

A pandemic in the dark – solar is lighting up Malawi's un-electrified clinics

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Over 15.6 million people in Malawi are facing the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic while living without electricity and rural health clinics are operating in darkness as the virus spreads. SolarAid, a UK based international NGO, moved quickly, expanding its operations towards supporting the Ministry of Health and to distributing solar lights and systems to health workers and clinics in the dark.

In Malawi, where 54% of the population live further than 5km from a health facility and 96% of the rural population don't have access to electricity, there is a significant concern about how the outbreak will impact the country.

The lack of electricity is not only affecting families in their homes – the majority of rural health clinics are vastly under-resourced. 41% of health facilities operate without being connected to the electric grid. Many of them ask their patients to bring their own candles or torches in the night time. The lack of access to electricity and modern forms of communication is further making the dissemination of information about the virus to rural populations a big challenge.

As cases of the coronavirus are increasing in the country, Malawi has taken preventive measures. However, due to the severe poverty the country is facing, the planned lockdown was blocked by the high court as a result of protests and rising concerns about the consequences a lock down would have on low income, vulnerable populations.

SolarAid has been operating in Malawi since 2008 with the aim to bring small solar lights to rural families through its social enterprise SunnyMoney. Field operations during this time of crises have shifted towards supporting the Ministry of Health with their efforts through:

- Distribution of solar systems that also charges mobile phones and radio to clinics, isolation centres and health volunteers working to disseminate information.
- Disseminating trusted information about the virus to rural populations through phone calls and SMS.

"At SolarAid Malawi, we are fully dedicated to responding to the pandemic, we are allocating resources and time to support the Ministry of Health in their effort of fighting the coronavirus. As a Malawian citizen, I also take it as a personal duty to make sure that people are safe, through disseminating accurate information about COVID-19 as well as, taking an active role in mobilising resources to enhance the preparedness of our health systems and facilities", says Brave Mhonie, Operations Director, SunnyMoney Malawi.

SolarAid are fundraising to cover the costs of the efforts with a public appeal, with an estimation of £242,000. [Click here for the appeal page.](#)

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