

Solar power technology poised to light up remote villages



Sixty-one-year-old Seiha Al Raja, her son Bader Awad Fahed Hamed, and Rafia Enad Fahed Hamed recount their experiences at the Barefoot College on Monday (Petra photo)

AMMAN - Three Jordanians who spent six months in India receiving training solar power technology, returned home on Monday with plans to utilise their experience to benefit their communities.

Sixty-one-year-old Seiha Al Raja, her son Bader Awad Fahed Hamed, and Rafia Enad Fahed Hamed from the Mansheyet Al Ghayath village in Mafraq Governorate learnt the use and maintenance of solar cells to generate electricity at the Barefoot College in the Tilonia village in Rajasthan, one of India's largest, driest and poorest states.

"The training in India was excellent. I will train other people in my village and other villages in the area on how to use solar cells to generate power. Some people in the village are not provided with electricity. Many others do not have money to pay for it," Bader said yesterday.

"I never would have believed that the sun can be used to generate electricity," his mother Seiha remarked, adding that she is looking forward to teaching women in her village and other places on how to benefit from her experience.

"I received very good training in India... at the end of the course I was surprised and very happy that I could assemble and conduct maintenance for solar cells to generate electricity. I am illiterate, but am proud of myself now," she told The Jordan Times yesterday.

The three are now awaiting the necessary funds to initiate a JD50,000 project to install solar panels for about 200 families in the village, according to the Ministry of Environment, which has contacted several donor bodies and private sector entities that showed interest in financing the venture.

Noting that the project is the first of its kind in the region, Minister of Environment Taher Shakhshir said the ministry has coordinated with the Ministry of Education to provide a classroom for the three Jordanians to spread the know-how they acquired in India.

The minister added that a society comprising area residents will be established to run the project and ensure its sustainability.

Bader, who also received training in water-harvesting, said he will train families in the village on how best to make use of rainfall, especially since the area receives heavy rainfall that "is wasted", according to him.

Ministry officials highlighted the importance of such projects, noting that providing electricity to remote villages in the Kingdom costs about JD250,000.

Founded in 1972 by Indian social activist and educator Bunker Roy, the Barefoot College is an NGO that provides basic services and solutions for problems in rural communities, with the objective of making them self-sufficient and sustainable, according to its website.

The “Barefoot solutions” can be broadly categorised into solar energy, water, education, healthcare, rural handicrafts, people’s action, communication, women’s empowerment and wasteland development, the website indicated.

The college, which only accepts uneducated individuals from remote areas across the world, has become the focal point of a marriage of modern technology and local skills to “bring poor people into the development process”.

Barefoot College has trained 140 grandmothers in 23 countries and thanks to their efforts, around 600 villages in India, Asia, Africa and South America are now running on solar power.

Solar power is a key part of the Kingdom’s drive towards renewable energy, and is expected to account for 10 per cent of the country’s energy mix by 2020 under the national energy strategy.