

Environment

# Zim’s renewable energy strategy lost in translation



environment  
with Kennedy Nyavaya

CALLOUSED palms, unkempt hair and a dusty outfit characterises a towering yet soft-spoken middle-aged man in Hopley, some 15km from Harare’s city center.

At noon, 48-year-old Thomas Musandu sits to catch a breather from his taxing occupation of moulding clay bricks for sale in his backyard.

Reclining on a pile of blocks of bricks outside his two-roomed house, the father of six watches three of his toddler sons playfully devour their lunch — thick corn porridge (*sadza*) and green vegetable relish.

“I have no stipulated time of work so I work any time of the day and I rest whenever I feel like I am tired,” says Musandu.

The intermittent breaks in between this hard labour, that has seen him produce an average of 600 bricks in four days, are necessary time to either catch up with family or turn on the stereo to keep abreast with national current affairs.

However, on this particular day, the latter is proving hard to achieve as the absence of the sun makes it impossible for his cheap 50-watt solar panel to charge the second-hand motorcycle battery used for storage.

“We bought this panel from people, who sell them around and we use it to power the radio, charge phones as well as lighting up the house at night, but when there is no sun like this all of that

becomes impossible,” he said.

Had he been using the genuine products to harness as well as store solar power, he could have been able to use the surplus from yesterday to stay at the top of the energy woes bedevilling the peri-urban neighbourhood.

Estimated to carry over 40 000 residents, the community is yet to be connected to the national electricity grid since establishment in 2005, a situation that has left residents with no option but to pursue alternative power sources.

While wood fuel is popular for cooking and heating in winter, most are using solar to power several household devices and keep their households lit at night.

United Nations research points at 13% of the global population still lacking access to electricity while three billion people are said to rely on unsustainable sources like wood, coal, charcoal or animal waste for cooking and heating.

In Zimbabwe, close to 60% from a population of 14 million is not on the national grid at a time the country’s power utility Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (Zesa) has been failing to meet the daily demand of 2 300 megawatts (MW) resulting in load-shedding.

Last year Zesa’s generation capacity dramatically fell to below 820MW, against daily peak production of 1 600MW in winter and 1 400MW in summer

after water levels at Kariba hydro-power station dropped significantly due to successive droughts.

Faced with a severe energy deficit, there have been urgent calls to adopt lasting solutions with expansion of coal production emerging on one hand while a rapid clean energy transition plan is raised on the other.

Earlier this year the country launched the National Renewable Energy Policy (NREP) which suggests that clean energy alone, in the form of solar, hydro, biomass, geothermal and wind, if implemented has the potential of satisfying the local demand and leaving a surplus.

“We should be motivated to lobby for a clean energy transition because we have all felt the impacts of green house gas emissions in the atmosphere, which has contributed to global warming resulting in a climate emergency,” says climate activist Elizabeth Gulugulu.

“By lobbying for clean energy we are simply saying we can still develop but in a more sustainable manner for healthy lives and a healthy planet.”

Cyclones, heat waves and droughts among other effects of climate change have become common features in the landlocked southern African country in recent years.

According to Gulugulu, slow implementation of policies like the NREP could further exacerbate an already dire situation where trees are fast vanishing as a result of over 70% of populations in rural and peri-urban areas not having access to electricity.

“This has led to massive land degradation through deforestation because it is what people can afford although we all know the importance of trees (as carbon sinks) in our ecosystem,” she said.



True to her sentiments, Zimbabwe has reportedly been losing more than 330 000 hectares of forest (over 60 million trees) annually because of dependence on unclean sources like wood and charcoal for cooking and heating.

Renewable energy expert in government’s Climate Change Management Department Lawrence Mashungu weighed in saying:

“The issue of preserving our forests is everyone’s responsibility as much as it is the government’s mandate to protect and provide awareness about the importance of our trees.”

However, the government has been setting a somewhat contradictory example in the energy sector by vehemently pursuing thermal power, with President Emmerson Mnangagwa recently commissioning new coal mines and announcing an expansion roadmap towards generating and exporting surplus.

“The ongoing coal mining projects in Hwange District will ultimately translate into an increased national generation capacity of over 6 000MW by 2025 and

this will see Zimbabwe becoming a net exporter of energy works,” said Mnangagwa.

This comes against the backdrop of the country’s Paris Agreement ratification in 2017, pledging to reduce emissions per capita by 33%, come 2030.

“If you look at our projections, the targets specify that the reductions are in relation to what we could have been using then if it was business as usual,” says Mashungu.

