

Energy - the golden thread

By  Danette Breitenbach

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With the demand for energy expected to increase substantially to 2040 globally, Africa is no exception. However, compared to 70-90 % in other regions, only 39% of Africa's population is electrified. Yet, by that date it is forecast that the African population will nearly double, to 1.8-billion, with urbanisation increasing from 40% to 56%. Therefore, Africa must increase the percentage of population electrified.



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“Despite energy demand in sub-Saharan Africa growing by around 45% between 2000 and 2012, it accounts for only four percent of the world total despite being home to 13% of the global population,” says Minister of Energy, David Mahlobo, in a speech read out on his behalf at the Africa Energy Indaba 2018.

Energy access for all

While access to modern energy services is increasing, it remains limited with more than 650-million people in the region without access to electricity and nearly 730-million relying on the traditional use of biomass for cooking, he adds.

Energy, says the minister, is the golden thread that runs through the economy and stimulates and sustains the economic growth and development of a country - especially so for developing economies.

“The primary purpose of energy is to contribute to a better quality of life and modern energy unlocks access to improved health care, education, economic opportunities and longer life. Lighting up the continent of Africa, lights the lives of millions.”

The minister also touched on the global adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. “The adoption of the goal to ensure access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy for all by 2030, established a new level of political recognition for energy’s central role in development. As a continent we need to ensure that we have universal energy access to clean, sustainable and affordable energy by 2030. This universal target should not elude us.”

Africa, and the African Union (AU) in particular, supports the UN initiative of energy access for all by 2030. It is our commitment as a continent and individual countries that we increase generation capacity to meet energy needs now and in the future.”

The AU and various regional energy power pools in the continent have approved the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), of which the majority of projects under PIDA focus on energy.

“The continent has an energy policy, strategy and plan with identified projects for implementation. The energy strategy requires an investment of approximately \$42.2bn annually to meet the universal access to energy by 2030.”

Projects

The PIDA has identified 15 priority energy programmes with over 50 projects that focus on hydropower, geothermal, renewable energy and regional interconnectors (transmission lines) and pipeline infrastructure.

Already in September 2011 at the African energy ministers meeting projects were identified including MphandaNkuwa hydropower with total installed capacity up to 2,600MW and the Grand Inga in the Democratic Republic of Congo (which has the potential to generate 40,000MW of hydroelectricity).

Once realised, those projects will contribute greatly to change the access to electricity in the region, says the minister, adding that the Kingdom of Lesotho has substantial wind capacity that can produce electricity to not only meet the needs for the country, but generate excess for export in the region. Zambia and Angola have also hydro potential which is untapped. In Ethiopia there is huge hydro potential as well West and East Africa has hydro, solar and wind potential.

“It is only through a supply of secure, clean and sustainable energy that the anticipated population growth will be made possible and given this scenario, energy access is the “golden thread” that weaves together economic growth, human development and environmental sustainability,” says the minister.

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