Saint lucia first solar



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In February 2016, St. Lucia Electricity Services (LUCELEC) released a request for proposal to companies to submit bids to construct the power station.[1] The tender was won by GRUPOTEC. On 20 June 2017, LUCELEC and GRUPOTEC signed the contract to begin the engineering, procurement and construction of the power station.[2]

The power station has an installed generating capacity of 3 MW. Upon commissioning, the power station covered around 5% of electricity demand in the country.[5] The power station consists of almost 15,000 photovoltaic panels.[7]

The power station was constructed at a cost of US\$20 million with funds from St. Lucia Electricity Services.[5]

The Caribbean Island of St. Lucia is known for its beautiful beaches, lush rainforests, and colorful coral reefs. But for some of the almost 200,000 people that live on the island, another incredible resource is affecting their daily lives -- the nearly 15,000 solar panels that are producing clean, reliable, electricity from the island"s first utility-scale solar farm.

The island"s utility company, St. Lucia Electricity Services Limited (LUCELEC), with support from RMI, completed the 4 megawatt system just north of Hewanorra International Airport in August 2018. And in the first three years of operation, it produced 24.7 million kWh of electricity -- enough to power 3,500 homes -- saving 1.5 million gallons of diesel and more than \$3 million.

The journey to the solar farm actually began in 2015 with a case study. RMI was hired by the Government of Saint Lucia to develop a National Energy Transition Strategy for the island. The island was shipping in diesel for the sole electric plant on the island and it was costly. "Of course, Saint Lucia is very vulnerable to climate change. But nobody was thinking of that in 2015. It was really related to cost," says RMI's Kaitlyn Bunker, one of the analysts who produced the transition strategy. "They were ready to make a change in their energy system."

This solar farm was the first large utility-scale solar farm in the region. This meant a steep learning curve for the government and the utility. RMI's expertise was crucial, bringing multiple stakeholders together to collaborate and create an inclusive process. "We demystified the process to procure a solar farm using World Bank best practices, and we really drove down pricing because we brought a bigger procurement pool to the table," says Chris Burgess, RMI's projects director.

The project also demonstrated the need for philanthropic support at the concept and preparation phase to unlock private finance to bring the project to fruition. "For every dollar in philanthropic funds, we unlocked

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\$17 in private investment," says Burgess. "This is the highest leverage ratio the UNDP ever had."

But Saint Lucia didn"t stop there. The island has a goal to have 35 percent of its electricity be supplied by renewable energy by 2025, which means not only more solar farms, but also distributed renewables.

Leveraging philanthropic support to unlock private capital is a concept that resonates to this day, and only becomes more critical as resilience needs deepen. RMI has spun up an entire practice dedicated to scaling this "catalytic" capital, and has helped launch the Caribbean Climate Smart fund, which systemically de-risks and prepares energy projects across Caribbean nations for investment.

Ian Welch Phillips grew up in Trinidad. He went to school in the UK and ended up working for a utility company there. But after working in London on renewable energy and battery storage projects, he got the itch to return to his native country. "We in the Caribbean are blessed with all these resources, but we don"t utilize them. And they"re better for the environment and better for the economy," he says. "It got to the point where I wanted to give back to the region in whatever way I could."

While these six microgrids have been designed and planned for, they have not been constructed yet because of a lack of financing. "We know what it is to be in an ever-changing climate and the impact it"s having on our livelihoods," says Hyacinth. "But being able to translate that with the necessary information, the data to justify why the climate financing is necessary, is a major challenge." And that"s where Skeeta Carasco comes in.

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