

Winds of change as Seychelles embraces green power

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A view of the port in Victoria on March 5, 2012. On two islands surrounded by deep turquoise water, the blades of eight wind turbines spin, providing a rare source of green energy for the port of Victoria, the Seychelles capital.

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The popular tourist archipelago far out in the Indian Ocean is almost

entirely dependent on imported [fossil fuels](#) for power, but is now embracing renewable energy.

The new wind farm here, opened in early June and funded by the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, has a total capacity of six [megawatts](#), enough for some 2,000 houses in Mahe, the main island of the Seychelles and home to 70,000 people, around 90 percent of the population of the archipelago.

The turbines are the first opened in a plan to provide at least 15 percent of the Seychelles power needs from renewable sources by 2030.

"The decision to produce electricity using renewable energy was taken in 2008, after oil prices peaked, to ensure [energy security](#)," said Tony Imaduwa, acting head of the Seychelles' [energy commission](#).

Currently, the islands "are 95 percent dependent on imported oil", the Indian Ocean Commission, a regional body, and the European Commission said in a joint statement in early June.

Since then, the EU has announced 15 million euros (\$20 million) in funding for renewable energy projects in the wider Indian Ocean region, including the Seychelles but also for Mauritius, Comoros and Madagascar.

"The IOC countries are highly vulnerable to the effects of soaring [oil prices](#)," the two institutions added. "Yet the region has a large potential for renewable energy (hydro, solar, wind, geothermal) that is underutilised."

Since the Seychelles decided to launch renewable energy generation, it has also revised legislation to break the state's power monopoly.

"Now, companies that produce renewable energy can sell electricity," added Imaduwa.

— Solar power plans to boost [green energy](#) —

Reducing dependency on expensive fossil fuels is only one concern, with the Seychelles also keen to boost greener sources of power

Experts warn that the tiny nation—the only one in the world where half the land is a nature reserve—is threatened by changing weather patterns bringing harsher storms and much longer dry spells, and environmentalists are working on projects to help combat the impact.

However, building up a reliable system for production of renewable energy is still far off for the 115-island archipelago, whose economy depends mainly on high-end tourism.

"Currently, the Seychelles does not have the financial resources to undertake [renewable energy](#) (by themselves), as the equipment is still too expensive," said Wills Agricole, a senior environment ministry official.

"But thanks to the help of several countries, we are currently conducting several projects that should allow us to reduce fossil fuel consumption," he added.

Other green power sources are planned too.

Mascareignes Seychelles, a subsidiary of a French company based on the island of Reunion further south in the Indian Ocean, has won a tender to produce energy from waste incineration.

Agricole notes that the project, if it materialises, will take several years with many technical details yet to be resolved.

But he also points to other projects, including the installation of solar panels on homes on La Digue, the third most populated island of the Seychelles, and whose famous palm-fringed and white sand beaches are one of the most popular with tourists.

"We have just started a pilot project with a South Korean company, KC Cottrell, so that the island is completely self-reliant for power by 2020," said Agricole.

"This project will see a photovoltaic system on almost every house... and gasoline vehicles will even be replaced by electric cars."

By September, La Digue—currently supplied with electricity from a generator located on the neighbouring island of Praslin—should be equipped with solar powered streetlights, added Nicolas Hoareau, head of projects at the Seychelles Land Transport Agency.

"A Chinese company, ZET Corporation, has made a donation of 200 street lights," he said.

For Andrew Grieser Johns, program coordinator at the United Nations Development Programme, the Seychelles' target of having 15 percent of energy from [renewable sources](#) by 2030 "is quite possible to achieve."

The Seychelles hope they can even exceed that with foreign investment.

"The figure will certainly be revised upwards—even doubled—because many foreign companies are investing in this area," said Agricole.

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