

Plans by United States-based technology solutions firm, GreenRG Management, LLC, to commence manufacturing operations locally, could yield employment for up to 50 persons, in the first instance.

The company, which specialises in manufacturing solar energy products, could commence operations in Jamaica as early as the second quarter of 2013.

GreenRG, which is widely known for products such as solar powered light emitting diode (LED) panels, is currently partnering with the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development to implement the government's streetlight energy saving project, which kicked off on Tuesday (January 8) in Osbourne Store, Clarendon, with the commencement of a six-month pilot phase.

Speaking during the launch, Local Government and Community Development Minister, Hon. Noel Arscott, pointed out that GreenRG's management, which already has an office in Jamaica, has indicated that a larger complex is being sought to facilitate the assembly of LED solar lights locally.

"We expect them to employ anywhere between 25 and 50 persons to begin the assembly of LED solar lights in Jamaica. It is hoped that the project will grow from strength to strength to the point where we can export to the United States and other Caribbean countries," the Minister stated.

He also informed that the HEART Trust/NTA has collaborated with the Ministry to facilitate the training of five persons recruited, in the first instance, to be involved in the production, installation and maintenance of the LED panels.

"They (HEART) will continue to train others as we ramp up the production and ... negotiations are already underway with a local company to help to (manufacture) the base for the street lights," Mr. Arscott stated.

Meanwhile, GreenRG's Managing Director, Alfred Heyer, informed that the company is targeting the commencement of local operations by "early to mid-spring" this year, adding that "we have made plans that we can, basically, actually start the manufacturing process relatively soon".

He expressed the hope that Jamaica will serve as the springboard to expand the entity's operations across the Caribbean.

The street light energy saving pilot project will see some 5,000 LED panels being installed in Clarendon and sections of Kingston, St. Andrew, and St. Catherine, replacing existing light fixtures.

Installation of the LED fixtures, which is being done at no cost to the government, is being facilitated by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry and GreenRG, which was signed in 2011. The MoU makes provisions for the testing and implementation of alternative energy technology solutions for local government facilities, and comes in the wake of a recently completed energy audit of the Ministry's offices as well as public spaces under its purview.

The project is aimed at significantly reducing the cost to the budget to maintain the country's approximately 93,000 street lights, which totals upwards of \$2 billion per annum. Minister Arscott advised that the results of the pilot phase will be evaluated to determine the way forward.

Cabinet recently approved measures aimed at reducing costs to the state for the island's street lights. These include: the introduction of policy standards on the type and characteristics of street lights, to enable the use of the most energy and cost efficient units. Implementation of this policy will be underpinned by the requisite regulations, which are expected to yield significant savings.

Cabinet also gave authorization for the exploration of "feasible options" for the introduction of LED street lights on a wide scale islandwide.