Brazzaville green electricity

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The time for energy transition has come in Congo. The authorities of this Central African country recently inaugurated the Renewable Energy Research Centre. Comprising offices and accommodation for Congolese and other African researchers, the facility covers an area of 10 000 square metres in the town of Oyo, 400 kilometres from the capital Brazzaville.

“It is a centre that aims to develop applied research in the field of renewable energy. Our country has great potential in terms of green energy resources, particularly hydroelectricity (22 000 MW), biomass, wind and solar energy,” explains Gabin Dimitri Ngantso, a researcher at the Congolese Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Technological Innovation.

At a total cost of 24 million euros (15.7 billion CFA francs), the work on the Oyo centre lasted five years. It was financed within the framework of cooperation between the Republic of Congo, the Italian oil group Eni and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO). According to Claudio Desclazi, Eni’s managing director, this expected diversification of the electricity mix will facilitate access to electricity in Congolese localities not connected to the national grid.

In this central African country where the rate of access to electricity is 68.5% according to the World Bank, the authorities are also banking on the future hybrid solar power plant (3.4 MW) in Impfondo, located in the Likouala department. The work, which will start in 2021, is being carried out by Produits de Construction de Brazzaville (PROCOB), a subsidiary of the Belgian company ABC Contracting. The facility, built on an 11-hectare site, will have 11,520 solar panels capable of supplying 6,480 kVa to cope with load shedding.

SNEL director-general Jean-Bosco Kayombo Kayan was quoted by Reuters as saying: "With the signing of this agreement, we will contribute to securing the energy supply in the major urban and peri-urban centres.

“We will similarly be able to ensure the supply of electricity to industrialists in the area, in particular the mining companies, which represent the economic lungs of [the] Haut-Katanga and Lualaba [provinces]."

SNEL said that the solar facilities will have the capacity to supply 500GWh of clean energy to Congo"s grid, enough to meet the power requirements of more than 1.25 million people in the region.

Despite being one of Africa’s major copper producers and the world’s biggest cobalt miner, the Democratic Republic of the Congo lacks reliable access to electricity.

Last year, Power Technology reported that the Inga-Kolwezi transmission line operated by SNEL was one of the world’s longest transmission lines, measuring 1,700km in length.

Commissioned in the coming weeks, the ESU will produce drinking water and electricity, store and process food products and power equipment for handicrafts, agriculture and livestock farming. A local company will then manage and maintain the site. Finally, the site will also be used to train and provide jobs for the region’s young craftspeople and farmers.

“It’s really difficult to buy petrol here, and there’s a shortage of drinking water. We have to cross the river to buy water in Brazzaville. Going back and forth each time, there are a lot of expenses. We are glad that the village is moving forward with this project. We will also be able to keep fish fresh and sell them locally. Here, there is no hospital. We would like to have a health centre. And instead of seeing young people just hanging around, we would like them to get professional training on the project site.”