



The time is now for solar at African health centers

April 7, 2020 – John van Zuylen

We are still in the midst of the crisis but today I wanted to take a positive angle and look at the future. Researchers are now working day and night to develop a cure and eventually a vaccine. And it is reasonable to expect this vaccine will be available in the medium term. The virus knows no border and in order to be efficient it will need to be available globally, even in the most remote parts of Africa. This may be challenging as vaccines require to be refrigerated and the WHO estimates that [only 28% of African health centers have access to reliable energy](#).

Luckily, simple solutions already exist to provide basic electricity, hence refrigeration, to health centers. Several organizations have already been working for a long time to bring this much needed electricity to health facilities. Sun Transfer Kenya with the support of the Solar Energy Foundation installed [solar for lighting and vaccines refrigeration at 10 clinics in Kenya](#), significantly improving the conditions for mothers to give birth and increasing vaccination rates within the community. In Kenya again, the private clinic network [Tunza Family Health](#) has installed [solar+storage systems at their 23 clinics](#) with the financial support of local Population Services Kenya offering a 24-month loan plan. This access to reliable energy has improved the quality of service at the clinics and increase patients visits and business. A demonstration that solar energy also has a direct impact on improving the bottom line of commercially-run health facilities. [We Care Solar](#) has delivered more than 5,000 compact “Solar Suitcases” to maternal health facilities in Africa and Asia to improve the quality of obstetric care. Finally, UNDP through its Solar for Health initiative has [already installed PV at 900 health facilities](#), most of them located in SSA.

These are just a few examples and there are probably many more which have gone less noticed. But this is still only a drop in the ocean, as it is estimated that [sub-Saharan Africa counts 100,000 health centers](#). This lack of infrastructure in African health facilities has been known for decades. But easy solutions exist, and they rely on solar and storage technology.

This is a great opportunity for the solar industry to hit a double target: further develop the penetration of solar technologies throughout the continent AND contribute to improving the quality and reliability of the continent’s health care services. The latter is now more important than ever, and this is our chance, as professionals but also as members of the global community, to have a tangible impact on improving lives.

The only missing element in this equation is adequate financing. Some cases may require pure grants, but many will also be viable through lending to allow for PAYG financing. It is our hope that national governments, multi-laterals and donors all around the globe will soon make the necessary financial packages and/or support available. This will not only ensure that solar professionals can bring solar solutions to health facilities in a financially sustainable way, but also that health care professionals will finally be able to treat and protect their patients in decent conditions.

For more extensive information about the importance of and solutions to electrifying health care centers in Africa, we invite you to visit <http://poweringhc.org/about-us/>