

# Saving Lives Through Solar Light

Fact Sheet on UNFPA Sierra Leone's Solar Suitcase Project

Nov 2013



Technician installing the solar suitcase in Bamoi PHU

## Solar Suitcase

The Solar suitcase, which comes in a compact easily identifiable yellow suitcase, has two solar panels that are mounted on a clinic's roof and connected to high quality LED lights. Once fully charged it can provide light for up to 18 – 20 hours. The suitcase also has headlamps, a foetal Doppler to monitor a baby's heart rate and a cell phone-charging unit.

**“THE INSTALLATION OF THESE SOLAR SUITCASES HAS PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN HELPING TO UPGRADE THE HEALTH FACILITIES IN THE COUNTRY AND HAS ALSO POSITIVELY CONTRIBUTED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GOVERNMENT’S FREE HEALTH CARE INITIATIVE”**

**Sierra Leone Health Minister  
Hon. Miatta Kargbo**

## Background

Availability of Emergency Obstetric and New-born Care is central to reducing maternal and neonatal mortality. This is due to the fact that major causes of maternal mortality such as haemorrhage, sepsis, hypertensive disorders, obstructed labours amongst other causes, can be treated with trained human resources at appropriate, well-equipped health facilities. As such UNFPA Country Office in Sierra Leone has been supporting the Government of Sierra Leone refurbishing health facilities and also by upgrading Basic Emergency Obstetric Neonatal Care (BEmONC) facilities and Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Neonatal Care (CEmONC) centres to ensure that women have access to safe delivery and no woman should die while giving birth.

The absence of electricity, especially for labour rooms, operating theatres and PHUs has been a major bottleneck to the implementation of the government's Free Health Care Initiative as it made it difficult to deliver critical services at night: especially complicated night time deliveries and many lives were lost.

## UNFPA Inputs.

In January 2012 the Friends of PCMH coordinated by retired midwife, Isha Daramy Kabia invited the We Care Solar organization through the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, to showcase their solar suitcases in Sierra Leone. UNFPA was quick to see the potential in saving lives through the use of solar suitcases that can be used for deliveries at night, charge cell phones to call for ambulances, and provide foetal scope to monitor the baby's heart-beat.

UNFPA supported the We Care Solar team to transport the initial 7 solar suitcase (donated by We Care Solar) in March/April 2012 and an additional 11 suitcases in June 2012 from Lungi to the districts, train a small core team in installation and maintenance, and to install the solar suitcase in PHUs that had been identified by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation.



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Women accessing services at Kondemaia PHU



Newly lit maternity ward at Bamoi PHU during night

***“THANKS TO THE SOLAR SUITCASE, NOW WE HAVE POWER DURING THE NIGHT TIME IN THE MATERNITY ROOM. SO YOU DO NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT COMING DURING NIGHT FOR YOUR DELIVERY.”***

**Ms. Elizabeth Mansaray  
Maternal Health Aide**

## Impact of the Solar Suitcase Project

It was important for MoHS and UNFPA to assess the effectiveness of the donated solar suitcases before scaling up the programme. Hence, a team made up of MOHS staff, Isha Daramy-Kabia and UNFPA carried out an assessment of the first 7 PHUs where the solar suitcases were installed with the help of UNFPA and found out that the installation of the 7 suitcases has been a major success and has helped to improve the capacity to perform deliveries at night, improved client confidence and reduced client cost amongst other things.

## Scale up of the Solar Suitcase Project

After assessing the positive results from the first set of installations, UNFPA helped the Ministry of Health procure 42 more solar suitcases from We Care Solar Organization to be installed in 42 PHUs that will again be identified by the Ministry of Health. With additional support from UNFPA, the installation of these 42 suitcases was successfully completed in October 2013. Since the initiation of the project, UNFPA has assisted the Government of Sierra Leone to install a total of 60 Solar Suitcases around the country in 13 districts.

## Way forward

There has been great interest by Government of Sierra Leone to continue to scale up the Solar Suitcase project and to provide light to more maternity wards around the country. While anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of night-time deliveries have seen a drastic increase in places where the solar suitcases have been installed, UNFPA is currently in the process of developing a comprehensive monitoring system to assess the impact on the numbers and quality of services in the places where solar suitcases have been already installed. Depending on the assessment findings and subject to funding availability, UNFPA will see whether the project can be scaled up even further in 2014.

For a visual representation of the Solar Suitcase project and other initiatives by UNFPA Sierra Leone, please visit our YouTube site at

<http://www.youtube.com/user/UNFPASierraLeone>