

## Terms of reference

# PROVISION OF SERVICES RELATING TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DIGITAL ENERGY PARTNERSHIPS CALL FOR PROJECTS

## I. Background

### *1. The Digital Energy program : Elements of background*

The digital revolution is essential to solve the challenges of energy accessibility in emerging countries. In Africa alone, 600 million people, 1 in 2 in sub-Saharan Africa, do not have access to electricity. This situation severely limits economic development opportunities, access to health services, education, and overall quality of life.

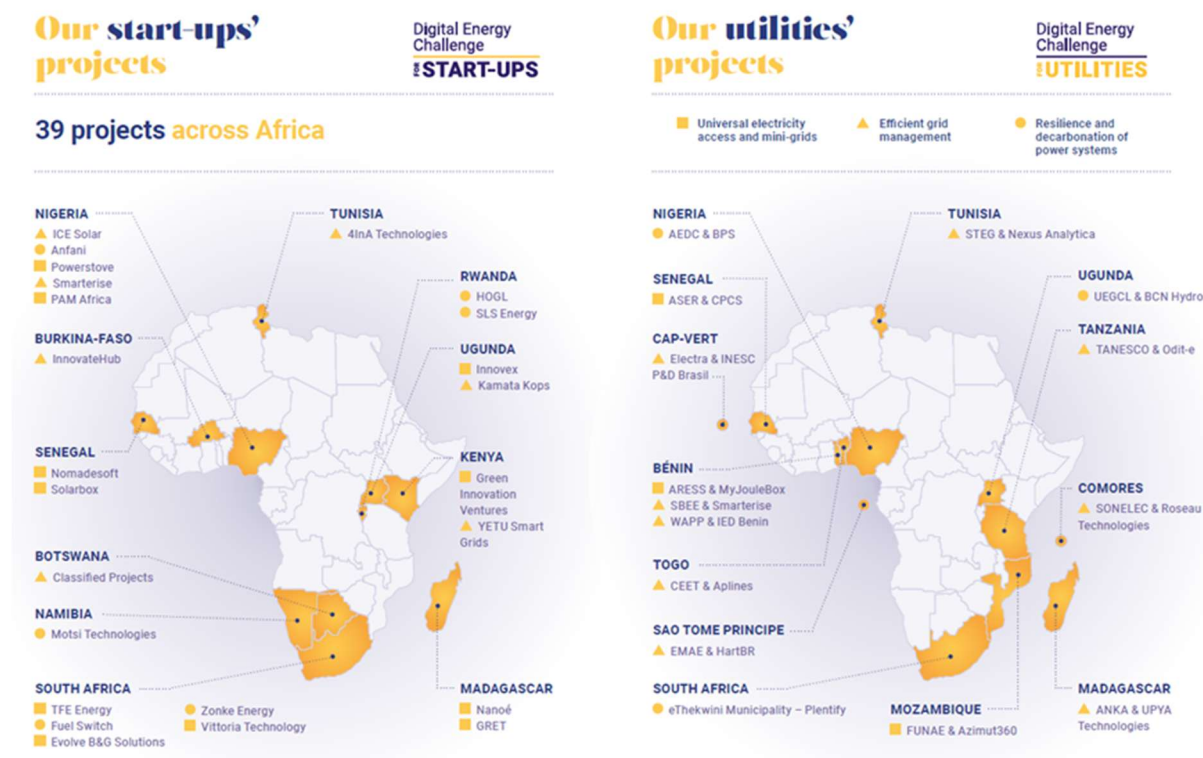
Since 2020, Agence Française de Développement (AFD) has been implementing the Digital Energy initiative funded by the DG INTPA of the European Commission (24.8M€) and the French Agency for Ecological Transition ADEME (1.1M€). **Digital Energy's mission is to help improve access to energy through the development and deployment of innovative and digital solutions in Africa.** Digital Energy offers a full range of tools to support African public energy utilities and start-ups in their digitalization process through content production and sharing, networking initiatives, innovation challenges, seed funding and technical assistance. The program also supports innovation and entrepreneurship and aims to build bridges between innovative start-ups with new solutions and public and private companies responsible for providing public services.

Finally, the program aims to contribute to the European Global Gateway strategy for "sustainable and reliable connections [...] serving citizens and the planet" in the energy sector by supporting sustainable investments that promote equitable access to infrastructure financed with the involvement of the European private sector.

