

# Freeing Costa Rica from Fossil Fuels

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Dr. Monica Araya is a Costa Rican author and adviser on clean development in Latin America. Her [TED talk](#), filmed in June 2016, deals with one of the most critically important questions of our time; how can we build a society free from fossil fuels? Drawing on her home country, Costa Rica, as an example, Monica argues that **developing countries can lead the transition to clean energy in all sectors**, and, in doing so, can be a source of inspiration for the rest of the world which may one day follow suit.

## Costa Rica is leading the way

Costa Rica has a population of approximately 4.9 million people and generates most of its electricity from hydropower, alongside other renewable sources such as geothermal plants, wind turbines, biomass and solar power. Incredibly, **2016 saw [98% of Costa Rica's electricity](#) being generated from renewable sources**. Additionally, in a record breaking run beginning on June 17, 2016, the Central American nation was **powered by 100% renewable energy for [110 consecutive days](#)**, despite experiencing sub-optimal weather conditions during that period.

While Costa Rica has an abundance of natural resources, this is only part of the picture. Costa Rica is a country with a long tradition of environmental protection and ‘big ideas’. For instance, in 1948, the country abolished its armed forces, freeing up millions of dollars ordinarily spent on defence which were instead invested in social programs, the creation of national parks and renewable energy generation.



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## How long until Costa Rica becomes carbon neutral?

Despite its successes, Costa Rica still has a long way to go to reach its goal of becoming carbon neutral. Transport poses the largest challenge to Costa Rica’s carbon neutrality, as vehicles remain almost totally dependent on oil for operation. According to the [OECD](#), sales of private vehicles in Costa Rica are rapidly increasing due to inefficiencies in the public transportation system and is worsening air pollution, noise pollution and congestion problems.

Araya believes Costa Rica can break free from its oil dependence by **transitioning to electric vehicles and by engaging the community to take action on ensuring a clean energy future**. For example, to improve citizen engagement in Costa Rica, Araya and others founded the [Costa Rica Limpia](#) organisation in 2014, which aims to empower and inspire citizens to pursue a society free from fossil fuels.

Her message is ultimately one of hope. She hopes Costa Rica will continue to inspire the rest of the world, and serve as a living example that **countries do not have to choose between development and environmental protection**. Rather, both development and environmental protection can complement each other, improving a country’s quality of life along the way.

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