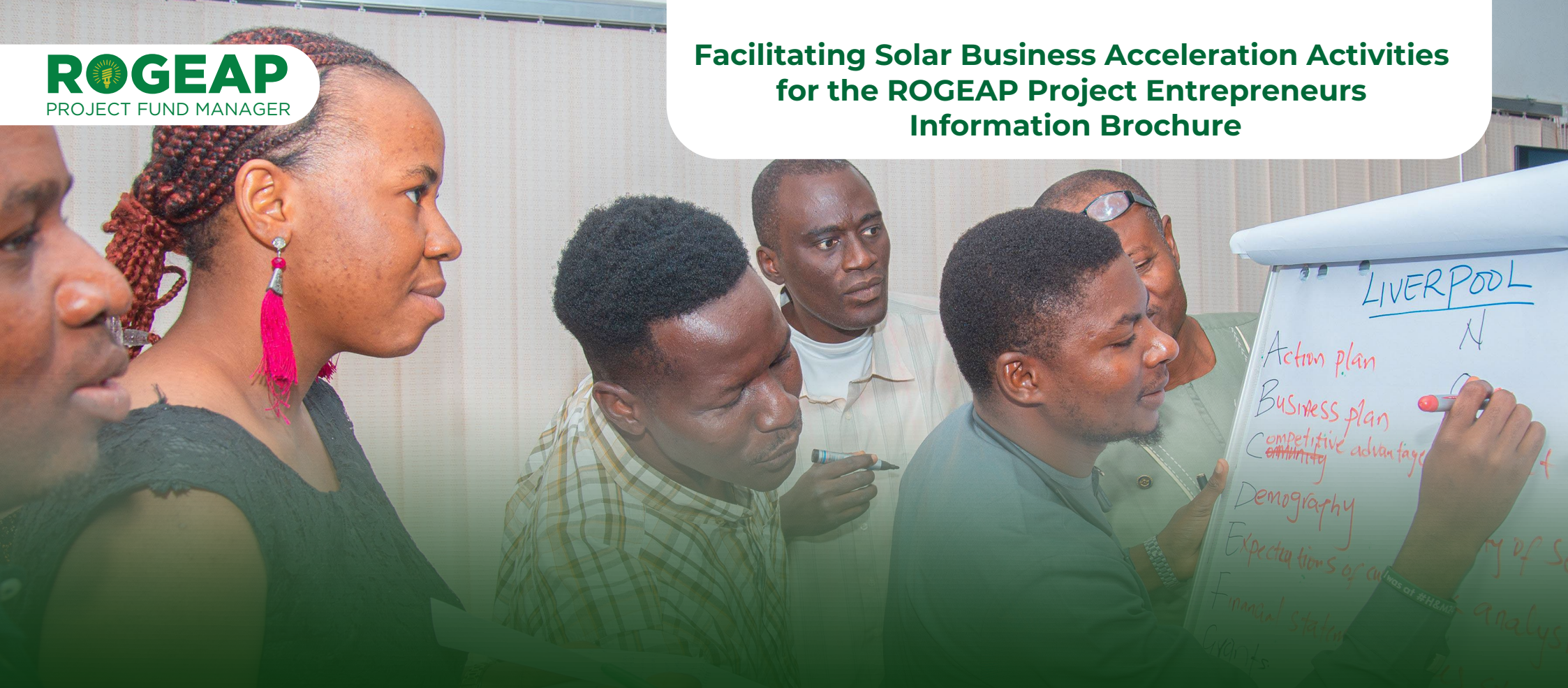


Facilitating Solar Business Acceleration Activities for the ROGEAP Project Entrepreneurs Information Brochure



**Are you an innovative SME in the off-grid solar energy sector?
Do you want to take your business to the next level?**

The Regional Off-Grid Electricity Access Project (ROGEAP) Project Fund Manager invites eligible SMEs to apply for a 9-Month Business Acceleration Program designed to support, mentor, and scale up your business through structured capacity building, investment readiness, and market access initiatives.



