

Interview

Marta Segú: "We have changed the lives of populations that did not have access to electricity or resources to pay for it"



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Marta Segú is the director of Probitas Foundation.

The director of the Probitas Foundation explains that the project of renewable energies in different hospitals has allowed to provide quality healthcare to vulnerable countries as Sierra Leona and Angola.

What is your project for photovoltaic panels?

The project has been to develop a solar container to be used as an electric generator from photovoltaic energy in different parts of the world and for different uses.

Where does the initiative start from?

The project emerges from the GLI project ('Global Laboratory Initiative') developed for our foundation since 2010. The objective is to strengthen the capacities of the clinical diagnosis laboratories in the most vulnerable regions of the world, providing the health centers of the basic tools to diagnose, treat and follow diseases that cause a higher mortality.

What is the relationship between this project and solar panels?

We detected different problems related to the electrical supply that made the long-term viability difficult for the program. If we reinforce the laboratories and the infrastructures but we leave unnecessary energy expenditure for them we are not doing a good project because the impact would not be positive, on the contrary, it could be even negative.

That is why we started the project to electrify laboratories and hospitals from renewable energies. We started with self-sufficiency and viability economic analysis of the clinical analysis laboratory of the Valentí de Pau Center installed inside of the GLI-Bamako program (Sierra Leone).

What does the project propose?

The project proposes the design of a standardized and photovoltaic solar installation mounted in a marine container (and therefore mobile) that feeds the consumptions of GLI laboratories installed by the Probitas Foundation around the world.

In which countries did you implement it?

In Sierra Leone, at the Saint John of God Hospital, Valentin de Pau Health Center in Bamako with Mutuelle Benkan and in the Nossa Senhora da Paz hospital in Cubal, Angola.

For what reason did you decide to intervene in hospitals in these countries and not in others?

Due to the poverty and social precariousness in which these countries live and because we are strengthening diagnostic laboratories in remote areas and difficult to access to bring quality health care to the most vulnerable populations. We thought about installing this system in laboratories and we already have three: in Sierra Leone, in the Lunsar region. Here we implanted it at the Saint John of God hospital, which gave a good result because now they have electricity 24 hours a day for the ICU, the operating room and the Intermediate care. They also have a back-up generator in case the photovoltaic system fails and save more than 1.000 euros per month in energy expenditure.

And in what other hospitals?

In the center of Salt Valentín de Pablo in Bamako, in the Telephone sans Fils district (TSF) in collaboration with the Mutuelle Benkan. And at the Cubal Hospital in Angola where a prototype has been done to conduct a pilot study and see if this prototype can work well in most laboratories that strengthen the Probitas Foundation because it is made in a container and the material can be sent easily (plates, batteries ...).

In what conditions were (speaking of infrastructure and electrical supply) these hospitals before implementing your program?

Many of them did not have electricity of public network and they went with generators with a huge gas mileage expense.

Do the countries where you develop these projects have one of the highest levels of energy poverty in the world?

Yes, they are countries and especially areas that do not have access to the electrical system or have no resources to pay for it, therefore our system has changed their lives.

Who are the beneficiaries?

The direct beneficiaries are the workers of the GLI laboratory, the sanitary personnel and users of the Hospital or health center in general. The quality of the service has increased because the operating hours can be extended from the laboratory and from carrying out analysis and testing to patients. In addition, this allows the blood stored in the blood bank to be kept in good condition, as well as reagents and medications that need to be stored in cold conditions. In addition, the costs associated with the purchase of fuel for the operation of the generator group are reduced and this allows new investments in the future.

What results did your intervention have?

This allows many things: to ensure a permanent electrical supply 24 hours a day equivalent to a conventional electrical network, extend the life of the installed equipment, ensure the correct storage of the reagents and test used in the laboratory, ensure correct blood storage at the blood bank, allow emergency clinical analysis to be performed 24 hours a day, reduce the electrical bill associated with the laboratory's consumption and make the

laboratory's work to be economically sustainable and viable long term.

Only benefit the centers that have this system?

The excess available energy not only ensures the economic viability and quality of the service offered to the Health Centers, but also allows the laboratories of centers that do not have access to the electricity grid to be fed. In this way, access to the health of the population in the most isolated areas can be improved by providing the centers of an electrical service and a laboratory of autonomous and quality clinical analysis.

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