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# “Switch On” — New Documentary On Energy Poverty With Scott Tinker

December 3rd, 2020 by [Jesper Berggreen](#)

I received an email from my old acquaintance Robert A. Freling from [Solar Electric Light Fund](#) (SELF) inviting me to watch a new documentary in which he and his team plays a major role: “Switch On.” The film is released from [Switch Energy Alliance](#), in which [Bureau of Economic Geology](#) Director Scott Tinker is on a global adventure to meet people and communities as they *Switch On*.

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It's a feature-length film that illustrates the profound challenges that energy poverty poses for nearly one billion people on planet Earth. It's a follow up to the earlier released documentary "Switch," and this time around I must admit that I got quite emotional watching "Switch On." It moved me because I found it was honest in the way it let ordinary people illustrate the challenges of energy poverty with a positive mindset without neglecting the astounding efforts needed to turn the world around to a complete and sustainable energy future. In other words, it made a seemingly impossible task seem possible. SELF's punchline is that it "will change the way you look at energy and the developing world forever."

Take an hour and nineteen minutes off your schedule and watch this. I'm curious what you think. Are we really at the brink of a true global scale energy revolution, for all walks of life? It is difficult for me to not be biased in this regard, and to explain why, here are a couple of examples from my encounters with energy poverty.

In the photo below you see a new library building outside the rural school **Chibwe** in Zambia. In 2019 the building was made ready to receive electricity from the grid 200 meters down the road for the first time since this area got access to electricity more than 4 decades

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ago. I helped pay the final invoice for establishing the connection, and I still await final confirmation that it has happened. The problem? Bureaucracy.



Photo by Jesper Berggreen

In the photo below from Itezhi-Tezhi, Zambia in 2014, my late friend **Dixon** answers my ignorant question as to why he uses small solar panels (see that one on the ground by the house) instead of the grid literally going over his house: "It's too expensive to get connected, and besides, I can't afford a refrigerator." The problem? Availability.



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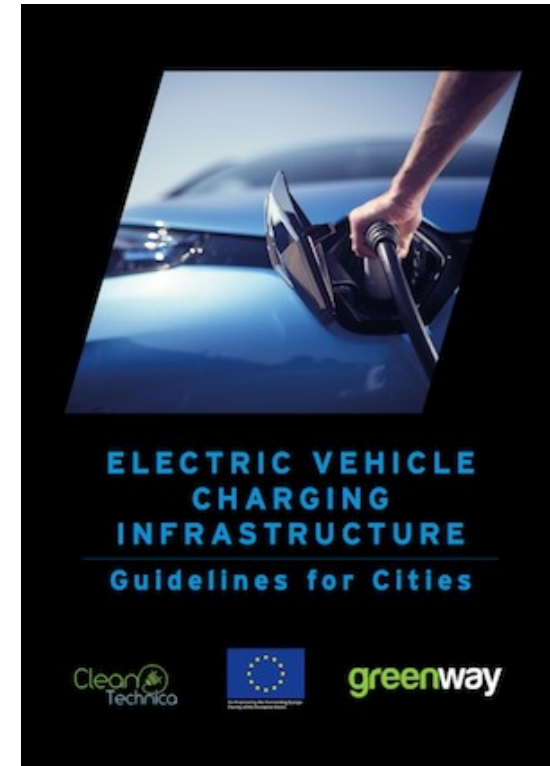


Photo by Jesper Berggreen

In the documentary "**Switch On**," Scott at one point wonders how much fossil fuel they just burnt to transport solar panels, batteries, and tons of other hardware, and people, to a small village to build a microgrid. Well, the age of fire may be ending, but burning stuff is propelling us to a new future, and it will be a while before the last carbohydrate is converted to particulates and greenhouse gasses to provide energy to the inhabitants of this planet. Let's hope we're not too late.

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## Energy Alliance

### About the Author



**Jesper Berggreen** Jesper had his perspective on the world expanded vastly after having attended primary school in rural Africa in the early 1980s. And while educated a computer programmer and laboratory technician, working with computers and lab-robots at the institute of forensic medicine in Aarhus, Denmark, he never forgets what life is like having nothing. Thus it became obvious for him that technological advancement is necessary for the prosperity of all humankind, sharing this one vessel we call planet earth. However, technology has to be smart, clean, sustainable, widely accessible, and democratic in order to change the world for the better. Writing about clean energy, electric transportation, energy poverty, and related issues, he gets the message through to anyone who wants to know better. Jesper is founder of Lifelike.dk and a long-term investor in Tesla, Ørsted, and Vestas.



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**Solarman** • a month ago • edited

""In other words, it made a seemingly impossible task seem possible. SELF's punchline is that it "will change the way you look at energy and the developing world forever.""

I find it interesting that these "third World countries" are actually the largest adopters of solar PV and energy storage World wide. The tailor in India that spent almost a years wages to buy a couple of solar PV panels and batteries and an inverter to power his 'new' electric sewing machine. He not only increased his daily productivity, he can now work at night to get more work done.

The family in Africa that lives in a utility dead zone. They have a cell phone, but are still using candles and kerosene to light their homes at night. The pay as you go solar PV installation gets them a solar PV panel, battery and a few LED lights and a cell phone USB charge port. A small charge on the phone bill each month until the system is paid off, saves time, money and travel to "go to town" to charge the cell phone and buy candles and kerosene. The money saved there helps pay for the system in the long run. The indoor air quality is better with the LED lighting than, burning something to make light.

In these countries, admittedly, a nano or micro grid of from 50 watts to 200 watts in Africa and 200 watts to 1.5kWp in India can do wonders for these people.

In countries like the U.S. we pretty much have a utility connection and our average energy use per day is 36kWh/day to 46kWh/day. Depending on latitude, the sun hours, a roof top system of from 6.5kWp to 8kWp in the south and southwest and 9.5kWp to 12kWp in the north and northeast to take care of the average energy needs for a home.

In these poor countries the citizens are making on average the equivalent of \$200 to \$600/mo. USD and are installing and using solar PV to enhance their lives. In the U.S. where there are often two income households and an average \$4,000 to



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