

# Clean energy powers coronavirus testing in Africa: Renovagen's FAST FOLD portable solar power system deployed by First Aid Africa to accelerate COVID-19 testing

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First Aid Africa, a Scottish charity with operations in Africa supporting sustainable healthcare, and Renovagen Ltd, a UK supplier and manufacturer of innovative portable renewable energy equipment, have announced the success of a rapid response project to support testing operations in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in Zambia.

One of Renovagen's FAST FOLD portable solar power systems was deployed by First Aid Africa to Mbereshi Mission Hospital following an urgent request. The hospital was struggling with delivery of tests because power was available for only 6 hours a day and it was extremely unreliable. Due to logistical and procurement restrictions, fuel for generators was not available at the site. This limited the number of tests which could be completed, and caused valuable reagents to be wasted as tests were being interrupted by power outages. With reagents being in such short supply, this was a critical issue.

First Aid Africa responded by sending one of their FAST FOLD portable solar power systems on a 14 hour drive across the country to the hospital site, where it was set up within minutes to provide a stable source of clean power for the testing equipment at the hospital. The small size and weight of the system meant that it could be transported by pickup truck and manually deployed without the need for special equipment. The unique design, with single-button operation, meant that no specialist skills were needed to set up and run the FAST FOLD system. First Aid Africa plan to leave the system in place to support the COVID-19 response, until funding can be raised for a permanent off-grid solar power installation at the site. At that time, the FAST FOLD system can be moved to another location with a critical need for power.

John Hingley, Managing Director of Renovagen Ltd said, "This case study demonstrates the benefits of portable solar power equipment as a critical interim solution in healthcare settings. The FAST FOLD system has proven itself to be an extremely flexible tool for fast response in remote locations where the use of heavy equipment to deploy larger systems may not be practical and specialist electrical skills may not be available. Whether the driving factor for urgency is a global pandemic, a natural disaster or population displacement, there will continue to be many scenarios where self-sustaining power is required at sites that are difficult to access. Often, the provision of that power without reliance on fuel for generators can be life-saving. We are proud to have partnered with First Aid Africa to provide this capability that enhances their great work in Africa."

"The FAST FOLD system can provide 100% self-sustaining power for medical equipment, without reliance on the grid or diesel supplies", states Sam Abrahams, CEO of First Aid Africa. "It has proved to be a flexible asset for supporting a range of our operations – from First Aid training in remote villages to urgent response to critical healthcare issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Having a kW-scale portable solar capability - which can be packed up within a few minutes by hand, transported by pickup truck and redeployed just as quickly - is hugely valuable. This has had a direct impact on the number of COVID-19 tests being completed, so it is positively contributing to the national response, helping to contain the virus and ultimately to save lives."

Josephat Moyo, Medical Laboratory Technologist at Mbereshi Mission Hospital said “I would like to acknowledge and thank First Aid Africa for providing the FAST FOLD portable solar generator to our institution. We are using it to power Pentra C200 and Gene Xpert machines used for COVID-19 testing and are extending it to power blood count/CD4 count machines as well. This has helped the laboratory to have a stable energy supply – which is especially valuable because before we had the FAST FOLD system we would usually experience power supply interruptions during the course of our work. The result has been improved turn-around times for test results and a reduction in wastage of reagents.”

We welcome press enquiries and investment/funding enquiries to assist in scaling up and increasing the impact of our projects.

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