

Maaher Bhaloo: Academy student proposes affordable and sustainable electricity for Zanzibar

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Maaher Bhaloo receiving his first runner up award at the Zanzibar Youth Awards 2021.

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Maaher Bhaloo, a Year 10 student at the Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa, Kenya was the first runner up for the “Best Tech/Science Innovator of the Year” category, and the youngest participant, at the Zanzibar Youth Awards 2021. Maaher designed and developed an affordable, environmentally conscious solar power plant proposition as his personal project for the Academy, which was recently approved by the Zanzibar Government for implementation.

Tanzania’s pristine blue waters, its whitewashed sandy beaches and rich, cosmopolitan history entice thousands of tourists to visit the beautiful island of Zanzibar every year. In recent years, an influx of new technologies has led to a rise in the demand and consumption of electricity on the island. However, not all Zanzibaris can afford electricity – an all too necessary tool not just for everyday life but also for fostering development in education, health care, industry, business and so much more.

Growing up in Zanzibar, Maaher witnessed families in his community struggle to pay for expensive electricity, and noted an absence of eco-friendly initiatives to keep Zanzibar sustainable for future generations. As he pursued his education at the Academy, these two issues were at the forefront of his mind.

Maaher joined the Academy in 2016 as a residential student. He brought with him a passion for his hometown and a vision for a prosperous, sustainable and thriving Zanzibar. In addition to participating in community service – a key component of the Academy’s educational mission and vision for social responsibility – Maaher also participated in beach and park cleanups in Zanzibar to keep his town clean and beautiful.

Year 10 students at the Aga Khan Academies are required to pursue a personal project that combines their passions with their studies. In the process, they are encouraged to share their knowledge and collaborate with others in their community to enhance peoples’ quality of life. Maaher knew straight away what his project would tackle.

“I am passionate about the environment, my town’s development and community service, the latter being something taught to me by the Academy as an important aspect of life,” Maaher said. “Through my personal project, I was able to combine these interests to create ‘Zanzibar – a Solar Island’, a proposition for a solar power plant that will transition from using fossil fuels to renewable energy, to increase the availability of sustainable and affordable electricity in Zanzibar.”

Maaher designed a model of the solar power plant using wood, turf and real solar cells. “Subjects like Product Design and Physics that I took at the Academy really helped me develop my model. Also, the time management and organisational skills I learned at the Academy helped me to stay on track and deliver my project on time,” he said.

The solar power plant is designed to harness energy from the sun to generate inexpensive, clean and reliable electricity for most of the island’s local households as well combat the hazardous effects of fossil fuels, which are harmful to both the environment and public health.

Maaher presented the completed model of his solar energy design to Zanzibar’s Director of Energy, Mr Mohammed Abdulla Mohammed. He was so impressed with the initiative that he set up a meeting for Maaher to present his project to Zanzibar’s Minister of Land, Water, Housing and Energy, the Honourable Salama Aboud Talib. She immediately approved Maaher’s project for implementation, applauding Maaher’s innovative commitment to enacting positive change for Zanzibaris and improving their quality of life.

As he waits for his vision of “Zanzibar – a Solar Island” to be realised, Maaher is already devising plans for his Diploma Programme at the Academy next year. “I want to create a fundraising organisation to install solar panels amongst the less advantaged communities in Zanzibar.” Although he aspires to attend university abroad, Maaher envisions returning home to Zanzibar afterwards to give back to his community.

