Superhot Rock Geothermal in Somalia

A Potential Renewable Energy Gamechanger

CLEAN AIR TASK FORCE

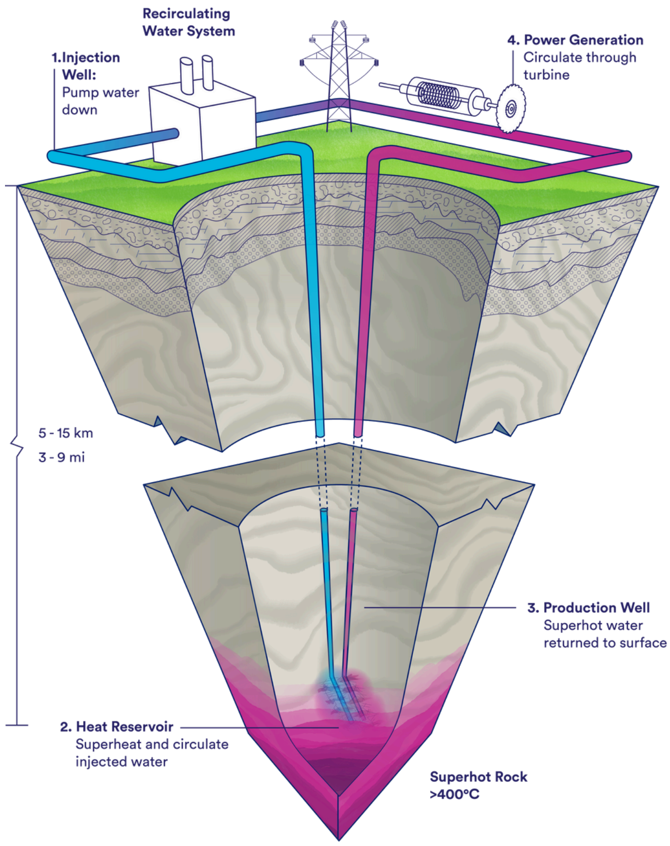
What if there were an always-on renewable energy source with the potential to replace fossil fuel power generation and meet much of the world's future energy needs? What if that energy source could provide firm power without variability issues? What if it had a low land footprint and was available around the world, reducing the need to import energy?

This energy source is possible. It's called superhot rock geothermal.

The power of superhot rock geothermal

Superhot rock geothermal is an emerging energy source that could harness massive stores of renewable energy by pumping water deep into hot underground rocks, where it naturally heats up and then returns to the surface as steam. That steam could be used to produce carbon-free electricity, clean hydrogen, and other high-energy-intensity products.

Traditional geothermal systems in operation today only work in regions where hot water naturally exists near the earth's surface. By contrast, superhot rock geothermal systems would reach kilometers deeper into the earth and wouldn't require underground sources of water, making them viable across the globe.[1] With appropriate investment to overcome technological hurdles, superhot rock geothermal could reach commercial scale and potentially market prices.[2] If this is achieved, superhot rock geothermal could provide clean firm power at scale without the import risk and land-use footprint of other energy sources.



Superhot rock's enormous potential in Somalia

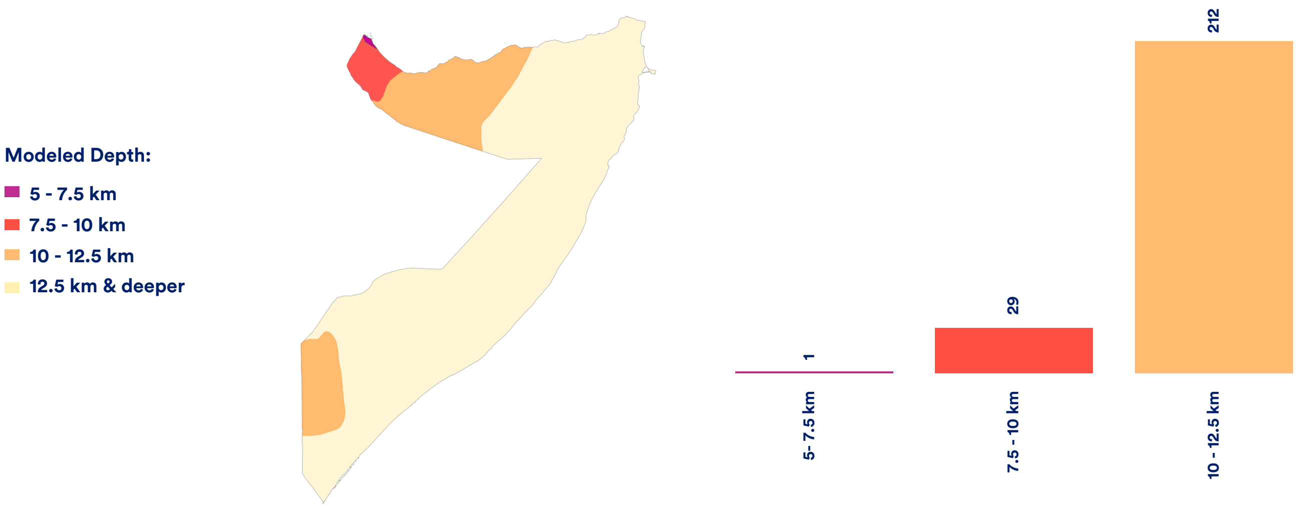


Figure 1: The potential of 1% of Somalia's superhot rock geothermal resource (GW)

