



ENERGY CRISIS IN THE DARK CONTINENT OF AFRICA - by: Xolisa Bangani

The demand for electricity is rising rapidly and energy companies are struggling to maintain has become a catastrophe. In developing countries such as South Africa where there is a high rate of population , poverty, crime and unemployment things can go from bad to worse.

During the 1994 elections when the country became an independent and democratic country, people were promised to have access to electricity and yet since then this promise has never been fulfilled. Some claim that the government failed to address people about self-reliance instead they would depend public sector in order to fulfill their needs. People need to know that there is enough renewable energy (not fossil fuels) on earth to meet all the electric needs of all the population centers in the world for hundreds of years to come. The problem is that this energy is either in remote regions or is being used only in certain political fiefdoms. The idea of linking the world`s electrical power networks fueled by renewable energy resources such as the sun, wind and water should be practice and popularized.

Renewable energy is essential to meeting basic human needs – food production, running water, heat, light and transport are all dependent on energy access. Poor access to energy has severe impacts on health, quality of life, education and economic productivity.

A research made by International Energy Agency show that, 1.3 billion people around the world lack access to electricity – 84% are in rural areas. Women and children in many of these areas walk several miles every day to obtain water and firewood — basic tools for survival. With access to electricity people can pump water from the ground, illuminate a health clinic and refrigerate food and medicine. Currently South Africa is experiencing load shedding and blackouts even in the big cities with its economy being threatened.

The threat of local power initiatives is not so much that they can be done and are needed, but that they have the potential to alter the very pathway of future energy supply. This is perhaps what the national energy regulator and Eskom (South Africa`s energy company) both fear most. When the crisis hit in 2007, it was a case of demand exceeding supply – meaning we had enough power generating capacity to produce the maximum rated level of power. But the growth of the economy exceeded Eskom`s ability to supply the necessary power at the time.

Today the problem is different, as we have less demand on top of coal plants not being able to generate at full capacity. This is due to the fact that coal plants should have 90% generation availability in a year, but are operating at 70-75% availability today.

In other words, the same number of power plants are generating less than they did before. Renewable energies are needed especially in the poor or rural societies where people cannot afford to pay for electricity. There are also arguments for energy saving methods.