



Suva, Fiji – Four hundred remote rural households in Fiji’s sugarcane belt areas will have electricity by the middle of this year, thanks to a European Union funded, Micro Projects Programme (MPP) for clean, green solar power, implemented by the Pacific Community (SPC).

Each of the 400 households in Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki will have lighting and power-points installed. For some, this is the first reliable electricity supply they have had.

Fifty of the 400 households will also be supplied with water pumps and five households with freezers, powered by the new solar equipment. The solar photovoltaic (PV) systems consist of solar modules (panels), sealed lead-acid batteries, inverter(s), portable lamps and other accessories that capture sunlight and convert it to power.

SPC Deputy Director-General (Suva), Dr Audrey Aumua, said energy poverty, including access to electricity, is one of the most important obstacles to social and economic development of the rural, remote and resource poor communities.

“The high costs of fossil fuels can account for up to 25 per cent of average rural incomes making conventional energy increasingly unaffordable for the poor,” Dr Aumua said.

The MPP is one of a number of EU funded projects being implemented by SPC in Fiji’s sugarcane-belt areas, all working to boost productivity and improve the livelihood of those whose income is built around sugarcane farming.

The five households receiving freezers and the fifty being supplied with solar powered water pumps are in Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki. They have been selected for the additional support because they demonstrate existing income-boosting potential.

Some households already supplement their sugarcane income with other agricultural produce such as seasonal vegetables, root crops and fruits. Their access to solar water pumps will enable these farmers to keep their produce irrigated and increase their production. Farmers located near coastal areas who are engaged in fishing for extra income will also have access to freezers to store their fish.

“Access to clean, and renewable energy will enhance their quality of life by improving conditions for income generation and diversification beyond sugarcane farming. Importantly, this has broader positive impact on public health, education, environmental protection and conservation,” Dr Aumua explained.

In addition to the rural electricity initiative, the project offers Income Generation and Livelihood training to support the capacity of farmers to assess their income opportunities.

Each household will get basic training on the operation and maintenance of the solar home systems. A user manual, selected spare-parts and basic tools are provided with the system.

The SPC Rural Electrification Team hope to have the new solar home systems online for the farming families by the middle of the year - weather permitting. Installation work is underway now on selected farms that supply the Lautoka and Rakiraki mills.

The FJ\$10 million EU funded Fiji Micro Projects Programme (MPP) was redesigned in May, 2016, to assist Fiji in implementing a medium to long-term response following the impact of TC Winston.

Rural electrification and specifically “Improved access to affordable electricity and increased income generating opportunities” is one of the two key result areas of MPP. Improved access to safe and disaster resilient water supply, sanitation and hygiene facilities and practices” is the programmes second key result area.

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