Powering health: WHO brings solar energy to the health sector in Gaza

The solar power plant at Nasser Hospital in Gaza. Credit: WHO

17 June 2019, Gaza - The World Health Organization (WHO) and implementing partners inaugurated the newly installed solar power plant at Nasser hospital in the Gaza Strip. Funded by the Government of Japan, the solar plant as a source of alternative energy will reduce the reliance of the hospital on donated fuel for emergency generators and contribute to build resilience of critical departments providing life-saving interventions.

Annually, the 250 KWp solar plant, providing 420 MWh of clean energy, is expected to save around 166,000 litres of fuel and reduce CO2 emissions by 185 tons. It will also improve the availability of essential health services for an estimated 19,000 people per month.
“Interruptions in energy supply have created an enormous challenge for the health sector in Gaza, putting lives of the most vulnerable patients at risk. The solar electrification of Nasser Hospital is an important step towards ensuring more sustainable power supply to health facilities,” says Dr Gerald Rockenschaub, head of WHO’s office for the occupied Palestinian territory. “We are grateful to the Government of Japan for funding this initiative that also contributes to building a more resilient health system and environmental sustainability in Gaza.”

The Government of Japan provided US$ 500,000 to WHO to implement the solar electrification project in order to meet the needs of the wider population, with a specific focus on the refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) in Gaza.

“We believe that through this project, Japan will contribute to strengthening the linkages between humanitarian responses and longer-term development plans to achieve sustainability in the health sector. The solar electrification project will reduce the risk of preventable mortality of newborns, intensive care patients and patients requiring hemodialysis,” says Mr. Takeshi Okubo, Representative of Japan to Palestine. “In addition, we know that the outcome of this project will go beyond its timeframe; more patients will likely benefit from this intervention in the future.”
Gaza has been affected by chronic electricity shortages for years, which severely compromise the provision of basic health services. As a result, the hospitals in the Gaza Strip have to rely on backup generators to sustain critical life-saving services when electricity is unavailable from the mains grid supply. Since the start of 2018, the international community has collectively donated $4 million USD for emergency fuel to sustain Gaza’s critical health facilities. According to OCHA, 4.29 million litres of fuel were provided to Gaza’s health sector to support 80 health facilities.

Power interruptions affect the functionality of health facilities and hospitals, jeopardizing essential services, including intensive care, haemodialysis, operating theatres and pharmaceutical and vaccine storage. To reduce the impact of the electricity crisis on patients, WHO and health cluster partners have been working to mobilize resources to provide main public hospitals with alternative energy sources. Solar electrification can effectively contribute to decrease the dependence of hospitals on emergency generators. To ensure full energy resilience of hospitals and the broader health sector, a comprehensive approach to the provision of sustainable energy supply and further investments in upgrading the electricity supply infrastructure for the Gaza Strip are needed.