INTRODUCTION

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is setting up a private sector Entrepreneurship Support Facility (ESF) and Financial Support Facility (FSF) under the Regional Off-Grid Electricity Access Project (ROGEAP). ROGEAP is financed by the World Bank, the Clean Technology Fund (CTF) and the Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS) of the Government of the Netherlands. The ROGEAP is implemented by ECOWAS and West African Development Bank (BOAD).

ROGEAP objective is to increase access to sustainable electricity services in the fifteen ECOWAS member countries (ECOWAS member countries are Republic of Benin, Republic of Cape Verde, Burkina Faso, Republic of Côte D'Ivoire, Islamic Republic of The Gambia, Republic of Ghana, Republic of Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Republic of Liberia, Republic of Mali, Republic of Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Senegal, Republic of Sierra Leone, and Republic of Togo) and four Sahelian countries (namely Cameroon, Chad, Mauritania and Central African Republic). ROGEAP will improve access to sustainable energy by building a regional market for off-grid solar products and supporting the various stakeholders across the value chain.

ROGEAP has two main components:

Component 1 focuses on developing a regional market by establishing enabling business environment and providing technical and financial capacity building support to solar entrepreneurs in 19 project countries, and specifically through the following four sub-components:

- Component 1A: Enabling Environment
- Component 1B: Entrepreneurship Technical Support
- Component 1C: Entrepreneurship Financial Support
- Component 1D: Barrier Removal for Challenging Markets

Component 2 focuses on facilitating access to finance for standalone solar system businesses through a line of credit and establishing a guarantee facility to eligible CFIs located in eight WAEMU member countries, and specifically through the following two sub-components:

- (i) Component 2A; Line of credit to solar businesses
- (ii) Component 2B: Contingent grant facility for commercial financial institutions (CFIs) lending to solar businesses

BACKGROUND OF CUSTOMIZED BUSINESS ACCELERATION SUPPORT PROGRAM

The proposed Customized Business Acceleration Support program aims to enhance the capacity, skills, and bankability of early-stage solar businesses operating in 13 eligible countries. The program will involve partnering with established national training providers, incubators, accelerators, and entrepreneurial support organizations to deliver tailored training and mentoring programs. These programs will cover a wide range of topics including business strategies, business models, technology development, and investment facilitation. The process will begin with a comprehensive training needs assessment, followed by the design and implementation of specialized training materials. Selected businesses will receive follow-up coaching over a period of 9-12 months to support their growth and financial linkage, ultimately aiming to improve their access to finance and market opportunities.

Through a structured approach encompassing training needs assessment, material design, provider selection, business identification, training pilot, and follow-up coaching, the program seeks to empower early-stage solar businesses for sustainable growth and impact. Emphasis will be placed on inclusivity, with a target of at least 30% female participation, and support for women-focused organizations. Additionally, successful businesses will have opportunities for further engagement, including participation in regional competitions and access to loans from financial institutions under Component 2. Overall, the program strives to foster a supportive ecosystem for off-grid solar entrepreneurs, driving economic development and energy access across targeted regions.

The demand for solar energy continues to grow steadily worldwide, driven by increasing environmental awareness and the need for sustainable energy sources. However, early-stage solar businesses face numerous challenges that hinder their growth and contribution to the industry. These challenges include limited access to finance, lack of technical expertise, market entry barriers, and capacity constraints. In response, the proposed program aims to address these challenges comprehensively. The 9 months acceleration cycle will ensure SMEs have long term support for growth and expansion compared to a one week one off training workshop which has less impact

Through its holistic approach, the business acceleration supports the growth and development of early-stage solar businesses. By improving access to clean energy in off-grid and underserved communities, the program promotes economic development, job creation, and improved livelihoods. Furthermore, by nurturing innovation and entrepreneurship in the solar sector, the program drives technological advancements and fosters a transition towards a more sustainable energy future.

OBJECTIVES OF THE BUSINESS ACCELERATION SUPPORT

To accelerate the growth and sustainability of early-stage solar businesses in 13 eligible countries through customized business acceleration support, thereby improving energy access and fostering economic development.