The program is structured around four components, the main results to date of which are detailed below:

Digital Energy Challenge	Seed financing	Digitalisation of utilities	Community
8 M€	4.8 M€	5.1 M€	2.3 M€
Utilities/Startups & SMES	Startups	Utilities	Utilities/Startups
4 Challenges	12 companies in the pipe	6 TA for 2.3 M€	<b>Oct. 2023</b> : Launch of the Community
37 innovative projects	5 already funded	9 webinars	3 collaborative studies (geospatial data, energy storage, AI)
15 partnerships between Utilities and startups		3 benchmarks	

The Digital Energy Challenge is one of the flagship components of the Digital Energy program. This call for projects has been launched five times a year, the latest of which is still ongoing. To date, the Challenge has rewarded two categories of projects: innovations led by African startups and projects led by innovative SMEs in partnership with African utilities. Digital Energy has supported more than 35 innovative projects, including 10 public-private partnerships. Furthermore, the program launched a Community of stakeholders and its [digital platform](#) through which collaborative studies, webinars and events are organized.



*Map of the supported projects at the end of 2024*



One of the success stories of the Digital Energy Challenge is the support that AFD has provided to the Nigerian company Beacon Power Services at its beginnings in the development of an energy and customer management solution for the distribution company AEDC in Nigeria.

After 5 years of implementation, it was decided to revamp Digital Energy Challenge and **to focus on the public-private partnerships**, aimed at supporting open innovation projects between private companies with innovative solutions and public utilities. The creation of this partnership program, **Digital Energy Partnerships**, aims to extend and amplify the results already achieved by Digital Energy in the context of capacity building and funding activities for utilities.

## *2. Digital Energy Partnership: support public private innovation in M300 countries*

The objectives of the Digital Energy Partnerships is to support innovation that will increase access to energy with selected public utilities, with two strong and structuring principles:

- 1) Public utilities are selected based on their commitment to Mission 300 and innovation ideas shall contribute to the improvement of the impacts of infrastructure projects financed by international donors including the European Union in the framework of the Global Gateway strategy.
- 2) Innovative solutions proposed by the private sector are selected through an open innovation challenge, which may be preceded by studies if necessary.

To achieve this objective, we believe that Digital Energy should work as closely as possible with local ecosystems by creating a network of "innovation labs", in close collaboration with the utilities responsible for providing electricity in Africa.

Two main activities are planned (i) Capacity building and (ii) Project identification (by facilitating design processes and business matchmaking) and funding through partnership between the public and private sectors.

### Capacity building

- (1) The community, the platform <https://digital-energy.eu>, and associated events:
  - The ‘Labs Forum’: one event per year organized in one of the countries hosting the Challenge, to share best practices and to promote B2B meetings and synergies.
  - Learning expeditions: once or twice a year, we envisage organizing learning expedition days to meet innovative and inspiring players.
  - Online training and webinars accessible all year through the Digital Energy platform <https://digital-energy.eu>, as well as key resources.
- (2) a specific toolkit designed to allow public utilities to (i) identify the idea for which innovative private solutions are expected, (ii) map the innovation and partnership ecosystem, and (ii) assess the digital maturity and economic viability of their project.

## Projects identification and support

Throughout the year, the public utilities benefit from Digital Energy's support to identify the project on which they wish to work on. Projects considered not to be mature enough may be suggested for specific studies. **One utility** is selected each year to benefit from the challenge. **A Call for Innovative Projects is then issued** every year and open for a period of 3 months. Applications are selected by an ad-hoc evaluation committee according to a specific set of criteria: maturity level of technical solutions, financial viability of private companies, etc.

In 2025, the Senelec utility in Senegal was selected for the Digital Energy Partnership and a call for projects was launched around the theme "Identification and real-time census of connections" as part of the Global Gateway [PADERAU](#) project. **This year, the call for projects will be carried out in partnership with a utility in Nigeria.**

## **II. Objectives of the assignment**

The objective of this assignment is to:

- Organize the call for projects for innovative SME in partnership with a public utility in Nigeria
- Perform projects diagnosis and design of personalized support plan
- Organize a Bootcamp in Nigeria in Abuja or Lagos.

