Powering Health Care
for Women, Children and Families

The Issue

Imagine having to give birth in the dark or have an operation with only the light of a mobile phone. While there is little awareness about the importance of electricity to health care, it is essential for women, children and families.

Health care facilities depend on electricity to function and provide essential services when they are needed most. Electricity is used to power the lights in the operating room and maternity ward, maintain the cold chain for vaccines, and operate life-saving medical devices. Yet, it is estimated that tens of thousands of health facilities across Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia lack access to electricity and/or suffer from frequent and debilitating blackouts.

This situation negatively affects the health of hundreds of millions of women, children, and men in the developing world. As the health community works to improve access to quality, facility-based health care in order to end preventable maternal and child deaths, the electricity needs of the health sector in low- and middle-income countries will only continue to grow.

Did you know?

An estimated 1 in 4 health facilities in Sub-Saharan Africa lack access to electricity

Roughly 300,000 women die from pregnancy- and childbirth-related complications every year. Providing minimal lighting and other electricity-dependent medical services can help avert many life-threatening complications affecting mothers and newborns during pregnancy

Approximately 1.7 million children die each year from diseases that can be prevented through immunizations, yet a considerable share of vaccines is ruined due to poor cold chain services

Nearly 70% of medical devices used in developing countries fail, with poor power quality a major contributing factor

The Opportunity

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) presents an opportunity to address these challenges in a more integrated and effective manner and to raise this issue on the global agenda. Efforts to improve health outcomes under SDG 3 (Good Health), coupled with growing support for and advances in sustainable energy, can improve access to and the quality of health services, particularly maternal, newborn, and child health services.

Currently, the energy and health sectors seldom work together and often lack policies, data, tools, and institutional capacities to make transformational changes in how energy is considered within health systems and vice-versa. By fostering collaboration between the energy and health sectors, we can create a strong enabling environment to expand access to sustainable energy for health facilities. Additionally, by promoting innovation and finding innovative financing models, we can help bring sustainable energy solutions to health facilities in communities in need.

In short: We can power better health care for women, children, and families.
About the Initiative

Powering Health Care is an initiative of the United Nations Foundation that works with the UN and partners to advance access to power in health facilities in resource-constrained settings to improve the availability and quality of health services, particularly for women and children. Launched in 2013 in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Women, the initiative works closely with Sustainable Energy for All.

The United Nations Foundation carries out this mission through a three-pronged strategy:

1. **Make the Case:** We work to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of electrifying health care facilities to achieve the SDGs by commissioning studies and research, providing thought leadership supporting awareness campaigns, and hosting high-level events.

2. **Strengthen the Environment:** We help strengthen the enabling environment for health facility electrification by promoting dialogue and coordination between the energy and health communities and by collaborating with other international organizations to generate tools, data, and quality standards that help governments and their partners plan and develop sustainable interventions.

3. **Improve Delivery:** We foster new and improved ways of delivering energy solutions for health facilities by supporting innovative projects and sharing best practices through webinars and workshops.

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**Our Achievements**

- **262 health facilities** powered with innovative energy solutions
- **4,650 mothers and newborns** mothers and newborns served in health facilities with improved maternal and child health services per month
- **More than $10 million** raised in support of the initiative’s goals

Assessed energy needs for **320 primary health facilities** in Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda

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