

# Solar-powered irrigation systems for Myanmar's Dry Zone



In 2018, EKOenergy's Climate Fund granted 23,000 € to the Renewable Energy Association of Myanmar (REAM), enabling them to install solar irrigation systems in Myanmar's Dry Zone. Another 20,000 € was granted by the Siemens Foundation.

Text: Milly Wernerus

Picture: REAM

Myanmar's Dry Zone is home to around 10 million people, more than half of whom are farmers. As its name suggests, it is the country's driest region, with an annual rainfall between 500 and 1,000 mm. This amount of water enables farms to yield only 1-2 crops per year, generating on average 250\$-500\$ per family, which is too little for a decent living. As a result, many young workers leave the Dry Zone to search for jobs elsewhere, leaving the farms mostly in the care of women and the elderly.

In order to improve livelihoods, REAM developed a project to provide beneficiaries with photovoltaic drip irrigation systems. Aung Myint from REAM explains that the irrigation systems provide the farms with access to water all year round, enabling them to grow 4-12 different crops such as flowers, various fruits and vegetables, and even rice. This allows farmers to increase their yield and generate a better income, regardless of the rainfall.

Each step of the project was carefully discussed and jointly implemented by REAM, their local partners and the involved farmers. Farmers received training about solar PV and the appropriate use of drip irrigation, as well as season-based agriculture practices in line with the varying market prices. In addition to receiving training, farmers were

encouraged to share their knowledge with each other. The local branch of WWF was also involved as a partner in capacity building activities and provided funds to produce educational video clips.

For subsistence farmers, it can be very difficult to get loans. Therefore REAM used this project to establish a tentative revolving fund, through which paybacks by previous beneficiaries enable other farmers to pre-finance their own irrigation systems. In the early stages of the project, five farms received solar irrigation systems in order to introduce this technology and train others. In the following two years, another 16 were installed.

REAM wishes to use these concrete examples to convince others, such as politicians, of the feasibility and usefulness of such systems. In addition, they aim to scale up the project to other villages in the Dry Zone in order to help transform this poverty-ridden area into an agro-economic generator for the country. Furthermore, the project will further increase sustainability in the region, since it improves long-term protection of aquifers.

We thank all EKOenergy users for contributing to REAM's work involving bringing solar energy to the Dry Zone and to the agenda of local authorities.

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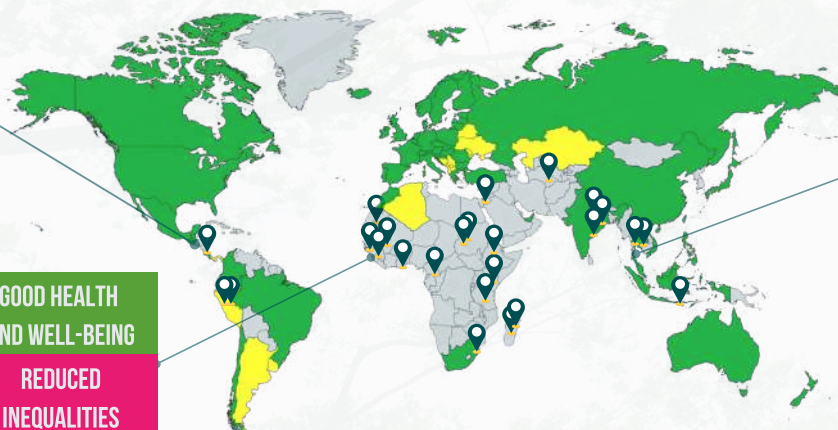
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