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## 12,000 KW of Solar Energy at St. Benedict College

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The Ministry of education has initiated an ambitious environmental protection programme so that in time the schools in Malta would be 'zero Carbon Dioxide contributors'. This means that the energy usage in the schools would include the integration of electrical generation by means of renewable sources, namely solar power and wind power in such a quantity that the total consumption of electricity absorbed from the Enemalta national grid, would be balanced out by the production of 'clean' electricity by means of solar and wind systems. With such systems state schools will not only be producing clean energy and reducing dependency on fossil fuels but will also be educating our children on how best to use our natural resources. Education Minister Louis Galea said this when visiting St. Benedict's College in Kirkop where a new solar power system has been installed and which is expected to produce over 12,000Kw Hrs annually.

When fuel oil is burnt in power stations to produce electricity, actually it would be using the power of the sun that had reached the earth millions of years ago. Likewise when we burn petrol or diesel in automobiles and coal for heating or electricity generation. The burning of these fossil fuels is causing Global Warming, drastically changing the weather patterns of our planet.

The equipment, installed at St. Benedict College does not wait for millions of years, nor thousands or even minutes, but converts the sun's rays immediately into electrical power as soon as the rays hit the surface of the solar panels.

Each Kilowatt Hour of electricity consumed adds 0.75 Kg of Carbon Dioxide into the atmosphere. The minimum total annual production of the installed solar system is estimated to be 12,000 KwHrs, that is, 12,000 units of electrical power. This means that due to the installation of these photovoltaic panels, 9 tons of Carbon Dioxide would be prevented from being released into the atmosphere annually, and contributing towards the reduction of the Global Warming phenomenon.

The photovoltaic panels at St. Benedict College have a lifetime of at least 36 years, manufactured by a firm of international repute with worldwide technical backup including Malta. In monetary terms, the installation will make a saving of Lm 1000 per annum in the cost of electrical consumption, while the payback period, estimated at current cost of electricity would be approximately 18 years. Considering that the lifetime of the system is longer than twice this duration, the investment turns out to be very cost effective.

More importantly, however, the photovoltaic equipment will also serve as an educational tool for the students at St. Benedict for learning the science behind this technology and as an exposure to the environmental protection requirements that the planet urgently requires.

The Foundation for Tomorrow's Schools (FTS) is also in the process of investigating the best engineering solution and feasibility for the installation of a wind generation system which is envisaged to be of a higher output and even more cost effective with the scope of reaching the 'Zero Carbon Dioxide Contribution' level at St. Benedict College.

Minister Galea said that when the Government launched the school building and modernisation project, FTS was directed to seek all possible means for rain water storage and for alternative systems of energy. Louis Galea said government schools absorb over a third of a million Malta Liri in electrical energy, whilst at they same time they have enormous spaces available, including unutilised roofs. Minister Galea said that making use of alternative sources of energy is gradually becoming more feasible and necessary. "It is important that schools are at the forefront of this development to show the way, especially to the young and future generations."

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