

Electricity-starved Africa needs urgent solutions - POWER-GEN Africa

Despite its great economic potential, sub-Saharan Africa's power industry is seriously underdeveloped, with only 53% and 8% of its urban and rural population, respectively, having access to electricity. The Power-Gen Africa Conference and Expo, launched earlier this week in Johannesburg and due to be held on 6-8 November 2012 at the Sandton Convention Centre, South Africa, is set to discuss urgent energy solutions for Africa.

 By Iсса Sikiŕi da Silva: @sikitimedia 6 Sep 2011



The Power-Gen conference and exhibition, a brainchild of US company PennWell Corporation, is a global platform where major international power players showcase their new products and technologies.

"This conference will look at strategies, which include policy-making, risks and finance, and also touch on technical aspects specifically debating issues such as how to acquire and operate the latest technologies build a stronger power industry," PennWell director of conferences (international power group) Nigel Blackaby told a media briefing.

As the sub-Saharan Africa's population is growing faster than predicted, its environmental demands increasing and power demands also rising along, very few governments have been able to meet those demands. Even leading economies such as South Africa and Nigeria are seriously struggling to cope with rising demands, a situation which often results to constant blackouts or load-shedding.

According to PennWell Corporation, sub-Saharan Africa's total installed capacity amounts to some 55 000 Megawatts, with SA alone having about 36 000 Megawatts.

With the exception of SA, the infrastructure is still largely characterised by isolated networks with little or no interconnection between countries, low fuel use efficiency, low capacity factors, and high distribution and transmission losses.

"The energy challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa are many and they impact seriously on the overall performance of the region's social and economic indicators," he said.

"Improving the added value of African products will require modern energy provision for manufacturing, processing, storage and transportation."

Conference set for 2012

Blackaby, who is calling for papers for the conference, said hosting the conference for the first time in Africa was in response to the demands of PennWell's numerous clients who are very much interested in the African market given its growth potential and extensive resources.

"The electricity industry in Africa is seriously underdeveloped, yet it is a growing economy, which the rest of the world is keen to help it maximise its potential," he said.

"By bringing this conference and exhibition in Africa, we are hoping to create business opportunities for SA and African local companies, which will have the opportunity to network with some of the world's leading power experts and companies that are coming here."

A vital learning platform

UK-based Blackaby said he was hoping that SA's Eskom will be part of the event and that many government ministers in Africa will also feature at the conference, which is seen as a vital learning platform for countries and companies struggling with electricity issues.

Regarding the exhibition, Blackaby said 40% of the exhibition space has already been secured since June with European companies from Germany, Finland, Sweden, Spain, among others, topping the list. Power-Gen Africa joins PennWell's existing network of Power-Gen events including Power-Gen International, Power-Gen Europe, Power-Gen Asia, Power-Gen Middle East and Power-Gen India and Central Asia. PennWell's core business also includes print and digital media. The company publishes over 50 magazines with a strong focus on energy issues.

For more, go to www.powergenafrika.com and www.pennwell.com.

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