

# Israelis bring green power to West Bank village

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A Palestinian woman carries a bucket on her head as she passes a solar panel, in the West Bank village of Susya near Hebron, Wednesday, Oct. 7, 2009. Residents of a West Bank village bereft of electricity have been lifted out of the dark ages by an unlikely aid: a group of Israelis who installed solar panels and wind turbines to illuminate their makeshift homes. (AP Photo/Nasser Shiyoukhi)

(AP) -- Residents of a West Bank village with no electricity have been helped out of the darkness by unlikely benefactors - a group of Israelis who installed solar panels and wind turbines to illuminate the Palestinians' makeshift homes.

The villagers of Susya live in tents and caves with [power](#) lines darting right above their dwellings, connecting a nearby Jewish settlement to the [power grid](#) while bypassing them entirely.

It was this lack of basic services that drew the physicists from Comet-ME, a group of pro-peace Israeli scientists and activists, to this dusty, desolate area. Now the entire village of 300 people has access to power that is reliable, free and green.

At night, rudimentary streetlights dot the otherwise pitch-black village and each home is lit by an energy-saving bulb. Villagers have no access to phone lines, but the power allows them to charge their cell phones.

"Life is easier now," said Susya villager Widad Nawaja, standing below the solar panel that powers her home. "We have light. Children can do their homework at night if they couldn't finish it during the day."

The residents also hope the new amenities will help them make more money: an electric butter churner means they can produce butter faster than by hand, and two green-powered refrigerators can preserve their produce until it can be sold.

"The communities here are in deep poverty. The project is targeted to help them make more revenue from their own work," said Noam Dotan, an activist and physicist with Comet-ME.

Comet-ME says it seeks to use renewable energy to empower Palestinian communities like this one, which is among the poorest in the West Bank.

The West Bank, home to some 2.5 million Palestinians, is controlled by the Israeli military, with the Western-backed Palestinian Authority governing some areas. Some 300,000 Israeli settlers also live in the territory. The Palestinians want to make the West Bank part of their future state.

Israel provides power to Jewish settlements and military facilities in the West Bank, as well as to most Palestinian cities and towns.

But Comet-ME says some 500 Palestinian families in communities not officially recognized by the Israeli military authorities in this part of the southern West Bank are forced to live off the grid. The Israeli military said it never received a request for power from the community and if it did, the army would study it "in accordance with the relevant laws."

Susya villagers used to depend on diesel generators which were costly and polluted the air.

The community has faced a series of evictions by the military and has clashed with Jewish settlers in the past. But the villagers and the activists say the work to set up the new power system - done by both Israelis and Palestinians - helped temper mistrust.

"This is an example of the coexistence between Arabs and Jews, and this is a very important thing," said Mohammad Ahmed Nasser Nawaja, wearing a traditional Arab robe and carrying the cell phone he charged thanks to the new power system.

Meanwhile, word has spread to other villages lacking electricity. Comet-ME hopes to power up the remaining off-grid families in this area over the next four years.

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