Sub-Objectives/ thematic Approach to the acceleration support

1. Enhance Capacity and Skills: Provide tailored training and mentoring to early-stage solar businesses to improve their understanding of business models, technology, and financial management.
2. Improve Bankability and access to credit lines: Assist off grid solar entrepreneurs in developing robust business plans, financial forecasting, and investment facilitation strategies to enhance their attractiveness to investors and funding opportunities.
3. Develop Standardized Training Materials: Create standardized training materials specifically designed for Customized Business Acceleration Support programs targeting early-stage and growth-stage solar companies.
4. Build Capacity of Training Providers: Train local business support organizations, including incubators, accelerators, and entrepreneurial support organizations, to effectively deliver industry-specific content and support.
5. Promote Gender Inclusivity: Ensure gender inclusivity by aiming for at least 30% female participation and addressing specific needs and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing training and support programs.

BENEFITS OF THE ACCELERATION PROGRAM TO SMEs:

- Comprehensive business development support
- Access to financial and technical support
- Tailored training on innovation, scalability, and sustainability
- Exposure to investors and key stakeholders in the off-grid energy sector
- Networking opportunities with industry leaders across the region
- Opportunity to pitch your innovative business solutions for off-grid electrification
- Access to Financial facilities and credit lines with BOAD and other financial institutions

WHO SHOULD APPLY?

- SMEs operating in the off-grid solar energy sector
- Companies offering innovative solutions for off-grid electrification
- Entrepreneurs aiming to scale their solar businesses across the region
- Growth and Matured stage companies seeking for funding and market expansion

TYPE OF SMES TO BE SUPPORTED : Start up, Early stage, Growth stage, Maturity stage in the off-grid sector, Thus, each stage of the enterprise development life cycle requires different strategies, resources, and management approaches to ensure sustained success and growth.

1. Startup Stage

The startup stage SMEs are defined as where the business idea takes form, and the entrepreneur focuses on turning this idea into a viable product or service. At this point, the business is often in its infancy, working to establish its value proposition, secure initial funding, and develop a minimum viable product (MVP).

Key Characteristics:

- i. Limited market presence, primarily focusing on product development.
- ii. High uncertainty, with significant risks associated with market acceptance and financial sustainability.
- iii. Entrepreneurs are deeply involved in all aspects of the business, from product design to sales and customer interaction.

2. Early Stage

At the early stage, the business stage is defined as having typically moved beyond the MVP and is working on refining its product or service, expanding its customer base, and achieving a sustainable revenue model. The focus is on market entry, customer acquisition, and validation of the business model.

Key Characteristics:

- i. Initial sales and revenue generation, but profitability may still be out of reach.
- ii. Efforts to secure additional funding (e.g., from angel investors or venture capital).
- iii. Organizational development begins, with the formation of a small, dedicated team.
- iv. Business processes are still being established, and the company remains agile and adaptable.

3. Growth Stage

The growth stage is marked by rapid expansion and scaling of operations. The business has validated its product-market fit and is focused on increasing market share, optimizing operations, and expanding its customer base both geographically and demographically.

Key Characteristics:

- i. Significant revenue growth, with the company moving toward profitability.
- ii. Expansion of the product line or services offered.
- iii. Organizational scaling, with the addition of more employees, formalizing structures, and processes.
- iv. Investment in marketing, sales, and customer service to sustain growth.

4. Maturity Stage

In the maturity stage, the business is defined as having achieved stable growth and market presence. The focus shifts from expansion to maintaining market position, optimizing efficiency, and maximizing profitability. Innovation may continue, but the pace is slower compared to the growth stage.

Key Characteristics:

- i. Stable revenues with consistent profitability.
- ii. Market leadership or a strong competitive position within the industry.
- iii. Focus on efficiency, cost management, and maintaining customer loyalty.
- iv. Potential exploration of new markets or product diversification to sustain growth.
- v. The company might consider mergers, acquisitions, or strategic partnerships to maintain its competitive edge.

PROGRAM TIMELINE:

- Application Deadline: 1st November – 15th December 2024
- Program Duration: 9- 12 months
- Hybrid delivery
- 1- 6 hours dedication weekly

HOW TO APPLY:

Interested SMEs should submit their expression of interest via rogeappfm.org/smeacceleration

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Visit rogeappfm.org or email us at info@rogeappfm.org

Take the step today—accelerate your growth and transform off-grid energy access in your region!