First-of-a-kind modeling from Clean Air Task Force and the University of Twente in the Netherlands estimated superhot rock geothermal potential around the world. While this modeling is preliminary, it suggests that Somalia has significant superhot rock resources.[3] Just 1% of Somalia's superhot rock resource has the potential to provide 241 GW of energy capacity, which could generate over 2,009,285 GWh of electricity. Put another way, just 1% of Somalia's superhot rock geothermal endowment is equivalent to 1.2 billion barrels of oil.[4]

Socio-economic development

Public electricity grids were destroyed during the war, resulting in only 36% of the population having access to electricity in 2019. This has contributed to other socioeconomic challenges such as unemployment. As of 2020, the cost of a kilowatt-hour of energy in Mogadishu was approximately USD 1.0, which is five times higher than in neighboring Kenya.[5]

The immense capacity of superhot rock geothermal could play a crucial role in addressing these challenges and fostering sustainable development in Somalia. Superhot rock geothermal projects can increase the overall capacity of the electrical grid, providing more reliable and consistent power to homes, businesses, and industries and enabling economic growth.

The development of superhot rock geothermal projects also requires a workforce, creating job opportunities in various fields such as engineering, geology, and maintenance. This can contribute to reducing unemployment and poverty rates in Somalia. Finally, the development of superhot rock geothermal projects may attract foreign investment and expertise. Collaborating with international partners can bring in funding, technology, and knowledge, fostering a supportive environment for sustainable development.

Renewable, pollution-free energy

Somalia's current generation capacity stands at 106 megawatts, primarily derived from expensive, polluting, and isolated diesel generators.[6] This informal setup leads to significant inefficiencies in both power generation and distribution, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Superhot rock geothermal could theoretically replace these fossil fuel electricity sources with renewable electricity.

Superhot rock geothermal would also provide air quality and health benefits by reducing nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, and other toxic pollutants associated with the combustion of fossil fuels. And excess superhot rock geothermal could play a role in producing low-carbon hydrogen for decarbonizing heavy industry.

Efficient land use

Superhot rock geothermal would be an extremely energy-dense resource, so its land requirements would be exceptionally low. Producing 1 GW of superhot rock geothermal is estimated to require roughly 12 km² of land, compared to approximately 160 km² of land for natural gas, 180 km² for solar, 520 km² for offshore wind, and 14,000 km² for biomass.[7]

Reliable and efficient grid

Superhot rock geothermal is available around the clock, rain or shine. An electricity system without this type of firm power requires building excess generation and transmission capacity to ensure there is always enough to meet demand. For example, a recent study of California found that an energy system that includes clean firm power would require one-third the new transmission compared to one without these resources.[8] Finally, the 24/7 production profile of superhot rock geothermal makes better use of existing grid infrastructure by operating reliably and consistently, reducing reliance on demand-side shifting and expensive backup generation.

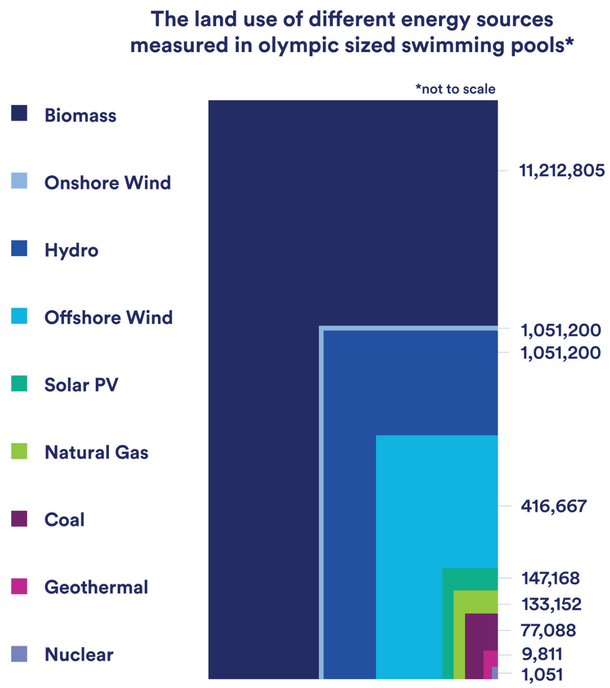


Figure 3: Estimated land use for superhot rock geothermal compared to other energy sources

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Clean Air Task Force (CATF) is a global nonprofit organization working to safeguard against the worst impacts of climate change by catalyzing the rapid development and deployment of low-carbon energy and other climate-protecting technologies. CATF's Superhot Rock Geothermal team is dedicated to decarbonizing the energy sector through superhot rock geothermal. To learn more about the policy and technology innovations required to fulfil superhot rock geothermal's revolutionary potential, visit our website at www.cleanairtaskforce.org/superhot-rock. For inquiries, contact press@catf.us.

Footnotes

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