

Energy inclusion: renewable energies power economic development in Colombia



Working together with locals in the municipality of Natagaima in Colombia, an international team of specialists has been developing and producing solar-powered water pumps, cooling chambers, incubators and electric fences. These efforts have helped to strengthen the local economy while also creating more equitable access to energy.

Since 2015, EBP has also been working together with partners from science and business in Chile to complete various projects in the area of energy inclusion (cf. links).

All of the projects are based on a holistic approach to planning that ensures both an early-stage inclusion of all stakeholders and a robustly representative development of solutions.

Providing training to local workers is regarded as a key to the proper local operation and maintenance of the technical systems. In all of the energy projects carried out so far, we have been able to demonstrate how sources of renewable energy can be exploited to boost regional economic development and create jobs.

Project in Natagaima, Colombia

Working with the Switzerland-based Fastenopfer Foundation, we have begun a new project in the region of Natagaima, which is located in Colombia's Tolima Department. The region's small farming operations and indigenous communities are currently weighed down by poverty, a lack of essential infrastructure, and high rates of unemployment, especially among Natagaima's youth. These conditions have led to an exodus to large cities like Calí and Bogotá.

Client

REPIC – Renewable Energy Promotion in International Cooperation - an interdepartmental platform of the Swiss federal agencies SECO, SDC, FOEN and SFOE

Facts

Period	2020 - 2022
Project Country	Colombia
Contribution to UN Goals	7, 10, 11, 13
Indigenous families	206

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Solar energy to support local farm production

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The prospects for the region, however, are expected to change for the better as solar-powered water pumps (irrigation), electric fences (livestock), cooling systems (meat and fish storage), and incubators (poultry farming) are introduced in the framework of the project. The use of solar for all of the technical installations will ensure regional autonomy, improve the local economy, and create jobs, especially for the region's younger inhabitants.

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Development fund provides credit vehicle for replication

One of the innovative features of this pilot project is its link to the PAHO Revolving Fund. This development fund is administered by the inhabitants of Natagaima, and provides an alternative credit vehicle for a population that would otherwise have no more than limited access to certified banking services. The fund will also soon make interest-free loans available for renewable energy projects, enabling individuals, for instance, to purchase solar-powered water pumps and acquire a working knowledge of modern green energy systems. When asked to assess the impact of the initiative, Orlando, a member of the indigenous Palma Alta community, says: "The project is based on an integrated and sustainable approach that protects our land and contributes to the well-being of our community."

Close cooperation with local and international organizations

The project is managed at the local level by Grupo Semillas, a longtime partner organization to the Fastenopfer Foundation that has worked with the Pijao communities for more than ten years. CORPOEMA, a Colombian engineering firm specializing in renewable energy projects, is training local workers and overseeing the installation of the technical systems.

Important contribution to UN goals

Energy inclusion makes a direct contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations. The specific goals include: Goal Number 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy); Goal Number 10 (Reduced Inequalities); Goal Number 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities); and Goal Number 13 (Climate Action).