

RELEASE IN FULL

South Mount Hebron renewable energy system under threat of demolition by Israeli authorities – status report

Background

Located in the southern Hebron hills, in an area called Masafer Yatta, these communities of Palestinian farmers and shepherds live in shanty-like village of caves and tents. This is a very traditional population subsisting on non-mechanized agriculture and herding. Often referred to as the “cave dwellers”, the people who call this area home have lived in the area continuously since the 19th century on either a continuous or seasonal base.

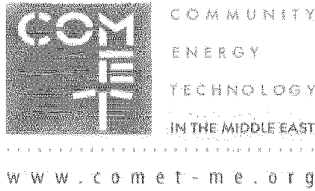
Because of changing economic conditions, desertification, and the ongoing Israeli occupation, the communities are heavily disadvantaged. They suffer from a continuous need to rely on outside support for survival. In an economic climate where their agricultural produce is competing against imported and industrialized crops, the opportunities for economic growth are severely limited. These difficulties are furthered by the community's location in Area C. As a result, all of the community's infrastructure issues, such as water and electricity connection as well as building permits, require Israeli approval (which is never granted). This poverty and marginalization, and in particular the absence of energy infrastructure, is more a product of the political situation than geography or economics.

Renewable Rural electrification projects

From 2009 to the present a series of projects were carried out to provide the communities in the region with renewable, and sustainable, basic energy services. The projects consist of the construction of renewable energy systems (wind and solar), capacity building and reliable maintenance. Provision of basic energy services has been universally recognized as a central factor in achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and impacts communities in a variety of positive ways. Communities are able to integrate into existing markets and tap into their economic and creative potential. It impacts the lives of women by releasing them from gender specific manual labor to more productive pursuits and opportunities. Children can study after night and members of the community gain a sense of security and empowerment. Indoor air pollution due to fire and the dangers associated with kerosene lamps are eliminated.



info@comet-me.org | Nes Lagoyim 9, Tel Aviv - Jaffa Israel 68185



Current status

During January and February of 2012 the Israeli Civil Administration issued stop work orders to six of the systems that were built in these projects (Tha'ale, Shaab el Botom, Gawawis, Wadi J'heish, Herbaiat a nabi and Esfai Foq) effecting more than 500 people. On February 27, the civil administration turned the stop work orders into demolition orders in four of the communities (Shaab el Botom, Gawawis, Wadi J'heish, Herbaiat a nabi). This decision will take effect on Monday, March 5, and means that the Civil Administration is legally authorized to demolish the systems without prior warning. In Tha'ale, the hearing has been postponed indefinitely because of legal planning procedures taken by the lawyers. Tha'ale has suffered a demolition of community infrastructure on February 15, but the energy systems were not harmed. In Esfai Foque, the hearing at the Civil Administration HQ is scheduled for Wednesday, March 7. The systems were part of a project funded by the German Foreign Office and carried out by medico international and Comet-ME, and a project jointly funded by the German representative office in Ramallah, the New Zealand embassy in Ankara, Engineers without borders in Denmark and the Swiss olive oil campaign and implemented by Comet-ME. All involved parties are now working on a coordinated effort to prevent this demolition from happening, including legal steps, media exposure and diplomatic pressure on the Israeli authorities.

Photos

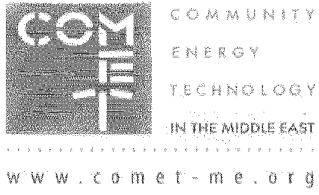
A short selection of photos showing South Mount Hebron and the renewable rural electrification projects. Photos courtesy of various photographers – do not use without permission from Comet-ME.

Contact

For further information please contact Aya Shoshan from Comet-ME at: aya@comet-me.org



