

Can renewable energy kick-start Colombian eco-tourism?

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Despite Colombia's emergence as one of Latin America's most robust economies over the past decade, many rural areas remain undeveloped and bereft of basic infrastructure. Small steps are being taken to change the current scenario and leading the way is Colombia-focused economics consultancy Market Analysis. The UK-based firm has set up a charitable foundation aiming to provide clean drinking water and electricity to a small community in the northern Guajira department. In the second of a two-part interview, Market Analysis director David Harbord explained how the initiative plans to kick-start the local economy.

BNamericas: Tell us about the Ferdescal (Fundación de energías renovables y desarrollo sostenible en comunidades colombianas) foundation that you have helped to set up to promote renewable energy and sustainable development in remote Colombian communities.

Harbord: Colombia has literally thousands of small, relatively isolated communities which have limited or no access to conventional sources of energy. This often means that they lack the power necessary to desalinate or purify drinking water, and limits access to information technologies such as computers and mobile phones. In our work on wind power in Colombia, we visited a number of such communities in the Guajira region where the potential for small-scale wind and solar energy is enormous. These indigenous Wayuu communities also have tremendous potential to develop tourism, based on the natural beauty of the area and wildlife such as flamingos.

BNamericas: What does the project involve?

Harbord: The charitable foundation aims to provide the funds and organization to try to equip some of these communities with solar panels and water desalination plants. A pilot project has been identified in a small community of 15-20 Wayuu families near Rio Hacha, who live mostly on sea fishing and rearing goats. The community has a single diesel generator which is expensive to operate, and is cut off from land access during the rainy season.

BNamericas: How will this change their lives and the area's prospects of economic development?

Harbord: Availability of reliable access to electricity, communications technologies and desalinated drinking water will enable the community to develop an eco-tourism project built around the presence of a large flock of flamingos in the area. But the potential for this type of project exists in all areas of Colombia.

BNamericas: At what stage is the project?

Harbord: We are currently in the initial stages of setting up the foundation and seeking funding. Some funds will be provided by my own company, Market Analysis Ltd. The international law firm Baker & McKenzie is assisting us with pro bono legal services.



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