

Radically different approach needed to power Africa

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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If the continent dealt with its access to electricity challenge with the same gusto it is applying to fighting the Covid-19 pandemic, the problem would already be solved, Dr Louis van Pletzen, director of InAfrica, told the Africa Energy Indaba virtual conference



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The dilemma of lack of electrification in Africa has been the same for the last 10 years, and currently there is no master plan to wipe this out. “We don’t deal with 850-million people living without electricity - 400,000 of whom die of indoor pollution, and deforestation etc - in the same way we attacked Covid. We need the same plan and drive to solve the issue of electrification in Africa, We need a radically different approach,” he said.

“If you look at the material we have to work with for the next five to seven years, it’s a position where you have debt overburdened economies, national utilities in deep trouble that can’t rely on state support and an ageing fleet.

“You have a dilemma developing where national utilities want to control because they feel threatened,” he said.

Approach

The approach towards fixing the energy deficit in Africa needs to be pragmatic. He said there is nothing wrong with coal and that we need to move away from a way of thinking that dictates shedding assets before the end of their natural life because they are deemed unsuitable or not environmentally friendly.

“We need a balanced fuel mix that leans towards renewables but ensures optimal use of existing assets for their remaining life,” Van Pletzen said.

Carbon capturing is something that has become very topical at a price point that makes it economical. “We shouldn't continuously apologise for different fuel sources because carbon capture is making coal pretty clean,” he said

I think going forward, the technology is moving so quickly. Five years ago the price point for battery, solar and wind was very different, Van Pletzen said.

“If you tell people, ‘if you generate electricity, whatever you have surplus we'll buy and have a different price points’, you don't need a huge bureaucracy. It will roll out and you'll have 10,000 MW in no time,” he said.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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