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Nirajesh, an Orb Energy technician, stands in the solar panel field at Aqeel Halmi's Orb Energy.

Zayed Future Energy Prize delivers a big energy boost

[Vesela Todorova](#)
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One-page article

As organisers of the Zayed Future Energy Prize sort through the contenders for next year's US\$4 million (Dh14.7m) funding, previous winners say they are already reaping the benefits.

The prize was launched in 2008 by Abu Dhabi's clean energy company, Masdar, to recognise people and organisations working in renewable energy and sustainability.

Many of those rewarded say the funding and recognition helped to boost the impact of their work.

For Damian Miller, the chief executive of Orb Energy, an Indian provider of solar electricity and hot-water systems, the award was a catalyst for implementing significant, and at the time risky, changes.

To achieve greater growth, he had been considering asking customers to pay up front, as well as turning more of the company's branches into franchises. "When you take those risks, your business goes into some turmoil," he said.

The company was awarded \$1m in January last year as the first runner-up in the small-to-medium enterprise or non-governmental organisation category. The cash, said Mr Miller, "was really a bit of security for us".

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When the company received the award, it had 11 franchises and 100 branches. It now has 125 franchises and 20 branches. It aims to reach 500 franchises in the next three years and expand into South-east Asia and Africa.

“The Zayed Prize helped us take some important risks,” he said. “We streamlined our operations. We really created a model that much more scaleable.”

As the second runner-up in the same category, the Environmental Defence Fund (EDF), a US-based non-governmental organisation that works on climate-change issues, was awarded \$500,000.

It used the funding to boost its smart grids programme. A smart grid is an electrical grid able to deal with a higher than normal level of volatility in electricity supply.

“The Zayed Future Energy Prize has enabled EDF to strengthen our international standing as an organisation, deepen our EDF Smart Power efforts – including our work on energy efficiency, smart grid and renewable energy – and heighten the effectiveness of our work to reduce harmful greenhouse-gas emissions,” said the organisation’s president, Fred Krupp.

“The prize helped EDF expand its work to ensure that the smart electric grid will also be a green grid, one that provides environmental and consumer benefits.”

In November, Mr Krupp was on a panel of experts tasked with providing the Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, with ways to make energy systems more resilient in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

“This may well not have happened but for the fact we were able to get more resources and enjoy increased visibility through the award,” said Mr Krupp.

The winner of the small-to-medium enterprises category last year was the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), an international non-profit organisation that provides a global system for companies to disclose their environmental impact.

The \$1.5m prize “was extremely important” in helping it to develop, said its executive chairman, Paul Dickinson. “We were able to expand in all areas of activity in 2012 because of the prize,” he added.

The funds enabled CDP to increase the number of companies that report climate change impact. More than 4,000 companies share their data. A total of 75 cities around the world also participate. The organisation has also expanded to include water and forest footprint reporting.

Another success was advising the British government on becoming the first in the world to require publicly traded businesses on the London Stock Exchange to report their greenhouse emissions. The regulation comes into force this year.

Among this year’s winners was d.light Design, a for-profit US-based social enterprise that sells solar lanterns to the developing world. The company was awarded \$1.5m as the winner in the small-to-medium enterprise category.

It will use the money to start “a major new education initiative” in Africa, said Donn Tice, the chief executive and chairman.

The programme aims to give solar lights to children in poor regions with little access to energy. They will also be taught about renewable energy in school.

“The prize money enables us to seed it and start it,” he said, adding that the programme aims to reach 10 million children in the next five years. “It allows us to reach millions more people than we would be able to reach ourselves.”

Submissions for the 2014 Zayed Future Energy Prize opened last Thursday and close on August 5.

The winners will be announced during Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week in January next year.

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