

Microgrid operation palestine

Many players are betting Palestinian microgrids (solar and wind) will ease the country's energy crisis. Palestinians pay the highest energy prices in the entire Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). The Palestinian territories are completely reliant on neighboring governments (mainly Israel) for fuel supplies, which are taxed heavily and distributed at a rate of 1 MW of electricity for every 12 MW used by Israelis. Some Palestinians lack power completely, some have power only for short times each day, and a combination of standard-of-living and high prices mean electricity swallows a large portion of their monthly budgets.

Yosef Abramowitz, CEO of Energyia and founder of Israel's solar sector was frustrated with the lack of progress of infrastructure plans from the U.K. and the U.S. Two years ago he published a plan for a Palestinian energy infrastructure based on solar energy. Abramowitz envisions Palestine, Israel, and surrounding energy-poor countries becoming the greenest region in the world. As he told the Jerusalem Post, "solar energy is the energy of peace, for the sun known no borders";

A recent article in Science Direct describes energy issues in Palestine as follows:

In addition to paying the highest energy prices, Palestinians also have access to the least electricity of any country in the region barring war-torn Syria and Yemen.

Palestinians living in the South Hebron Mountains in "Area C" which comprises approximately 60% of the West Bank live off-grid. They lack electricity or use cost-prohibitive diesel generators. The Israeli government, which controls the area, does not provide Area C's Palestinians the electricity available to Israeli settlers in close vicinity.

For this reason, Israeli-Palestinian NGO Comet-ME has since 2008 been using the area's abundant sun and wind to bring power to these villages, enabling them to make, store, and cook food as well as communicate with the outside world. In 2012, the organization established a Center for Appropriate Technologies in the South Hebron Hills. The center serves as the non-profit's base of operations and headquarters for design (using HOMER Pro for modeling), installation, and maintenance work. To date, Comet-ME has helped provide 3,000 people in 30 villages with renewable energy. By the end of 2017, the organization plans to serve 45 communities and 4,000 Palestinians as it begins expanding beyond the south Hebron hills to all underserved communities in Area C.

"Our systems range from small-scale family-based solar energy systems that serve a single family to microgrids that serve an entire community that can be up to 30-40 families or 200-300 individuals," Tamar Cohen, who handles organizational development for Comet-ME, tells Microgrid News & Insight. "The microgrids range from all solar to hybrid solar/wind to solar with an integrated backup genset."



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"Our continued presence in the field enables us to respond in a timely manner to any technical or social issues that arise," explains Cohen. " We also conduct system upgrades and grid extensions as needed to accommodate the expansion and growing energy needs of communities."

Cohen says Comet-ME's biggest challenge is working in an area "where any construction, including of humanitarian facilities, faces the threat of demolition." At this time, however, all of Comet-ME systems installed in the past eight years are currently operational and continue to reliably serve the communities, and the organization oversees ongoing maintenance and management of the systems as well as training of community representatives.

Upcoming in Part 2, ambitious initiatives and a quick glimpse into a variety of other off-grid renewable projects throughout Palestine.

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