



**For Immediate Release**

Tuesday, May 9, 2006

## Freeplay's Portable Energy Device Wins Major World Bank Competition

**Washington, D.C.** —May 9, 2006—World Bank's 2006 Global Development Marketplace (DM2006) announced winners of its \$4 million competition, 'Innovations in Water, Sanitation and Energy Services for Poor People.' The Freeplay Foundation won a \$199,000 award for the Freeplay Weza, a portable energy source, distributed to rural communities in Rwanda. Weza means "power" in Swahili. Winners were announced by Paul Wolfowitz, president of World Bank, at the organization's headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Selected from a competitive pool of more than 2,500 applicants, the Freeplay Foundation was one of 118 finalists in the DM2006 competition, representing a diverse sampling of organizations ranging from NGOs and universities, to private businesses and government agencies. The Freeplay Foundation was one of 40 selected to compete in the energy category. On May 10, the Weza will be showcased at the United Nations 14<sup>th</sup> Committee on Social Development (CSD).

"We believe that by integrating power on-demand with the ability to generate income, entrepreneurs will be able to transform their rural communities while breaking the cycle of poverty that seems intractable to many," said Kristine Pearson, executive director of the Freeplay Foundation. "The Weza can fulfill many daily energy needs in largely unelectrified regions, stimulating micro-enterprise while serving the community at large. The project allows the entrepreneurial spirit to take hold and empowers people to improve their lives through innovative application of the Freeplay Weza technology."

Accessible power is the key to establishing immediate, sustainable rural energy solutions. The Freeplay Weza is a state-of-the art, portable energy source, offering dependable power anywhere and at anytime. Its innovative foot pedal uses human energy to produce the power needed to

charge devices such as cell phones, lights, and electronic equipment. It can even jump-start a car. An innovative private-public alliance of five international and local partners led by the Freeplay Foundation will select, train, and support fifty Weza 'Pioneers' to establish small businesses in Rwanda. These entrepreneurs will provide fee-based energy services in rural areas. The Pioneers' micro-enterprises will be self-financing through low-interest credit, and it is expected that they will become profitable within one year.

Partners in the Weza project include CARE Rwanda, Cornell University's Center for Sustainable Global Enterprise (CSGE), Freeplay Energy Plc, and the Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (KIST). The Weza was developed by Freeplay Energy Plc, which owns the patent to its unique technology.

"Ninety-five percent of Rwandans do not have access to electricity, so most activity ends at sundown," said Rory Stear, executive chairman of Freeplay Energy Plc. "Weza technology can assist night-time medical procedures and a host of other undertakings. For urban dwellers in Rwanda, the Freeplay Weza can minimize daily power disruptions."

One of several small business ideas envisioned by the Freeplay Foundation is one in which Weza Pioneers charge cell phones. The Freeplay Weza powers seven cell phones at a time, so Pioneers can earn income by providing the service in exchange for a user fee. There has been an explosive growth of cell phone usage in Rwanda, but the biggest barrier to cell phone access is the ability to charge the phones. Rwanda has the highest population density of any country in Africa, which will offer a relatively concentrated marketplace for the Weza Pioneer entrepreneurs.

Less than 5% of Rwanda's 8.4 million people have access to electricity. Even in the capital of Kigali, power outages can last for days and hinder productive activities. Nonetheless, rural electrification ranks only fifth in official energy priorities and is allocated only 8% of the budget required. Traditional power sources in rural areas are particularly limited: hydroelectric stations operate at 25% capacity due to drought, emergency generators are increasingly expensive due to rising oil prices, and the extension of the public electricity grid is prohibitively expensive in this predominantly hilly country.

--MORE--

The Freeplay Foundation is a registered U.S. 501 (c) (3) nonprofit, and is a registered charity in South Africa and the United Kingdom. With offices in Cape Town and London, the Foundation works in more than a dozen countries in Africa and around the world.

Please visit [www.freeplayfoundation.org](http://www.freeplayfoundation.org) or [www.worldbank.org/developmentmarketplace](http://www.worldbank.org/developmentmarketplace) for more information.

###

Freeplay Foundation Contact:

**Michelle Riley**, Senior Consultant  
Phone in USA: (912) 898-2195  
[riley.freeplayfdn@gmail.com](mailto:riley.freeplayfdn@gmail.com)  
[www.freeplayfoundation.org](http://www.freeplayfoundation.org)

Freeplay Energy Plc Contact:

**Rory Stear**, Executive Chairman  
Phone in London: +44 (207) 851-2684  
[rstear@freeplayenergy.com](mailto:rstear@freeplayenergy.com)  
[www.freeplayenergy.com](http://www.freeplayenergy.com)