“Our phasing-out of coal will follow some structure, but we are within our targets as we will be then. Our emission reduction is not absolute because we are still energy-poor and need more energy to deal with the deficit.”

But, with the world already facing a sad reality of becoming 2°C hotter by 2050 when the initial target was to keep temperatures below 1,5°C by then, some climate-conscious countries — particularly in Europe — are revising their pledges towards reducing emissions further.

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of the programme was to protect human health during the Covid-19 outbreak.

He said they want to put in mechanisms that ensure good and regularly applied Wash and waste management

at promoting hygiene and, as you can see, we have donated buckets, detergents and other necessities meant to promote hygiene."

Chadoka said the programme was inclusive taking into consideration

number of wash programmes across the country, notably the US\$38 000 water pipeline project in Chiwenga ward in Muzarabani, among many other provisions of safe water, sanitation and hygiene programmes.

water, hygiene and sanitation project in Hopley and seven other districts across the country.

"The Wash (water, sanitation and hygiene) project launched here today is part of a broader programme aimed at promoting

hygiene Behavioural Change Coalition and our UN agencies."

Unicef has continued to increase access to water by drilling new boreholes and rehabilitating ineffective ones both in urban and rural areas.

Communities



Kunzwana works with its membership across the country, training in skills and supporting entrepreneurship.

## Kunzwana reaches out to marginalised women

BY LOWEN MUTAMBARA

LOCAL non-governmental organisation Kunzwana Women's Association has come up with a cocktail of strategies aimed at empowering women, particularly those in marginalised communities.

A large chunk of women live in rural areas where they have limited livelihood options or capacities, leaving them vulnerable.

Rural women also suffer from lack of access to healthcare services, and the overall denial of their sexual, reproductive and maternal health rights.

It is against this background that Kunzwana Women's Association has come up with a number of initiatives aimed at empowering women while at the same time promoting their participation and that of youths in economic activities.

Tamary Mandivava, the association's executive director, told *Standard Style* that her organisation was creating platforms focused on advancing women.

"Women are in the majority, especially in rural areas yet are excluded in economic activities. They are found in subsistence, informal and micro-economic activities, resulting in meagre yields and perpetuating the poverty cycle," said Mandivava.

Kunzwana Women's Association was founded in 1995 and it's headquartered in Harare's Hillside area.

The association has helped thousands of women through income-generating projects and capacity-building programmes.

Income-generating projects include basketry, tailoring, gardening and poultry, among a host of other sustainable projects.

"Our vision is to equip women, children and youths residing in farming areas, adjacent resettlement areas and nearby villages with practical survival skills for improved standards of living so that they enjoy equal status and ben-

efit from developmental processes with full control of their rights," said Mandivava.

She said her association at times would take finished products and sell them on the behalf of the women.

However, Mandivava be-

moaned the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, saying it had derailed some of the programmes.

"Most of our programmes were disrupted by Covid-19. Due to the pandemic, there was no distribution of contraceptives, and access to HIV medication by people liv-

ing with HIV was problematic," she said.

"Despite the pandemic, Kunzwana convened two workshops in leadership and decision-making meant to ensure women and youths issues were prioritised in the wake of the pandemic."

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Back home, ventures in thermal power at this moment may be misplaced and out of sync with reality demands as it takes decades to return heavy capital investment on coal, a leading emitter globally.

Experts say that without corruption and slow-paced implementation of RE policies, a swift energy transition would cease to be a distant dream.

Resources must be channelled to community development through "investing into renewable energy solutions which include biogas, solar and hydro-power", says Gulugulu.

"The country needs investors that put sustainability at the core of all projects. By so doing we will be killing two birds with one stone which is providing energy as a basic human right, unlocking green jobs for young people who are 60% of our population."

"This will create robust and resilient communities that are capable of mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change."

Another route would be capac-

itating clean energy independent power producers (IPPs) and offering them support to extend their operations and support government projects.

IPPs are privately sponsored power projects that are developed, constructed and operated, and have long-term power purchase agreements (PPAs) with the national power utility.

As of August 30 last year, more than 40 IPPs had been issued power generation licences although only nine of those had their projects completed by then, signalling that more investment is needed.

Ultimately, citizens like Musanda are desperate for a lasting solution to their daily energy deficiencies and without that, perhaps they may have to sire more children to fill the entertainment void that comes with taking a rest.

● This story is the last installment of a series titled *How a botched energy transition is working against climate change-prone Zimbabwe*, a project being supported by Africa 21.

In Conversation with

# Trevor

Next Guest

## Dr Douglas Mamvura

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