



Vivint solar rwanda

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When Covid-19 hit his small solar engineering business, chief executive Methode Maniraguha said: "No furloughs or layoffs - we'll pivot."

"Kids from Black neighborhoods are not aware solar offers them jobs and opportunities."

Image: RoadTripGuys/Pixabay

For Methode Maniraguha, consolidation in the solar industry - most recently illustrated in the U.S. by Sunrun's acquisition of Vivint Solar - does not signal a lessening of robust competition and innovation. Born in Rwanda, Maniraguha was around five in 1994 when the country descended into three months of genocidal strife which claimed an estimated million lives.

Maniraguha does not talk about how his family survived, beyond saying he was blessed to grow up with both parents. He appears to be one of those eternally optimistic people who see challenges as opportunities.

So, when the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic hit his two-year-old solar engineering start-up - Current Renewables Engineering in Riverside, California - he gathered his small staff and told them he was not planning lay-offs or furloughs.

"No, we are here," he said. "We will closely monitor what's going on and if we need to pivot, we'll pivot."

As engineering jobs fell off, Maniraguha and his team re-focused on research aimed at developing solutions to industry challenges such as the managed charging of electric vehicles and smoother grid integration of renewables. He spun off a new software company, Koa Analytics, as part of his research and entrepreneurial efforts, and was recognized by the Greater Riverside Chamber of Commerce as its 2020 Emerging Entrepreneur.

Maniraguha credits his mother for pushing him to pursue an education that would give him more options than existed in his rural agricultural community, where he recalls doing homework by candlelight. A love of math and science led to middle and high-school opportunities - rare for children from his village - and a full scholarship to California Baptist University in Riverside, where he earned an engineering degree. A senior-year internship turned him onto engineering opportunities in the solar industry and led to jobs at a pre-Tesla SolarCity and Sunrun.

The entrepreneur started Current Renewables in 2018, to provide engineering services for the residential market, and has since expanded into commercial and community solar. He spoke to pv magazine about his path from Rwanda to Riverside and solar entrepreneurship, the importance of customer experience and his



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views on equity and access in the industry. His answers have been condensed and edited for clarity.

pv magazine: Coming from the poverty and genocide of your childhood, what was it that drew you to the solar industry and starting your own company?

Methode Maniraguha: From a young age, problem solving was embedded in me. I always wanted to solve problems. I became a licensed engineer when I was working at Sunrun but I realized that I could accomplish more by starting my own business. Coming from a stable, poor family and being here in the U.S. for many years, and just seeing how things are changing globally, I noticed that income inequality was getting wider and wider. But in my head, I was like: "Is there a way that we can build stable, growing businesses and strong families and reduce income inequality?"

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