

## Getting the renewables success story out there

With South Africa's energy mix currently being decided and debated, global and local experts and leaders in the renewables industry believe it's time to convert a general awareness and understanding about green energy into tangible action.



Max Edkins

These were some of the key issues teased out and discussed at the US Embassy Pretoria's Energy21: Exchange Hub on telling the renewable energy story differently.

The event, which drew over 60 people working in the renewable energy sector, focused on tactics to get the industry's story out there. Participants considered how to best reach, touch, inform and convert new audiences, which is especially relevant following the announcement of South Africa's updated Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) 2020-2030 and the resounding success of the renewable energy independent power producers programme (REIPPPP).

### Finding new champions

"South Africa is at the beginning of a very important renewable energy journey," said Elizabeth McKay, minister counselor for public affairs at the US Embassy. "Finding new champions of renewable energy and encouraging more action will require us to shift the renewable energy narrative."

Driving this message home at the hub – a partnership between the US Embassy South Africa, World Bank's Connect4Climate and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) – were communications, climate change and renewables experts, including the World Bank's Max Edkins, Green Cape's Aman Baboolal, FirstRand Limited's Madeleine Ronquest and Intellidex's Colin Anthony.

"South Africa's renewables story is truly inspirational. We are transitioning towards a renewable future, which opens up opportunities. By communicating more, we strengthen the possibility of a renewables-focused future. It's also the most pressing challenge of our time and our generation's time," said Edkins, climate change and communications expert at the World Bank's Connect4Climate programme.

David Shelby, director of public engagement at the US State Department, said: "In the last five years South Africa has made tremendous headway for renewables – as evidenced by the highly successful REIPPP roll-out. This, in turn, has played an important part in building the economy and job creation. Now is the time to start telling this story and to communicate the benefits."

## **No longer expensive**

Through discussing tactics – ranging from strategies for creating compelling, sticky content, reaching rural communities, designing communications campaigns to data visualisation – influential industry minds explored new solutions for achieving greater awareness and public support for the renewable energy movement.

One of the main messages about renewable energy: it is no longer as expensive as people think.

Dr Tobias Bischof-Niemz, manager of CSIR's Energy Centre, said solar and wind energy cost competitiveness studies build a strong economic case and sound positioning for renewables.

This is especially important at a time when the department of energy's updated IRP will be discussed to determine the country's energy mix structure. "Building new energy capacity from wind and solar is less costly than coal. Additionally, these also offer CO<sub>2</sub> and water reductions," said Bischof-Niemz.

## **Grounded in science**

"While educating the public on renewables must be grounded in science, there is also the need to work together to create public awareness on renewables, to stimulate community interest – in both urban and rural areas – and engage meaningfully."

This sentiment was echoed by Edkins who believes that success lies in developing strong partnerships to drive a focused message on renewables.

## **Agreed action plan**

The conversations and outcomes from the workshop will continue with the intention of creating a strong and connected network within the renewable energy and communications industry. Participants acknowledged their shared passion for and commitment to telling the renewable energy story differently, leading the way in creating narratives that touches the hearts and minds of all South Africans.

An agreed action plan by all participants will continue its momentum throughout 2017.

However, change really begins with each participant and their will to drive home change in their renewables environment. "For us, success is for each person within the renewables industry to go home and implement one idea from Energy21 in their respective environments," said Shelby.

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