



# Saba Kalam and the launch of STAR Center, a human-impact driven project in Fiji

Imagine a world where the sun not only lights up our days but also powers our homes, schools, and hospitals. This is the vision that Saba Kalam, a Programme Specialist with the International Solar Alliance (ISA), is bringing to life through the STAR-C initiative. Recently, Saba embarked on an exciting mission to Fiji to launch a new STAR Centre, a platform that promises to transform the way Fijians use and benefit from solar energy.

Saba Kalam oversees STAR-C initiatives across ISA Member Countries around the world, but his visit to Fiji was particularly special. The STAR Centre is set to be a beacon of hope not only in Fiji but also in the rest of the Pacific region where islands such as Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Kiribati may start to transition towards solar energy, leaving unsustainable practices behind.

***“What is solar energy? How can a regular household benefit from it? How to install these systems?” are some of the questions we can expect from Fijians and that the centre will be able to address –(Saba Kalam)***

The STAR Centre will serve as a place where Fijians can learn, innovate, and share knowledge about solar energy. A place where solar energy technicians from all over Fiji come to learn about the latest innovative mechanisms like solar mini-grids, which are small-scale power networks that can operate independently or connect to larger grids. This is an important alternative for inhabitants of remote islands where traditional power lines are hard to come by.



***“The heart of this initiative lies not in the technology itself, but in the lives it will impact and transform,” states Saba enthusiastically.***

As part of his trip to Fiji, Saba visited a small village on Viti Levu and met the local communities. These people often rely on costly and ineffective kerosene lamps to light their homes. The STAR Centre will train technicians who can bring solar energy solutions to those villages, providing them with a safer, more reliable, and sustainable source of light.

Fiji’s journey towards solar energy differs from experiences in other regions where ISA has launched similar projects, such as Ethiopia and Somalia. Fiji is already making strides with policies to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. However, there is still a significant need for local expertise and greater awareness to speed up this transition. That’s where the STAR Centre can make a difference and engage Fijians.

During the recent visit, ISA engaged key Fijian stakeholders in Suva, the capital of Fiji. These included the Ministers of for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport, Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau. The Ministry supports ISA in various crucial areas, including solarization projects for health facilities and rural schools, decarbonization efforts in land and maritime transport sectors, shaping wider energy policies and regulatory frameworks, and facilitating project implementation at national and community levels.



But setting up the STAR Centre is no easy task. There are logistical and financial challenges to overcome. Yet, once these challenges are overcome, Fiji can become a bridge by sharing its knowledge and resources with neighbouring islands.

***“For the STAR Centre to impact the whole region, we would like to collaborate and share our knowledge about solar energy with governments, businesses, and communities around the Pacific”, –(Saba Kalam)***

In Fiji, Saba learned a local saying: “Vaka va, vaka bula,” which translates to “Paddle on, paddle with life.” This saying embodies the enthusiasm and determination needed to make solar energy accessible in Fiji. Hopefully, local communities will be able to say “Vaka va, vaka STAR-C” soon, meaning solar energy will have become a part of their daily lives.