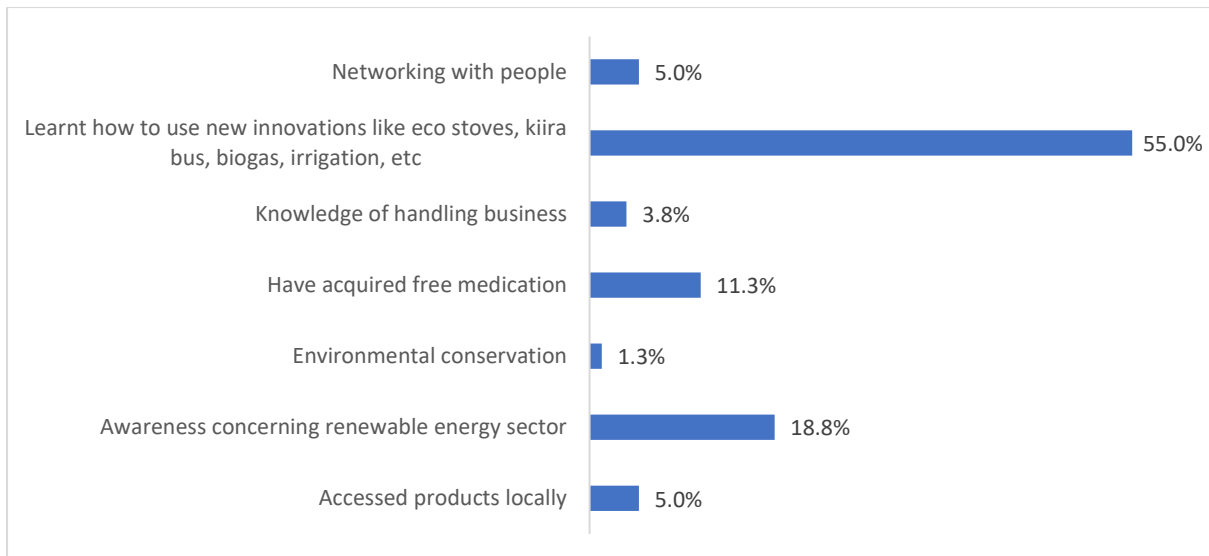


Figure 1: Perceptions of most important benefits from the Olwekobaano and Energy Expo 2023

As is historically the case with the Olwekobaano, our CSR health camp was in high demand, with the community turning up in large numbers to make use of the free health care services. We are particularly grateful to Rays of Hope Hospice Jinja (Early screening for cancer), Dr Anette Sansa of Jinja Hospital and her team (Ear, Nose and Throat) and Musana Community Health Care (general health care) for their combined services on the three days.

Here below is a compilation of some images from the event. More images can be found on the website: www.busogayaiffe.org

Sample gallery



Team from Makerere University explaining a clean cooking innovation



Ecostove corner



Explaining customisation of solutions



The Health Camp corner



Excitement about the Ecobus from Kiira Motors Corporation



Acknowledging an excellent exhibition

Review

The event was a great opportunity to restart BY's grassroots engagement after the period of absence that was conditioned by the pandemic. Hosting it on the strategic theme of improving access to energy proved to be a timely, strategic decision. We entered new partnerships that are already the basis for the development of project proposals based on some of the outputs of the event. Research data was also gathered that can inform not only these partnerships, but also inform the organising team in preparing for the next edition of the event later this year. We are especially delighted that a local energy resource hub is starting to take shape as an extension of the activities of the office we opened to interact with the community. This will provide an opportunity to gather more research data to strengthen the hub and to pilot what it can do over time. With the key service providers who participated, an MoU is being developed to structure the partnerships more strategically and to strengthen the way we work together for mutual benefit.

Next steps/Action plan

The next steps are to work on the main outputs of the event throughout the year using a strategy of developing them further and increasing their scope for measurable outcomes and impact. We shall further work systematically to prepare for the next edition of the event at the end of the year. This means maintaining our current portfolio of partners and engaging new ones to support the larger event we expect. With some of these partners we shall carry out small-scale activities throughout the year, for example inviting them to showcase their products and services and train on their use. We also plan to hold at least 2 health camps with our health care partners – one in each half of the year. In

order to strengthen our resource base for the event, we plan to approach potential partners in the course of the first quarter of the year such that they have enough time to consider the possibility of working with us on this important project. To do this, we shall first carefully review last year's activities regarding partnerships, and extract lessons to inform our activities this year. In light of the evidence we now have of the level of demand for the event, we are confident we shall be successful.

Preview of the Olwekobaano & Energy Expo 2024

Building on the positive experiences of the last event in December 2023, we expect a much more engaging event in 2024 characterised by more exhibiting partners and more participants from different spheres of life. We shall deepen the engagement around renewable energy using the following overarching theme: '[Taking the access to affordable, reliable and clean energy to more places and people using strategic partnerships to generate socio-economic change and to ensure sustainable development in Eastern Uganda](#)'. Further, some work will be done to develop the local energy resource hub and have it fully functional at the event as a showcase piece.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Olwekobaano and Energy Expo 2023 was successfully held in Kaliro town in Kaliro District. There was a strong response from the local leaders, the community and various stakeholders. The three core elements of the event – exhibition, conference and health camp, were all well attended. The ground is therefore set for the next edition of the event at the end of 2024, where we expect a significantly larger turn up of participants and exhibitors. We further expect stronger outputs that will act as a basis for a more intense set of outcomes and impact.

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