## **III. Scope of Services, Tasks and Expected Deliverables**

### Task 1: Organization of the Digital Energy Partnership call for project

#### *a) General framework*

The Digital Energy Partnership call for project will reward one innovative SME which will implement a digital innovative project within a public-private partnership framework to answer the strategic needs of a Nigerian utility. Thus, the consultant is asked to provide an offer for the organization of this call for project.

#### *Sub Task 1: Design of the call for projects and diagnosis of the utility's needs*

To set a logical framework for these challenges, the consultant will review the previous edition of the Digital Energy Challenge: rules, awards, etc.. The consultant will then proposed modifications to the current methodology, in order to include in the rules of the challenge a testing of the solutions proposed with real data from the Utility.

The consultant will have to conduct a needs assessment with the Nigerian Utility in order to diagnose its needs in terms of digitalization and identify those likely to be addressed by the Partnership call for projects. This work should lead to the definition of the themes of the call for projects which will allow companies to apply with their projects. Interviews and discussions with the utility will be conducted to:

- Assess the overall digital maturity of the Utility using a dedicated tool developed by Onepoint for Digital Energy
- Identify the different projects involving digital solutions and their priority level for the Utility
- Assess the alignment with Global Gateway as well as the future impacts of the project discussed with the Utility with the toolkit developed by Onepoint for Digital Energy
- Break down the chosen project or theme into different modules (at least four) corresponding to solutions or solution building blocks that the candidate companies will have to develop in partnership with the Utility.

The decision regarding the project or theme of the call for projects will be made in agreement with the Nigerian utility and AFD within the framework of the discussions that the consultant will lead. AFD will communicate findings to the EU in order for the consultant to take into account EU recommendations and priorities. Particular attention will be paid to aligning the call for projects objectives with the Global Gateway strategy and Digital Green Innovation Action priorities.

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AFD is also willing to include in the design of the call for projects:

- A strong focus on the use of AI, subject on which AFD has just launched a collaborative study that will be presented during the bootcamp.
- The analysis of the links that could be built with the solutions proposed and the Integrated Planning Tool developed by SEforALL

### *Sub Task 2: Organization of the call for projects*

The consultant will implement the scope designed in the first phase to organize the call for projects:

- Definition of the rules of the call for projects: profiles of candidates, awards, schedule, categories, criteria, partnerships, elements of the application file (questionnaire, supporting documents, ...) based on the results of previous editions;
- Putting the competition online on the Digital Energy platform (<https://digital-energy.eu/en/digital-energy-challenge-2025>) with the support of One Point, in charge of the Platform.
- Definition of the schedule;
- Identification and organization of the selection committee ;
- Provision of an evaluation guide for the members of the committee

- Communication around the pre-selection and selection phases.

#### *Sub Task 3: Sourcing of innovative SMEs*

The consultant will carry out the sourcing of companies throughout the African continent in order to mobilize applications. Beyond sourcing through the Digital Energy platform (publication of the competition), other channels will also be used: mailing, advertising on social networks, use of private and public databases, organization of local information meetings, partnerships with local incubators and hubs, events, etc.

The consultant will produce a description of sourcing modalities as part of the framework note and will be able to report regularly and in figures to AFD on sourcing and registrations, taking care to present data disaggregated by gender.

#### *Sub Task 4: Communication throughout the challenge*

- Provision of a communication plan (including a social media strategy), in line with visibility and communication rules applicable to EU-funded actions (including Global Gateway as well as D4D Hub communications guidelines) and the EU-AFD Agreements for a Digital Energy Facility in particular;
- Communication throughout the Challenge (logos, press release, press kit, tweets, poster, flyers, Kakemono, social networks, videos ...);
- Press relations throughout the project;
- Advice on the modalities / launching / awarding of prizes;
- Recommendations on the organization of events at the local level around the challenge;

Communication activities must be carried out in conjunction with AFD communication department as well as Onepoint, which is responsible for the animation and communication around the Digital Energy Community.

#### *Sub Task 5: Pre-selection and selection of innovative SMEs*

The consultant will carry out the following activities:

- Definition of screening and selection criteria and deliverables to be submitted by applicants (the consultant's proposal will be subject to review by the EC who has a veto right on award proposals). This activity will have to be carried out in collaboration with PROPARGO in order to define criteria favoring the selection of companies subject to potential subsequent investments ;
- Support to the establishment of a shortlist of innovative SMEs admitted at the selection

- stage (analysis of the application and preparation of the decisions of the pre-selection committee);
- Provision of an evaluation guide for the selection committees;
- Support for the evaluation of the applications and organization of the committee sessions;
- Informing candidates and answering questions;
- Organization of the testing of the proposed selection after preselection and before the selection committee;
- Communication about the pre-selection and selection phases.

