

Renewables won't solve Africa's energy crisis on their own

Renewable energy alone is not the solution to Africa's energy woes. There needs to be a continuation of base load power plants to collectively meet the growing power demand on the continent.



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The impact of not having electricity has far outweighed the cost of building new energy infrastructure, and African governments need to accelerate efforts to unlock economic opportunities in industrialisation, agriculture and small business development,” says Webb Meko, Black & Veatch sub-Saharan Africa business development director.

More than 620-million people in sub-Saharan Africa are without access to reliable electricity. Developing more long-term programmes with a balanced energy mix, as envisaged in the South African draft Integrate Resource Plan (IRP), is the right path, he says. “The IRP gives details for a balanced planning horizon, which enables people to make decisions on what to do. It contributes well to giving some level of stability into the direction South Africa’s government intends to go.”

Some believe that the IRP is trying to dictate the advancement of certain technologies at the expense of others, and that there is a need for a threshold in terms of emissions and tariffs, while creating an environment enabling all technologies to compete for the same space in the market.

“When building an effective and comprehensive energy portfolio, one must think about the impact it and supporting decisions will have on the economy, environment, and society at large. Renewables energy resources can be increased in terms of capacity and it form part of the overall energy mix which needs to be managed in an efficient way” Meko says.

Any country at a policy level has an obligation to sustain power in the most optimum way, and that can only be achieved if energy resources and other key implications are taken into account.

Investing in power infrastructure

In addition, there is no shortage of projects in Africa in which to invest, and there is no shortage of capital in the world, yet uncertainties must be addressed for Africa's infrastructure to adequately grow to meet the region's demand. Meko adds that the key thing for investors, is to ensure that they enter an investor-friendly environment which means there is policy and regulatory certainty, sovereign guarantees, no risk of default payments, no risk of breach of contract, and power utilities and other off-takers honouring their obligations

Meko says once all of the necessary fundamentals are realised, there will be an increased appetite for widescale investment in Africa.

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