

ACP Facility Helps Fight Energy Hunger in Southern Africa

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Sixty-seven-year old Sarudzai Msipa heavily blows air in and out of her mouth, seated in the open-air on a goat skin mat outside her hut as she battles to revive a dying fire on her cooking place set up in the middle of her yard at her remote home in Mwenezi district in Zimbabwe's Masvingo Province.

Just three sticks are in the fire to keep it alive and there is no sign of leftover firewood nearby. To Msipa, this means times are tough for her and many other villagers as the energy hunger takes a knock on them in this part of Southern Africa.

Even getting solar for lighting, is a non-starter for the Southern African region's many rural dwellers like Msipa who have to bear the brunt of the region's deepening energy hunger.

"I have no paraffin nor solar for lighting purposes. I can't afford to buy these because I have no income and worse still I cannot have electricity either," Msipa told IDN.

For Msipa, as for several other villagers here, even firewood has become hard to come by as the country's forests are fast fading away.

Of late, Zimbabwe in particular has been losing 350 000 hectares of forests each year, according to the country's Ministry of Environment. This means many Southern Africans like Msipa have to endure energy hunger as forests fade away.

To survive in the face of the mounting energy hunger in the region, Africans like Msipa have to cut the few remaining trees for their energy.

And as Southern Africa bears the brunt of energy poverty, currently 1.6 billion people globally – mainly in rural and peri-urban areas of developing countries – do not have access to electricity while 2.4 billion people rely on traditional biomass for cooking and heating.

The situation is particularly severe in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, where the rate of access to electricity is only 10 percent in rural areas, with traditional fuels such as wood being burnt under inadequate conditions causing 1.5 million deaths annually – most of them in ACP countries – due to respiratory diseases.

But even as forests are running out in this region, electricity is equally in short supply, further exacerbating the energy poverty here.

In Zimbabwe for instance, 32 percent of the country's 14 million people have access to electricity while in neighbouring Zambia, 23 percent of that country's population of 17 million people also have access to electricity.

Subsequently, countries like Zambia have not been spared from the energy hunger ravaging the Southern African region. According to the Zambia Development Agency (ZDA), the country's power deficit is estimated at 560MW and the country is now relying on importation of power to cushion the current electricity shortage.

As a result, power outages have become a daily foe to contend with for countries like Zambia and many indigenous dealers like Milton Mwaba have become the habitual victims of energy drought there.

"My grinding meals run on electricity and business is now down without constant electricity supplies," Mwaba, who hails from Nsunda rural village in Zambia, told IDN.

But the ACP-EU Energy Facility which was established over a decade ago, has come in handy to salvage the situation.

In Malawi, owing to acute poverty levels, most of the people there use traditional biomass as their source of energy, but reliance on biomass as a source of energy has helped to degrade the country's environment.

But with the help of [ACP-EU Energy Facility](#) ^[1], Malawi's Msamala Sustainable Energy project was implemented in the Balaka

district, a rural and poor area, with the project aimed at reducing the demand for fire wood.

The facility was set up to co-finance projects on increasing access to modern and sustainable energy services for the poor in ACP countries, especially in rural and peri-urban areas.

Since then, a total of four Calls for Proposals have been made under the ACP-EU Energy Facility of which under the first batch of funding, 196 million Euros was directed towards supporting projects on containing energy woes in developing countries, particularly in Africa.

Thanks to ACP-EU, a total of 173 projects were selected to receive support to increase access to energy in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, and a total project budget of approximately EUR 800 million has been provided by the EU and other donors.

Regardless of the headways made by the ACP-EU in combatting energy crisis, 10 percent of Malawi's 19 million people has access to electricity, this as the population is growing at a rate of about three percent annually.

As such, in Malawi currently, there is a high reliance on fuel wood, cow dung, agricultural waste, candles, diesel and paraffin for energy provision in the rural communities.

Even in Tanzania, a country with a population of 58 million people, a worse drought of energy is wreaking havoc, with the country plunged in greater want of electrical energy, with only 15 percent of the country's population having access to electricity.

Nevertheless, through the ACP-EU project, in Tanzania last year, with the aim of addressing economic growth, social improvement and poverty reduction, the "Mwenga 3 MW Hydro Power Plant" was directed at improving the access to sustainable and reliable energy in the country's fourteen villages.

In Mozambique, around 68 percent of the country's estimated 30 million people live in widely dispersed rural areas making extending access to electricity difficult. The national grid infrastructure is extremely limited and increasingly struggling to cope with rising demand.

Hit with energy hunger, around 80 percent of Mozambique's residents rely on biomass resources like wood, charcoal and leaves as their sole energy source for cooking and heating.

However, thanks to the ACP-EU project, in 2016 in Mozambique, a recently completed energy development project in that country focused on improving the access to clean energy in the country's two districts, with the project aiming to provide solar lanterns to rural households, reaching 18,000 people.

But Mozambique's widespread energy poverty happens against the backdrop of abundant natural resources in the Southern African nation, where in the past decade, significant coal and gas resources have been discovered.

With a population slightly over two million, Lesotho is no stranger to energy poverty rocking. Six percent of the country's rural households are connected to the national grid, this as the country has low awareness on renewable energy technologies and limited knowledge of potential resources.

For Southern Africans like Zimbabwe's Msipa, with energy deficits now a daily contention, their future seems uncertain. "Firewood which used to be easy to find has become scarce, meaning we may have no firewood in future," Msipa said. [IDN- InDepthNews – 26 April 2018]

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