

A SLICE OF SOLAR ACTION IN THE SUNNY PACIFIC

Smart Energy regularly reports on the progress of Its Time Foundation school solar projects that are transforming education and lifting prospects for students in the Pacific region. All the installations are the result of hundreds of hours spent fundraising, and also thanks to the generosity of equipment suppliers. Now Its Time founder Rob Edwards has launched Solar Business Partnerships to extend the reach and drive more installations. Here he explains what it's all about.

MANY PACIFIC ISLAND SCHOOLS struggle due to lack of electricity supplies or rely on dirty diesel generators they can barely afford to run a couple of hours per day. The school kids have little chance of a modern education; however for the past ten years the Its Time Foundation has stepped in and built 20 solar PV systems. They not only provide clean, free energy for lighting and computers but also transform the kids education and prospects.

The solar systems replace the emissions-intensive diesel generators which the schoolkids feel great about, and the money saved on diesel frees up cash flow to buy the computers. A win win!

After carefully choosing the most deserving schools in remote Fiji, I go about raising funds which is a tough game, but made easier by the generous support of our loyal and long term equipment sponsors Clenergy, Simliphi, Outback, Yingli and others.

Executing projects involves considerable logistics, in some cases loading equipment

on 4-wheel drives then a 16-hour ferry trip followed by a long bumpy drive to the school. Installations often include complete wiring of the school and teachers' homes in the school precinct.

When we complete a project, I have come to realise there is a high moment and a low moment, in quick succession.

The high: The community is elated when we flick the switch and the school has power, there is celebration and feasting.

The low: I wave goodbye from the small outboard boat or ute and think "Okay, we've spent the money, now to start climbing a new fundraising mountain and do it again."

Highs and lows were delivered in a different and somewhat crushing form earlier this year.

In March we had secured the support of Rotary for some funding and I was invited to be keynote conference speaker and offered complimentary exhibition space in front of 800 delegates from 120 Rotary clubs. I was confident this would result in enough funds for

Over the past decade Its Time Foundation has equipped 20 schools in the Pacific with solar power thanks to the generosity of equipment partners and individual donors. The foundation is now inviting solar businesses to make a real difference in kids' lives through the Business Partners program. www.iitime.org/partners





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five school solar projects. Concurrently, out of the blue, a super yacht owner contacted me saying he was keen to fund two schools and then visit the projects as part of the September family holiday.

I was looking at the happy prospect of securing seven more solar installations in a short time – more than a third of what I had achieved over ten years!

However, with COVID taking hold the conference was cancelled at the last minute, and soon after the yacht owner pulled out due to pandemic-induced travel restrictions.

Utterly heart breaking for me as well as schools in the Pacific.

Even in non-COVID times fundraising is a bit of a lonely grind, and I have been considering ways to ensure the continuation of the foundation and its good work, and the goodwill that flows to our close neighbours in the Pacific.

I was talking with friend and long-term Its Time supporter Mario Guzzi, Co-founder of mountings specialist Clenergy. We pondered whether industry players would consider Its Time as an on-going corporate social responsibility partner by contributing a small amount from each job or sale, say \$20, for each 5kW system they install.

Twenty dollars in multiples would really help us transform the landscape.

Coincidentally Queensland installer Sam Gardel, who I know well, phoned me with a similar idea, suggesting installers donate a fraction of a cent per watt they install resulting in more schools in the Pacific getting solar.

In turn Its Time could provide all donors with material, such as photos of solar systems they helped get off the ground, to proudly share with customers and staff.

The Its Time Foundation Business Partners Program

This led me to launch the *Its Time Foundation Business Partners Program* www.iitime.org/partners/ on 1 November.

The *Its Time Foundation Business Partners Program* is a simple yet highly effective way for like-minded small and large operators to make a significant difference. And it's not only good for kids – quality CSR programs are good for business.

If you want to make a difference and to share this with customers, we'd love to have you on board.

Please visit www.iitime.org/partners/ for more information and welcome to the fold!