



Abd ElKareem speaks with CRS Field Officer about his rehabilitation plan. Photo by CRS staff

Green Shelter Solutions to Help Families in Gaza Breathe Easier

FAMILIES IN GAZA IMPROVE THEIR HOMES, QUALITY OF LIFE

For Abd ElKareem AlShaf'ee and his family, the topic of electricity in their home in Beit Lahia, Gaza Strip has become a source of deep anxiety. Across Gaza, electricity in people's homes is increasingly cut, and for longer periods of time. In the 2014 conflict, entire neighborhoods in Gaza were reduced to rubble. More than 100,000 people were displaced and in need of long-term housing. Nearly a decade later, reconstruction efforts continue to be slow due to restrictions imposed by Israel on construction material. Thousands more families are living in substandard housing because they do not have the means to make repairs themselves.

For Abd, a father in his 70s, the lack of electricity is not only an inconvenience, it is life-threatening. Abd needs electricity to breathe. Living with Pulmonary Fibrosis, a progressive lung disease, Abd's lung capacity is compromised by as much as 80 percent. To breathe, he has a vaporizer and oxygen tank (both of which require electricity). But, when the lights go out, Abd must get to the hospital—which is far from his home—to get oxygen in his lungs.

“I used to spend a significant portion of my day at the hospital, ensuring a stable electricity supply to operate my vaporizer and sustain my life.”

Abd ElKareem,
Gaza Strip



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This struggle is compounded by the costs of health care—which, for Abd and his wife, are unaffordable. Already, they receive government stipends from the Ministry of Social Development on a quarterly basis, but that helps to cover household costs; it couldn't be stretched enough to pay for the series of hospital visits.

But, in October 2022, Abd learned about assistance available for families in Gaza to repair to homes that sustained major and minor damage in the recent years of conflict. While CRS shelter support in Gaza has included resurfacing exterior walls, replacing broken windows fixing damaged roofs and having cash assistance, the unique aspect of this Greening the Shelter project is the prioritization of environmentally-friendly approaches, like solar energy. Funded by ECHO-UNHCR, the activities are implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), its local partner Life and Hope Association, and the Global Shelter Cluster.

To take part, Abd attended an orientation to learn environmentally friendly approaches. He then submitted a proposal to CRS for how he would “green” his shelter. His wife contributed greatly to the ideas for improvements. CRS engages with both spouses in all project activities, with the result that home upgrades better reflect the needs of the whole family.

Both Abd and his wife felt that they needed a continuous source of electricity to protect his life and let him use the breathing device at any time. And, through the Greening the Shelter project, they were able to install a solar energy system to finally ensure a consistent electricity supply. The impacts have been life-altering improvements in their living conditions and quality of life.



Program participants in the Greening the Shelter program talk with CRS staff and sign contracts to start implementation. Photo by CRS Staff.

“ **During the recent escalation in May 2023, I no longer feared losing my life if I needed to use my breathing device or hesitated to call an ambulance. The presence of the solar energy system provides me with a sense of comfort, allowing me to exercise my right to receive proper healthcare.**”

-Abd ElKareem