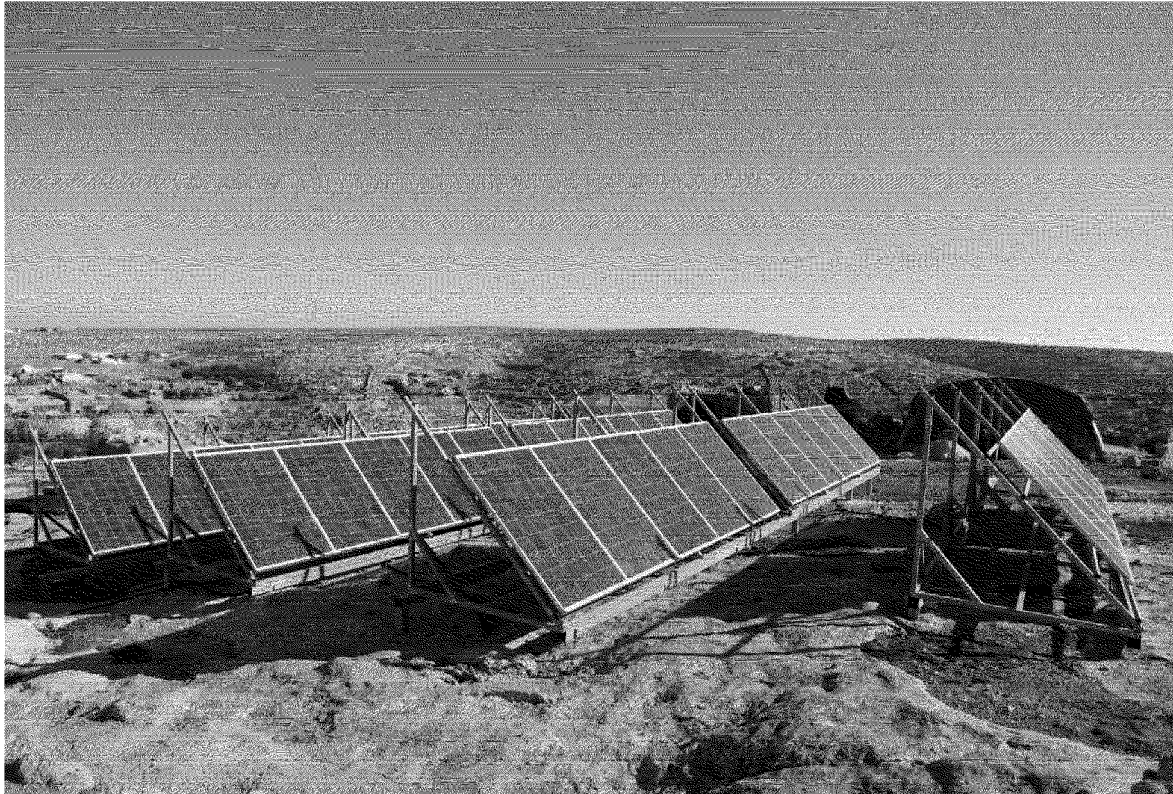
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1 A tent illumonated at night by renewable energy



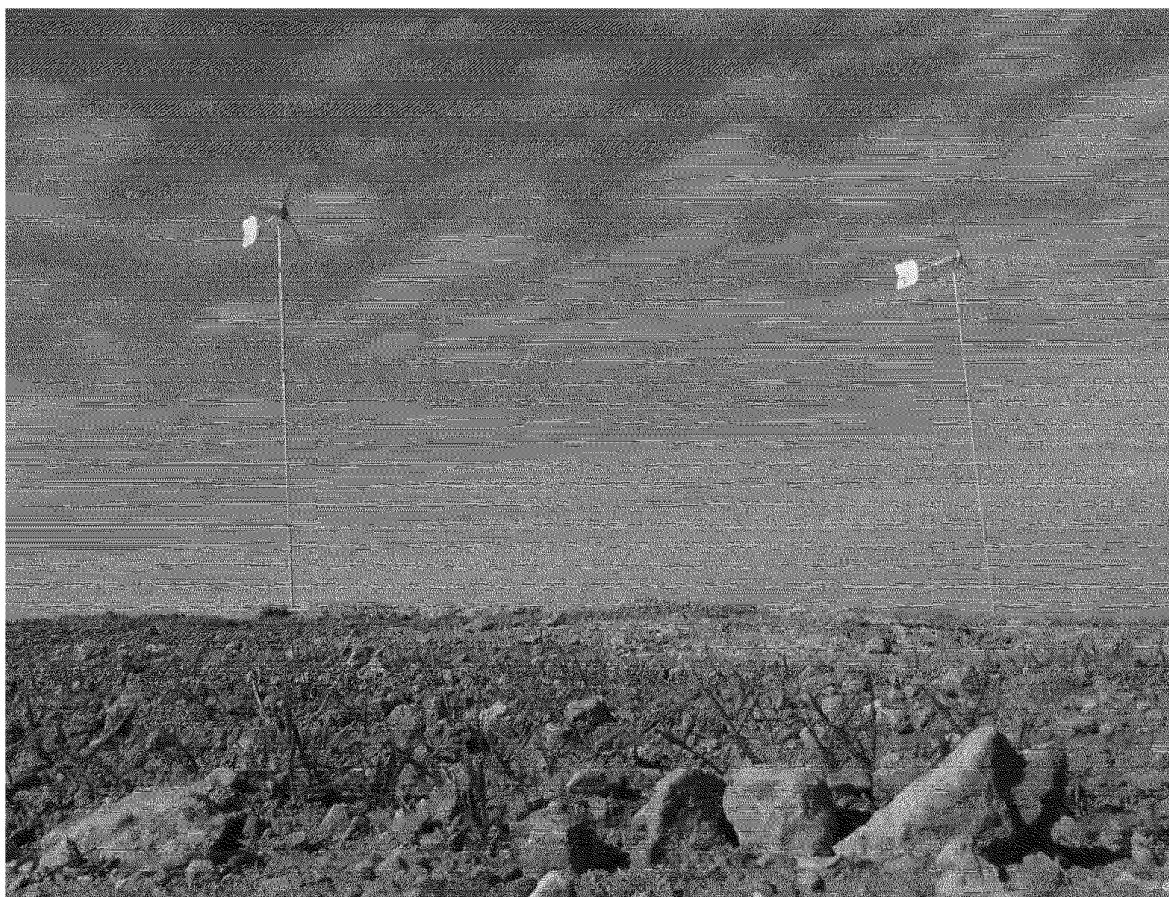
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2 Solar panels provide clean and sustainable energy to SMH communities



