

Transition to renewables well under way

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Today saw the start of [WindAc Africa 2017](#) - the annual "academic hour for wind power" hosted by the [South African Wind Energy Association](#) (SAWEA). Welcoming delegates to the conference, Brenda Martin, CEO of SAWEA, noted that the global energy transition to renewables is well on its way.



Brenda Martin, CEO, SAWEA

In South Africa, political will is a key determinant of the pace at which that transition occurs. She highlighted how by stimulating large-scale investment, the current national renewable energy programme has resulted in socioeconomic benefits over time, but, partly due to policy uncertainty, this success has stalled.

Illogical dependence on sunset industries

Regardless of this tension within the sector, SAWEA, she said, continues to work proactively in realising its potential benefits, however, we need to be sensitive to the impact of the decisions we make today on future generations. "A blind determination to remain dependant on sunset industries is not going to help South Africa. We need to have a sense of what it is we are signing up for, for future generations," she said, including the externalities involved in the energy choices we make.

The WindAc Africa 2017 programme, focusing on the technical, financial, policy and environmental aspects of the wind power sector in SA, aims to identify solutions to some of its current challenges, and to unpack new research learnings.

"Beyond the borders of our disciplines, our academic credentials, and our countries, through sharing our wisdoms and practices, we can ensure that the success of domestic energy transitions take place in a way which is just and which is future-focused," she said.



Mmboneni Muofhe, deputy director-general for Technology Innovation at the Department of Science and Technology in South Africa.

[Mmboneni Muofhe](#), deputy director-general for Technology Innovation at the Department of Science and Technology, shared similar sentiments during the opening segment of the conference, noting that its theme, "Wind power without borders", is futuristic in its focus. Unsustainable resource use leads to problems, like climate change, that have no geographical borders but, he said, these also transcend temporal borders in terms of the compromised environment left for generations still to come.

Overcoming political noise

The power of science, he said, lies in its ability to fade out the political noise due to its fact-based nature, however, scientists need to be assertive in this space as the information they provide should serve as the basis from which decisions are made. "If bad decisions are made, it shouldn't be because the information wasn't there, or because the information was compromised," he said. "This is the responsibility that we have here, that when we provide data and information that supports the argument we are making, let it be data that can withstand scrutiny over and over again."

Muofhe explained that one of the perpetual challenges the DST faces is bridging the innovation chasm. While a high volume

of research is done, very little is transitioned into products for the market. While South Africa's renewable energy programme has been recognised globally, more needs to be done to grow its contribution to the wind energy sector, he said.

Regardless of political bias, the energy transition is inevitable, said Muofhe, using Telkom as an example of a disrupted state entity that had to reinvent itself in order to remain relevant. He highlighted two key factors driving the rapid change in the energy space; recognition of our growing responsibility for the environment, and the progression of science and technology in realising alternate energy sources.

Opportunities in this sector are abundant in Africa, he said, where more than 600-million people lack access to reliable and safe energy sources. "The fact that only 32% of the population on this continent have access to modern energy services is problematic, but it's also a huge opportunity," he said, noting the potential for sustainable community development.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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