

Panama city solar thermal energy

Set amid winding roads, green trees and stunning mountains, it has more than 1,000 pupils, most of whom hail from one of Panama's largest indigenous groups, the Ng?be.

The single-storey school stands out from other buildings in the impoverished Hato Chami region because of the solar water heaters fitted to its roof. The recently installed devices allow students to take hot showers and make it easier for staff to boil water when preparing meals.

"People think that because Panama is a hot country there is no need for hot water," said Luis Navntoft, an advisor at Termosolar Panama, a broad-based partnership that installed the solar water heaters. "They are often not aware about the need for heat, either for hot water or cooking."

Termosolar is funded by the Global Environment Facility and supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the National Secretariat of Energy, the Ministry of the Environment, Banco General, the Technological University of Panama and the Panama Green Building Council.

Innovative Partnerships like Termosolar are expected to be a focus of discussions on 20 September as world leaders gather for the Climate Ambition Summit in New York. Part of the UN General Assembly, the event is designed to help supercharge the global effort to both counter and adapt to the climate crisis.

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Hato Chami is not unique in Latin America and the Caribbean. Many schools, hospitals and homes are without hot water. Electric water heaters are expensive and until recently solar was an untapped commodity. Many communities rely on firewood for heating - with the chopping of trees leading to deforestation.

Globally, trees soak up 30 per cent of emissions from industry and fossil fuels, but every year 10 million hectares of forests are cut down, with deforestation accounting for 11 per cent of carbon emissions. Projects like Termosolar Panama can help keep trees in the ground.

"Hot water is one of the easiest things to make sustainable, through solar thermal," said Geordie Colville, UNEP's Chief of Energy and Climate. "But even in tropical countries, such as Panama, where the sun is plentiful, a large proportion of water is heated by non-sustainable means."

Alongside countering deforestation, solar hot water heating could also help Panama cut its reliance on fossil fuels, particularly liquefied petroleum gas. A driver of climate change, according to Termosolar Panama the fuel is used to heat most of the over 30 million litres of hot water Panamanians use daily.



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Termosolar Panama is part of a wider Panamanian effort to move away from fossil fuels. This includes a national strategy to deploy 1 million square meters of solar thermal technology throughout the country by 2050. When fully implemented, Panama's National Solar Thermal Plan will prevent the release of 2.4 million tonnes of carbon dioxide and save Panamanians more than US\$110 million annually on fossil fuel bills.

"[Termosolar Panama] gives me an explosion of good feelings," said Rosilena Lindo, the Deputy Secretary of Energy in Panama. "It is building a family around solar in Panama and really helping raise awareness and capacity."

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