Solar PV is gaining ground in low and middle-income countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where a change from donor to more market-driven investments has been observed. This article contributes to energy transition research in low-income countries, taking Rwanda as a case study and focusing on the factors that determined the implementation of what was the largest on-grid solar project, upon completion in 2014. The multi-level perspective (MLP) is used to structure our analysis of the various socio-technical levels, and their interaction, to better understand the conditions that are enabling this transition. Our analysis reveals the central importance of bureaucratic and regulatory support for investment in low-carbon energy technologies, within a political economy influenced by processes of neo-liberalisation, while creating significant space for private contract negotiation. In particular, the provision of legal and financial guarantees was crucial to reduce risk for foreign capital investment, revealing contradictory forces that both promoted market rule, while limiting private capital’s exposure to competitive pressures. We also focus our analysis on the aspect of control and driving forces, in particular the role of development partners and private sector project champions.

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