

Hydropower must be utilised more - Dept



*Nelisiwe Magubane,
Director-General,
Department of Energy*

18 August 2010 - Hydropower which is one of the cleanest sources of energy remains untapped by most of the continent, says the Department of Energy.

Speaking at the 3rd annual Hydropower Africa Conference on Tuesday, department's Director-General Nelisiwe Magubane said according to experts the potential for hydropower is in excess of a hundred thousand megawatts.

"It is one of the cleanest sources of energy we have available but sadly much of it remains untapped," Magubane said.

She was speaking on behalf of Minister Dipou Peters who is currently at the SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government in Windhoek, Namibia.

Magubane said the potential of hydropower could not be underestimated at this critical stage of Africa's development, adding that the issue of energy affects everyone.

She said the conference comes at a time when South Africa is celebrating Women's Month, adding that challenges still remain for girl children in fetching firewood.

"It is necessary to expand opportunities for women especially from an energy provision point of view. It would be opportune how hydropower can be used to enhance the livelihood of women of all ages," she told conference.

Magubane said power challenges have proven to be extremely costly as it hinders socio economic development not only of the region but of the continent as well.

These challenges, she said, have affected the development of industries and slowed direct foreign investment.

"In the industrial and commercial space the absence of energy invariably results in job losses, in our ability to create goods and services and in creating jobs," said Magubane.

She noted that it was important to have shareholders invest in hydropower as government and its utilities cannot be expected to carry the responsibility alone.

"There has to be a degree of participation by private players .We should do everything in our power to ensure that energy projects do not collapse as soon as the project developers leave the site," she said.

The issue of funding as well as that of regulators needs to be also looked at.

"There is a need to create a continent wide integrated resource plan for electricity," she said, adding that the plan should look at issues of tariffs among other matters.

Subsidising the poor will also need to be looked at as well as ensuring that there is skills transfer.

Babu Ram chief power engineer from the African Development Bank South Africa said that 95 percent of hydropower is unexplored, adding that geology and high construction risks are some of the challenges around generating hydropower.

One of the other hydropower development challenges is that it is capital intensive. Ram said that there is a need to create incentives in order to bring in stakeholders.

World Bank water and hydropower advisor of the African region, Vahid Alavian, added that according to research done by the Bank, Africa's hydropower potential is high, the continent is behind compared to other regions and the continent's access to electricity is only at 20 percent compared to other countries.

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