#### *Sub Task 6: Bootcamp and awards ceremony in Nigeria*

A Digital Energy Bootcamp 2026 will be organized in Nigeria and will involve the AFD, the EC and the Nigerian utility to reward the winner of the challenge. The program and schedule of this bootcamp will be defined jointly with AFD at the start of the services in the scoping note. The objective of the bootcamp will be to:

- Integrate the laureate into the Digital Energy Community (past laureates, Digital Energy partners and funders, etc.)
- Finalize the diagnosis and the support plan on which the consultant will have obtained the agreement and adjustments required by the laureates ;
- Provide startups and utilities with services corresponding to their needs, by level of development or individually: training activities, networking, meetings with contractors, hackatons, technical assistance, etc.
- Cross experiences between startups and utilities to create an open innovation dynamic between them.

The consultant will carry out all aspects of the organization of the Bootcamp and awards ceremony, from the design of the event to all logistics aspects. The consultant will include the logistical costs of the organization of the bootcamp (flights & accommodation for the awardees, catering, perdiem, venue, invitation, etc.) in his offer with unit prices. The consultant will have to work in collaboration with the AFD local agency in Nigeria as well as with the Nigerian utility to organize the event.

#### *Sub Task 7: Capitalization and recommendations*

At the end of the service, the incumbent will provide AFD with all the challenge databases (private innovators, incubators, key statistics, graphic production, etc.). It will produce a review of the service and recommendations for the organization of subsequent editions.

#### *b) Expected deliverables*



- Deliverables for *Sub Task 1 – design of the call for project*

The preliminary work should contribute to the production a framing document for the call for projects including notably:

- General theme and module corresponding to specific technological needs/solutions for the utility
- Legal advice (rule of the challenges, KYC issues, etc)
- Scope, eligibility & award, criteria
- Sourcing strategy & communication
- Definition of the rules: technical scope, criteria, award, modalities, schedule;
- Definition of the detailed eligibility and award criteria and the deliverables to be submitted by the candidates;
- Production of a back planning and a roadmap to coordinate the call for projects.

This framing document should be provided two months after signature of the contract.

- Deliverables for *Sub Task 2: Organization of the call for projects*

- All document necessary for the organization of the challenge (including all material to be displayed in the web site – in English and French)

Four months after the signature of the contract.

- Deliverables for *Sub Task 3: Sourcing of innovative SMEs*

- Framework note describing the sourcing modalities - Two months after signature of the contract.
- Regular reports (including data) on sourcing and registrations. The frequency of these reports will be determined in the design phase.

- Deliverables for *Sub Task 4: Communication throughout the challenge*

- Communication (social networks, e-mailing, media, and specialized press) will take place throughout the implementation period:
- Provision of a communication plan that will specify the quantitative objectives for media and social network coverage, the content and communication channels to be used and will identify the key relays on the theme; 3 months after the signature of the contract to be revised every year
- Communication kit: Online content and graphic production, logos, videos, posters, flyers and kakemonos. 4 months after the signature of the contract.



- Production of content throughout the competition: press release, press kit, content that can be easily shared on social networks, tweets, poster to be printed, flyers, Kakémono, social network visuals...);
- Video production (teaser, individual pitches of candidates);
- Advice on the modalities/formats of launch/award presentation (format, press,...) ;
- Press relations throughout the project;
- An accompanying note on the organization of events at the local level around the competition;
- Communication coaching of the winners before the awards ceremony.

All content must be produced in French and English. A mastery of communication strategies and tools is expected.

- Deliverables for *Sub Task 5: Pre-selection and selection of startups and utilities*
  - Evaluation guide for the members of the jury (one for the pre-selection committee and one for the selection committee). 8 months after the signature of the contract
  - Shortlist of innovative SMEs by previously carrying out a DUE DILIGENCE verification. 9 months after the signature of the contract
  - Playground to test the preselected solutions
  - Minutes of the award committee and publication of results. 11 months after the signature of the contract
- Deliverables for *Sub Task 6: Bootcamp and awards ceremony in Nigeria*

The consultant will provide AFD with a Bootcamp and award ceremony framework note on the bootcamp organization, program, staffing and experts mobilized during the week 8 month after the signature of the contract. All material (presentation supports, communication tools, etc.) shall be delivered in their final version at least 15 days before the event.

