Surat, India: Rooftop Solar Panels
Model: Enabling Innovation

Surat’s rooftop solar programme created a model for solar panel installation in India. Today there are more than 400 solar panel vendors and 45,000 households with rooftop solar panels installed in the city.

THE CHALLENGE

With the largest diamond polishing industry in the world and one of India’s fastest growing cities, Surat needed a way to drive renewable energy projects and energy efficiency at large scales.

HOW IT WORKS

The city created a web portal and app for households to apply to install rooftop solar panels, and offered them a 30% subsidy.

Meanwhile, potential vendors - from small enterprises to large companies - could apply through simple tenders to join the programme, receive training, and access this market.

Playing the role of a facilitator between businesses and households, the city government also promoted the programme more broadly, including the training of university students to go door-to-door. The city assisted at least one resident per neighbourhood to install the panels, following a ‘seeing is believing’ strategy.

The model was so successful that in 2017 the state government of Gujarat adopted Surat’s system and began to manage requests across the state.

LESSONS

Cities can drive initiatives by creating an economy where businesses and customers can interact. In doing so, tools should be simple and user-friendly. Surat created a favourable enabling environment and streamlined the process for both applicants and vendors.

Creating the system is one part, awareness raising and broad buy-in is equally necessary to make it work. Exploring diverse strategies such as door-to-door and neighbourhood showcasing can help in substantially improving new and clean technology adoption.