

## Namibia considers nuclear power option

*Since it has uranium, nuclear power is a good option for Namibia given funding and expertise.*

Namibian  
January 31, 2006

The government ruffled some feathers among renewable-energy advocates yesterday when it said it had been toying with the idea of nuclear power as a potential energy source for Namibia.

But Mines and Energy Permanent Secretary Joseph Iita was quick to add that to date the subject had enjoyed only minimal attention and that at present Government was only informing itself about such an option.

It has, however, informed Namibia's biggest uranium mine, Roessing, that a small nuclear power plant was up for discussion.

"It is not like it's a project or programme or anything like that. Government is looking at all possibilities for power energy. It's just ideas. Nothing is concrete. We are not even looking at a feasibility study or anything. It is just a possibility," Iita told The Namibian yesterday. He was speaking on the sidelines of a renewable-energy workshop which got underway at the Harmony Centre outside Windhoek.

As Namibia's energy demand increases and its suppliers in the SADC region are unable to guarantee long-term power provision, the controversial subject of atomic energy raised its head at a gathering intended to discuss breaking down barriers to expanding renewable energy in Namibia as a long-term, sustainable energy option.

Iita told delegates that given Namibia's uranium resources, it was only logical for Government to consider nuclear energy along with renewable and other sources to alleviate the country's energy crisis. "Government has made a policy decision in that regard.

Namibia is not a country, which would use it for other purposes. That is a non-starter. But nuclear energy is a policy consideration.

There is a serious energy shortage and it's a resource [uranium] we can use," said Iita. Iita said investigations into nuclear energy had already indicated that Namibia did not have the human capacity to manage such a power plant and that the waste material it would generate was a very big concern in considering such an option.

But several experts on renewable energy in Namibia are appalled that atomic energy should even be considered as a potential energy source for the country, given its enormous potential to exploit renewable energy forms such as solar and wind power on a long-term basis.

Some were of the opinion that it was naïve to consider atomic energy purely as a power source only, maintaining that it was inherently coupled to military and political concerns.

lita said of all the power options researched to date, Government was still in favour of Namibia immediately pursuing the Kudu Gas project and more transmission lines for increasing local power generation.

Many of the hydropower options, he said, had cross-border ramifications which would need to be ironed out before they could be considered more seriously. "In view of the challenges we are faced with, it is crucial that we look at ways of providing energy service needs in different ways and not only rely on electricity," lita told delegates. He said Government was committed to promoting the use of renewable sources of energy to complement conventional electricity supply.

But renewable energy consultants say that should Namibia fully exploit this form of power supply, the country could even be in a position to export power. The Chief Technical Advisor of the Namibia Renewable Energy Programme (Namrep), Professor Prem Jain, told the workshop that Namibia's solar-energy potential was even greater than that of Asia but that there were a number of barriers inhibiting the growth of the renewable energy market in Namibia. He said his project was working on breaking down capacity, institutional, public awareness, social acceptance, financial and technical barriers to expanding the use of renewable energy. "People in the rural areas don't know what renewable energy can do," said Jain.

Namrep is a project of the Ministry of Mines and Energy, supported by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), to increase affordable access to sustainable energy services, accelerate market development for renewable energy technologies and to protect the environment by reducing or removing barriers to the demand for clean energy services in Namibia.

lita said Government's rural electrification programme had not had as broad an impact as hoped, because not enough resources were allocated for this purpose. But failure to speed up electrification in the rural areas could derail Vision 2030, because of the effect a lack of electricity supply has on development and investment.

Workshop delegates are looking at ways to fast-track the implementation of renewable energy technologies to meet the goals of 2030 for Namibia to have a sustainable energy supply.

Namibia has one of the highest per capita energy consumption figures in Africa. In the SADC region, Namibia's energy consumption is third after those of South Africa and Zimbabwe.

In many African countries, traditional fuels such as wood and dung account for 80 per cent of energy consumption.

In Namibia, this source of fuel accounts for less than 20 per cent of the country's energy consumption.