

Panasonic solar panels bhutan

The 180 kW grid-tied solar PV plant, the first of its kind in the country, demonstrates viability of solar power to diversify Bhutan's energy sources Photo: Department of Renewable Energy, Ministry of Economic Affairs

Electricity in Bhutan is generated mostly from hydropower, an energy source which is renewable unlike fossil-fuel driven power plants that are major contributors to carbon dioxide emissions worldwide. Like hydropower, sun is a bountiful resource Bhutan can tap into for producing renewable energy in keeping with our carbon neutrality commitments and also for enhancing energy security through diversification of energy sources. The commissioning and inauguration of the 180kW grid-tied ground mounted solar photo-voltaic power plant marks the start of Bhutan's investment in grid-tied solar energy as a viable alternative energy source in the face of soaring domestic demand and climate change.

4 October 2021: The Chairperson of the National Council of Bhutan, Lyonpo Tashi Dorji, inaugurated the 180 kW grid-tied ground mounted solar photo-voltaic power plant at Rubesa, Wangduephodrang today. The inauguration was attended by the Ambassador of Japan to Bhutan, Satoshi Suzuki (virtually), UNDP Resident Representative Azusa Kubota, representatives from the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC), Department of Renewable Energy (DRE), Bhutan Power Corporation (BPC), the Local Government and other power sector agencies.

Chairperson of the National Council of Bhutan, Lyonpo Tashi Dorji, and UNDP Resident Representative, Azusa Kubota, inaugurates the solar plant Photo: UNDP/Kinley Wangmo

The project, which was commissioned on 31 August 2021, is part of Bhutan's COVID-19 response and recovery project, "Towards Smarter, Greener and More Resilient Recovery through Innovation in Bhutan" funded by the Government of Japan and supported by UNDP. The USD 210,000 project was executed by DRE in collaboration with BPC as the implementing agency.

The 180 kW solar power plant is a first of its kind in the country and since its commissioning has been generating and feeding electricity into the local grid for distribution. The solar plant, co-located with the existing 600 kW wind farm at Rubesa, is expected to generate 263,000 units of energy a year, which will be adequate for supplying electricity to around 80-90 households.

The project activities, including the design, construction, installation, grid integration was carried out by local workforce. Experienced and trained personnel from this project will form a key group of professionals, who will take up upcoming renewable energy on utility level projects. Despite hindrances induced by the pandemic, the project was completed within seven months.

The DRE Director Phuntsho Namgyal (left) gives a tour of the solar plant Photo: UNDP/Kinley Wangmo

In his keynote address, National Council Chairperson Lyonpo Tashi Dorjisaïd, "Today, we are not just inaugurating a solar power plant, but also making history," he said.

The chairperson said that energy plays a crucial role in everyday life, and it is at the core of socio-economic development of any society. "Harnessing and investing in renewable energy is key to sustainable development and clean energy future," he said, adding that the most critical issue of our time - climate change - threatens our glaciers.

"Any significant impact on our glaciers would ultimately have an effect on the hydrological regime of the country which may affect hydropower generation. Therefore, it is timely that we accelerate harnessing solar energy and other renewables to have a healthy mix of energy supply from various renewable energy sources."

The Ambassador of Japan to Bhutan, Satoshi Suzuki, who addressed the gathering virtually said he hoped that the solar project would help enhance Bhutan's energy security, which is indispensable for the socio-economic development of the country. "I hope that these solar photo-voltaic facilities will be effectively used for many years to come," he said. "I also hope that the support provided by the people and the Government of Japan to realize this project will further augment the friendship between our two countries."

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