

Community microgrids freetown

They were informed of the project during a public meeting last Thursday at St Cleveland Baptist Church Hall in Freetown, which was hosted by the Ministry of Finance. It will deploy renewable energy, and provide the community with more resilient energy infrastructure that is better able to withstand devastating hurricanes anticipated in future.

Ginger Moxey, minister for Grand Bahama, said: "Our government is so focused on the revitalisation of East Grand Bahama and Grand Bahama in general. We are so happy to be here at this Town Hall meeting to hear their concerns. We believe the residents are appreciating what they are hearing here tonight."

Also in attendance were Kwasi Thompson, MP for East Grand Bahama, and Iram Lewis, MP for central Grand Bahama. The project resulted from the devastation caused by Hurricane Dorian in September 2019, which caused billions of dollars in damage on Grand Bahama and Abaco.

This resulted in residents of East Grand Bahama being without electricity, forcing them to either relocate or use generators. Through the microgrid project, facilitated by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), east Grand Bahama's power system will be rehabilitated and modernised with an interconnected grid network deploying solar energy designed to withstand increasingly severe hurricanes.

As a rapidly urbanising coastal city with high levels of deforestation, Freetown is increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. To address these challenges Freetown's City Council has launched a climate action strategy to strengthen resilience and reduce carbon emissions, building on such initiatives as the "Freetown the Treetown" community tree planting programme to restore the city's ecological infrastructure.

Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital city, has experienced rapid urbanisation over the past 50 years. While there is some contestation about what constitutes an informal settlement (slum) in Freetown and therefore a lack of certainty about the percentage of Freetown's population residing in these areas, studies suggest somewhere between 60% and 75% of urban areas in Freetown should be considered as slums.

Freetown has experienced rapid deforestation as a result of this growth, which has led to significant ecological and climate vulnerabilities - evidenced by such events as the mudslide in 2017 that killed more than 1,000 people and left 3,000 homeless.

Freetown's mayor, Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, who was elected in 2018, sought to address these critical challenges head on with the Transform Freetown agenda and subsequent development plan, and the "Freetown the Treetown" initiative. This scheme seeks to restore the city's ecosystem, while also empowering residents and providing income to communities, and climate finance to make tangible long-term positive change across the city.

Setting ambitious afforestation targets, the city is working to integrate participatory nature-based solutions into the city's climate adaptation and mitigation plans as well as more formal local planning to make the city much more resilient in the future.

The 2023 Freetown climate action strategy was developed through engagement with multiple partners, including residents and communities, to ensure that it was co-created by the people of Freetown, with targeted community engagement to factor in the needs of each neighbourhood and zone across the city. Freetown is already experiencing significant climate impacts that need urgent responses, and the plan is striving for a low-carbon, resilient and inclusive future.

Many development challenges are being deeply exacerbated by climate change- like the level of informality in the city with 60% of people living in and around informal settlements-which creates a high level of vulnerability. The slum upgrading process is tied to the regeneration of the coast line; a classic example of a new development trajectory that is climate sensitive

Freetown is a coastal city surrounded by tree-covered hills. The city's population has increased tenfold in the past 50 years to 1.2 million people and it continues to grow. This rapid growth has pushed the city up into the hinterlands and put pressure on the forest. The civil war in Sierra Leone (1991-2002) also had a significant impact.

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