

Hospital energy storage kabul

Continued international aid, including through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), is vital to create better lives for millions of Afghans and sustain development gains. The #ProtectTheGains series highlights ARTF projects that have made a real difference toward achieving a more prosperous, inclusive, and peaceful Afghanistan.

HERAT CITY, Herat Province--Since it recorded its first COVID-19 case in February 2020--and incidentally, the first case in Afghanistan--the Herat province has logged the country's second-highest number of confirmed cases, after Kabul.

Herat imports half of its electricity, mainly from its neighbors Iran and Turkmenistan. Power outages are common during the summer and winter months when power usage reaches its peak because of weather extremes.

Higher demand has outstripped supply over the past years. Afghanistan's national power utility Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), is often unable to meet its customers' needs, especially during peak periods or when long transmission lines are interrupted.

When the pandemic hit the province, DABS installed solar panels in ten hospitals across Herat to supply emergency power. Financed by the Herat Electrification Project, the solar panels were set up in June 2020.

"We all know continuous and reliable electricity is a major need in our hospitals, and the solar power system installed in the ten hospitals in Herat will resolve many of our issues," Sherzai says. "It has created a good and effective working environment for doctors, and they will be able to use essential medical equipment for the treatment of COVID-19 with the help of continuous power."

Herat's Shaidayi children's hospital was converted into a COVID-19 medical center to treat the mounting flow of infected people. The majority of COVID-19 patients in the hospital has 36 solar panels generating 10kW of energy for the Intensive Care Unit's (ICU) 14 ventilators and lights.

"The main usage of the solar power is in the ICU," says Abdul Manan Azadmanesh, 42, Director of Shaidayi Hospital. "If equipment such as ventilators stops working due to a power outage, the patients will have difficulty breathing, which can lead to death or serious damage after five minutes. Now that the solar power panels have been installed, we no longer need to rely on the power generator."

The hospital's backup generator proved unreliable because of the supply switchover; gaps in the power supply could last for several minutes or longer. "The hospital was using the power generator as a backup alongside the city power," Azadmanesh explains, "but the power generator also needs



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maintenance from time to time."

The initial success of the solar panels in Shaidayi Hospital and other health facilities has local authorities consider expanding the initiative to remote areas. More than 110 health centers across Herat province and some remote hospitals frequently face power shortages. "Districts far from the city and remote villages face more power outages than the provincial capital, and solar panels could be a big help for the hospitals located in these areas," says Sherzai.

He also believes that installing solar panels in district hospitals will help in all critical situations. "If people in the remote villages are infected by the coronavirus, we have made sure that hospitals have the resources they need to take care of the patients, and that also includes having access to reliable electricity," says Sherzai.

Herat province has been the epicenter of COVID-19 in Afghanistan and funds provided by the World Bank has helped the Government better equip medical centers and save lives. Photo Credit: DABS / World Bank

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