- Deliverables for *Sub Task 7: Capitalization and recommendations*
  - Provision of the challenge database: Application files, evaluation canvas, key statistics, contacts, etc.
  - A note reviewing the organization of the call for project, the best practices and the areas of improvement, with recommendations for possible next call for projects.

## Task 2 : Projects diagnosis and design, and implementation of personalized support plans

### *a) General framework*

At the end of the call for projects, the objective is to offer the laureate a financial reward and personalized support for 18 months, in order to support and help the Utility to develop the open innovation approach and to develop in partnership with the laureate new services or practices that meets the specific needs of their structures.

#### *Sub Task 1: Design of the support plans*

At the beginning of the mission, the consultant will carry out a 360° diagnosis of laureate in order to determine the best use of the rewards. This will include the following activities:

- Creation of a personalized support plan depending on the level of development of the innovation
- The consultant will have to define support objectives and implement indicators to assess the relevance and effectiveness of its action. These indicators will have to be validated with the AFD and aligned with reporting priorities to the EU.

The support plan could consist in the mobilization of a pool of experts, working together to bring technical assistance during a bootcamp and locally with the utility throughout the year of support, or any alternate proposition suited to the utilities needs.

The consultant will implement the necessary means to mobilize, on an ad hoc basis and as far as necessary, the support of experts and his network to accompany the laureate. The consultant could also implement partnerships with local incubators to reinforce the follow-up on a local basis.

#### *Sub Task 2: Implementation of the support and financing plans*

The consultant will be responsible for the management of financing of the laureate's innovative projects in partnership with the utility. All the funds allocated to the laureate will be included in the consultant's contract. AFD will not allocate directly the funds to the laureate.

The laureate will be able to contract directly with suppliers and subcontractors according to its needs expressed at the time of the diagnosis. In case of pivot, or change of strategy, the consultant will consult the laureate and actualize the support plan before transmitting it to AFD for validation.



The consultant will carry out for AFD a control of the proper use of the amounts allocated to the rewards.

### *Sub Task 3: Follow-up of the startups and utilities innovation*

On the basis of the support plan, the consultant will set up and lead a framework for regular discussions between the laureate, including via digital tools:

- The good execution of the support plan and their adequacy with the needs of the utility;
- If necessary, propose modifications to the support plan;
- To take stock of the work carried out by the startups and utilities and to be a source of advice and proposals.

Every 16 weeks, the incumbent will draw up a progress report that will be sent to AFD. This report will detail the use of the awards and the update of the support plan to cover their needs.

#### b) Expected deliverables

- Deliverables for *Sub Task 1: Design of the support plans*

The consultant will produce a diagnostic report and support plan for the laureate:

- Diagnosis of capacity gaps and challenges;
- Formalized offer of a capacity development action plan adapted to the needs of the laureate, with indicators the methodology to implement them.

- Deliverables for *Sub Task 2 and 3*

- Finance and audit procedure manual. To be provided 6 month after the contract signature.
- Expenditures plan for the laureate. Shall be included in the support plan.
- Quaterly reporting on the expenses of the laureate
- Reporting and communication on project's implementation and results
- Audit of the expenses for the laureate. Every year.

## **IV. Team Composition & Qualification Requirements**

The skills required to carry out the services of this lot are those covering the following areas:

- Extensive and demonstrated knowledge of the Anglophone and Francophone African innovation ecosystems and the utilities sector on the continent;



- Integration into a network of technical experts in the field of new technologies and energy;
- Demonstrated experience in supporting electricity utility digitalization project (SCADA, EMS/DMS, etc.)
- Project management and reporting capabilities;
- Mastery of English and French languages.
- Ability to manage and monitor a financial package (financing of start-ups and utilities).
- Mastery of communication strategies and communication tools; Editorial capacity for press and social media content; Production of graphic and audiovisual content (graphic charter, logo, videos...).
- Expertise in Business Development Support for SME's, strategy advice for fundraising and financing, and Transaction advisory up to financial close

It is expected that the consultant in the offer of services proposes the mobilization of an agency or a subcontractor specialized in communication to carry out the activities related to communication throughout the competition.