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Green energy way to go for Zim

19 JUL, 2019 - 00:07 0 VIEWS

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Econet Wireless recently commissioned a 466KW solar power plant at its Willowvale industrial complex in Harare, in line with the company's commitment towards the adoption of clean and renewable energy in Zimbabwe

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Plans by Government to craft incentives to promote investments into solar energy will certainly boost the country's set targets to increase the use of renewable energy for heating and electricity and reduce carbon emissions.

By 2030, Zimbabwe needs to achieve universal access to sustainable energy through the wider promotion of the adoption of renewable sources such as solar panels, wind farms or hydroelectric dams.

This will help to reduce pressure on main Zesa electricity grid and enable Zimbabwe to make huge savings on energy import costs, achieve its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on energy and contribute towards Vision 2030.

Under the Transitional Stabilisation Programme (TSP), Government identifies solar as an alternative source of power, particularly for rural households in off-grid areas and seeks adoption of renewable energy sources.

Renewable energy collected from renewable resources such as sunlight, waste, wind, water and geothermal heat, are some of the options that the country can harness.

Power shortages, the need to adopt cleaner and efficient systems, SDG targets on energy and our dream to be a middle income economy by 2030 all highlight the importance of adopting renewable energy as a national strategy.

Given the gravity of the energy crisis facing the country, it is heartening to hear that the Government is mulling to craft incentives that could spurt the rapid adoption of renewable energy.

“We don’t make solar panels or any other solar equipment, so they have to be bought at those (obtaining) prices,” Energy and Power Development Minister Fortune Chasi was quoted as saying recently.

“But what we are actively looking at now is how we can incentivise investments into solar. So, we are currently looking at that. Once we are clear on the incentive, we will then be able to communicate to the public.”

Incentives could be made through a number of arrangements for households, businesses and investors.

A variety of incentives and subsidies could help drive down the price of commercial electricity from the main Zesa grid, spur the adoption of renewable energy through off-grid systems and enhance the universal access to energy by the majority of the poor.

The cost of upgrading from the current Zesa-dependent electricity systems, gas and firewood to installing green power technology is very expensive.

Most of the components and equipment for solar and other green energy systems are imported.

Removal of import duty and other retail line taxes could encourage more people to sign up to the green energy system.

Energy experts at the Clean Energy Solutions Centre say financial incentives have been widely implemented by governments around the world to support scaled up deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies and practices.

In a report, the experts say as of 2015, at least 48 countries had adopted financial incentives to support renewable energy and energy efficiency deployment.

and other mandates.

It is vital for Zimbabwe to take lessons from different country experiences, SADC renewable energy protocols and other institutions to come up with an informed and country-specific financial incentive design.

“Financial incentives can address various barriers to renewable energy and energy efficiency technology deployment,” the Clean Energy Solutions Centre says.

“For instance, financial incentives can improve access to capital, reduce the burden of high upfront costs, lower financing costs, support creation of new markets, and address split incentives associated with energy-efficient technologies.”

“Common renewable energy and energy efficiency financial incentives used to address these challenges include tax measures, rebates, grants and performance-based incentives and loan programmes, guarantees, and credit enhancements.”

With the country’s main power utility, Zesa, struggling to provide adequate connections to growing demand in both rural and urban areas, Zimbabwe should push aggressively for new off-grid solutions to help the country achieve universal access to sustainable energy by 2030.

The country’s sole power utility is short on cash for power imports and for technological upgrades since it charges under-market prices and relies heavily on obsolete equipment.

Adopting a series of new policies and plans to push for new off-grid solutions which can lead to a rapid expansion of the national grid to most remote parts of the country which are yet to be connected, is now urgent.

Mobilising funding options from both local entities and development partners could help enhance the establishment of micro-grids in most communities that are still unconnected.

The country needs to scale up its own investments on solar power micro-grids, seek to build technical partnerships with development partners as well as elicit political capital to support the rolling out of such electrification programmes.

Incentives could be the vital cog to all this.

and clinics.

Significant strides have been made to promote other alternative energy sources such as biogas.

Government, with the support of international partners, has also invested significantly into the Kariba expansion helping to increase the hydropower station's generational capacity from 750MW to 1 050MW in 2017.

However, the country has failed to realise this full generational capacity of the Kariba power plant due to a drought which has affected water levels.

It is becoming clearer that the country needs to do more to invest in green energy and other improved cooking stove technologies to reduce land degradation and deforestation.

Promoting the development of more solar mini-grids will provide affordable and accessible energy supplies with long-term energy security.

It will contribute to job creation, food security, water availability, improved livelihoods and competitiveness of rural informal industry.

Renewable energy is firmly increasing its share on the global energy market and Zimbabwe needs light regulatory frameworks and remove burdensome procedures that could slow the uptake of renewable energy.

Offering incentives can encourage wider use and help secure the necessary investments in the renewable energy projects.

Renewable energy has a key role to play in mitigating climate change and guaranteeing long-term energy supply.

And climate change and energy security concerns should compel the Government to provide incentives for investments in renewable energy.

All this should help Zimbabwe meet some of its obligations under the Paris Agreement on climate change which it ratified in 2017.

Under the Agreement, the country is obliged to take steps to cut the emission of climate-warming

Some analysts, however, say the country should consider the downside of some of the incentives that could be crafted on some of the provisions of the World Trade Organisation.

They say when crafting the incentives, Zimbabwe should examine the legality of some renewable energy incentive mechanisms under WTO dispute settlement system framework.

Trade-related aspects of renewable energy incentives should not be a sticking point if there is wider consultation among all key stakeholders in the country’s energy sector.

If all problematic aspects are fully addressed, then Zimbabwe should be on course to achieving its Vision 2030 and other goals that seek to enhance access to energy, education, health, food security, industrialisation and an improved quality of life.

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