

JICA plan could save Ebeye millions

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Signing the minutes of the recent JICA survey mission to Ebeye and Majuro are, from left KAJUR's Kitlang Kabua, R&D Secretary Rebecca Lorennij, JICA team leader Shigeru Sugiyama, and Public Works Secretary Catalino Kijiner. Photo: Giff Johnson.

A proposed solar project for Ebeye could save the utility company anywhere from hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars a year, depending on the scale of the plan that is under discussion now.

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and RMI officials reviewed the project following a second survey visit to Ebeye and Majuro by a JICA team last month.

The survey for a solar power generation system on Ebeye was launched following a request from the RMI government. JICA is considering options for providing solar power that would reduce the Ebeye utility company KAJUR's use of diesel to produce electricity.

JICA has not yet made a decision about the project, which remains under study. The RMI's request is to establish a 600 kilowatt system for Ebeye.

The team, which was headed by Shigeru Sugiyama, JICA's deputy director general for the Department of Industrial Development and Public Policy, will produce a "preparatory survey report" from their recent visit.

To wrap up the visit last month, the JICA team met with RMI officials including Public Works Secretary Catalino Kijiner, R&D Secretary Rebecca Lorennij, and Kitlan 'Kitti' Kabua, KAJUR's senior management advisor. Kwajalein Senator David Paul was also in attendance. They signed off on the minutes of the visit prepared by the team.

Sugiyama explained that because Ebeye's power consumption is relatively small at 2.2 megawatts, this makes the plan for a 600 kilowatt solar installation — nearly one-third of Ebeye's base power load — a challenge in terms of maintaining reliability and stability of power.

One of the key questions to be decided is will the solar system be grid connected with or without use of batteries. Batteries raise maintenance needs and costs, but also would multiply the savings to KAJUR and the RMI government four-fold over a non-battery plan, said Paul.

For JICA, the three goals are to successfully address maintenance and reliability, while developing a project that is a model for solar use that can be replicated elsewhere.

"With the help of the RMI government and JICA, we hope this project materializes," said Kabua.

If the project goes forward without the battery option, the power generated from the sun will save KAJUR about 100,000 gallons of diesel a year. "If batteries are part of the base load, we will go from 100,000 gallons to 500,000 gallons savings a year," said Paul. "That is almost half of Ebeye's annual diesel use."

A JICA team will return in early 2017 to discuss the final draft plan.

Read more about this in the October 7, 2016 edition of the Marshall Islands Journal.

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