**RVA transitioning to 100% renewable energy by May**

AN ACADEMIC institution in St Vincent and the Grenadines that focuses heavily on sustainable living will have 100 per cent of its electricity generated from renewable energy by May.

The move by Richmond Vale Academy (RVA) falls under its 10-year programme, The St. Vincent Climate Compliance (CCCP) 2012 - 2021. Under the programme, the institution has trained hundreds of students to take action as well as inform thousands of people globally on the effects of global warming and climate change.

The programme was launched after a drought at the beginning of 2011, followed by Hurricane Tomas in 2010, and a drought at the start of 2012, and a large spike in energy costs, says that having the school transition to 100 per cent renewable energy by May is a practical solution to building greater resilience into the island nation's energy grid.

The new solar system at RVA will make a big difference as we become a model of a 100 per cent sustainable school in terms of electricity production, Herberg said.

All the energy RVA’s solar voltaic system produces is sold to the national grid for EC$0.45 per kilowatt-hour. RVA buys electricity from the national grid at EC$1.02 per kilowatt-hour.

At the end of the month, the excess energy we have sold is forwarded to the next month and credited to the electric bill. This means that in the months where more energy is needed to charge the batteries, we can use this credit,” Herberg explained.

She added: “With this system, we can produce around 225 per kilowatt-hour per day based on yearly average. At the moment we use 80 per kilowatt-hour per day. This will give us through room to expand the activities with more students and programmes.”

RVA consists of three buildings on a 30-acre property. Two of the buildings are connected to an off-grid solar system with 72 panels and 120 batteries. This was set up in 2017 and can provide these two buildings with 75 per cent of their energy needs throughout the year.

The third building is the workshop building, which has a diving centre, wood and metal workshops, storage room, food processing facility and classrooms.

Because of the nature of the activities that take place in this building, it requires more energy, and is still connected to the national grid, where 85 per cent of the energy is generated using fossil fuels.

To avoid using fossil fuel for electricity and be 100 per cent carbon neutral, Richmond Vale academy will upgrade its solar electricity generation to 50kW (180 panels).

With an upgrade of the current off-grid system and a new 13kW (48 panels) solar system in the workshop and classroom building, RVA will be able to produce all the electric it needs and become carbon neutral in terms of energy production.

In addition to generating electricity, the upgraded solar system will also allow the school to give hands on training to the students and employees at the academy in setting up the solar system.

Students will also receive training in the benefits of renewable energy and the equipment needed for its generation. RVA will also become a unique model for the Caribbean in being the first school to cover its electricity needs 100 per cent by renewable energy.

Since 2012, RVA has been working in a very focused way on developing a programme that helps participants to respond to the vagaries of climate change.

The StVincent CCCP seeks to educate, raise awareness and mobilize people to take action.

It offers a practical solution to building greater resilience into vulnerable communities by implementing actions to protect the natural resources that they depend on.

Since the start of the programme, 80 students from St Vincent along with hundreds of students from all over the world have educated themselves in climate compliance - specifically in the effects on small island nations - and have taken practical action.