

# **PROSPECTS FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY IN VIEQUES: IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES AND CAPITALIZING ON THE OPPORTUNITIES**

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This presentation is based on a pilot survey of knowledge, perceptions and attitudes towards renewable energy and public participation in Vieques conducted during the summer of 2008. In the early 2000's, issues surrounding the navy's departure from the island of Vieques, PR, where at the center of Puertorrican and international media outlets. At that time, the death of a civilian contractor killed while working in the militarized zone, helped frame the issue as one where the navy was seen as the impediment for the economic, social and environmental well being of the island/municipality. As such, a large amount of research and academic studies focused on the military activities as the main variable affecting Vieques's ability to develop in a sustainable way. While this argument had some explanatory power, four years after the navy's departure, viequenses are still grappling with issues that existed even before the navy's decision to leave: deficient transportation services, land speculation, lack of access to health services and economic underdevelopment, among others. Data collected through in-depth interviews with community leaders (n=10) and a survey of residents on the Vieques northern area (n=157) suggest that arguably "green energy projects" need to meet the standard of sustainability in order to be successfully implemented in this Puertorrican community. The transition towards community sustainability and the adoption of renewable energy projects must take into account contextual socio-economic factors for their success such as social and family structure, public distrust in social institutions, and local power struggles, among others.