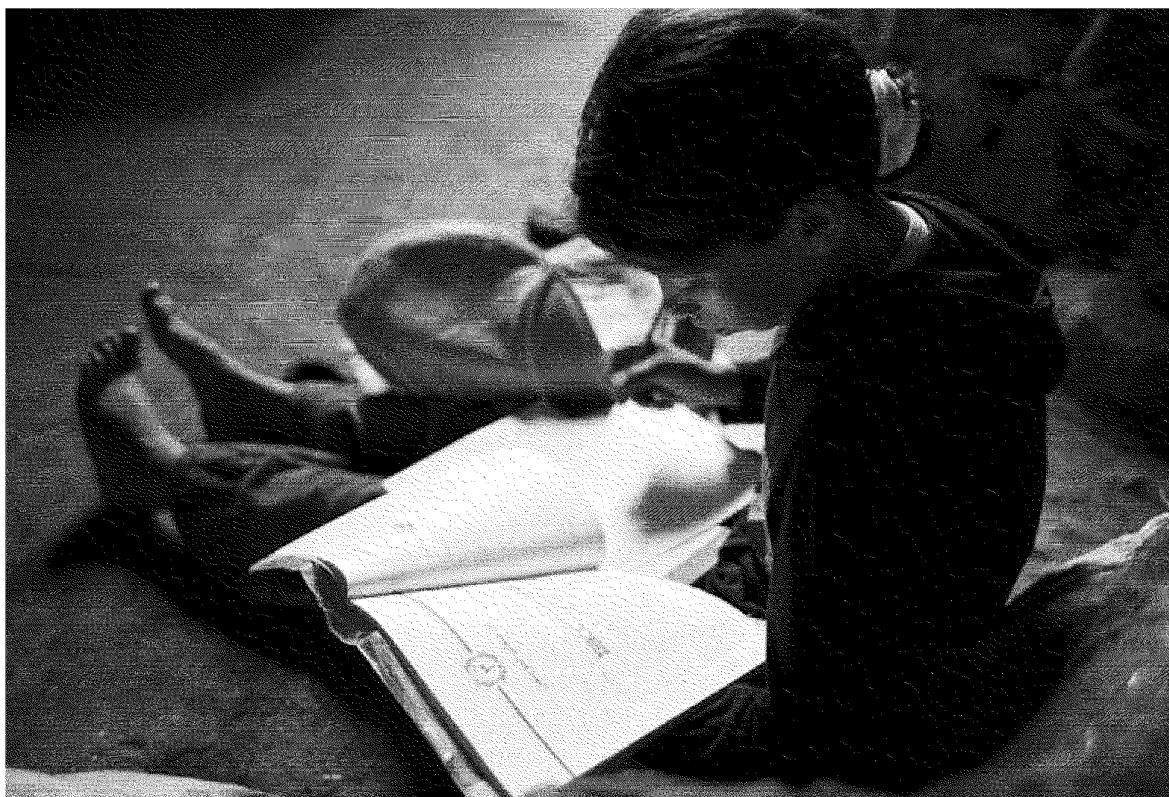
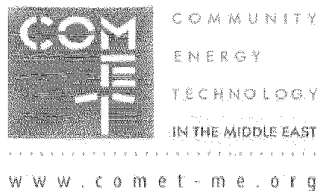
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3 Two wind turbines spin in the SMH wind generating electricity from nature's surplus



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4 electricity is not a luxury - using a lamp light to prepare homework.



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