

# Five reasons why South Africa should not follow the world leaders in renewable energy

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Germany, France and the Scandinavian countries are world leaders in the production and implementation of renewable energy systems, so we should try follow their lead, right? Not so fast. Here are five reasons why South African training institutions should be cautious when following the European model.

1. **Europe has a different climate.** Not only does Europe get less sunshine per year but their angle of incidence is markedly different from the African continent. Most European solar panels are manufactured in China and optimised for European conditions. This can lead to serious inefficiencies when translated into the African environment, and panel lifetime may be drastically reduced. Our wind patterns are different too – there has been much finger pointing after the failure in Darling, but many of those fingers quite reasonably point out a non-nuanced adoption of a European model.



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2. **Europe has a different electrical infrastructure.** The electrician training in Europe refers to codes, standards and componentry (like lighting contactors) which are not widely adopted in South Africa. This holds true also for many of the automation and software systems in local electrical networks.

3. **Europe has a different entrepreneurial spirit** – I realise that the very word is European but in Africa we do have a different entrepreneurial approach: very flexible and highly “can do”. Training needs to be functional and goal specific and the excessive theory and maths does not resonate with the agents in the field. Businessmen are not, after all, academics, and with the improvement of information technology, technicians have the opportunity to consult directly with specialists or else upgrade their own expertise continuously with targeted short courses.



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4. **Europe does not have Eskom** – I was quite shocked to learn that Eskom’s new prepaid meters are not direction sensitive. This means that they will actually charge you for current fed back onto the grid, instead of subtracting it from your balance. These and other quirks in the South African electrical network demand a different approach to any grid tied system than is found in Europe and Asia.

5. **Europe has different regulations** – the Brexit campaign has maybe rather unfairly laboured this point, but European producers and service providers have a great deal of compliance to overcome. Of course South Africa has safety and quality standards too but there are some hoops that our guys actually don’t have to jump through, which means that they can literally get back to business.

*“I believe that renewable energy provides a significant opportunity to improve energy access and security, mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, ensure sustainable development and significantly improve socio-economic development,”* said **Tina Joemat-Pettersson, South African Minister of Energy** at the 2015 South African International Renewable Energy Conference in Cape Town. We have a real African opportunity and that requires a real African approach. Of course we must learn from the experts but there are some things which we simply have to do our own way.

If you are interested in seeing some of the latest advances in South African Renewable Energy training, please visit the

Eduweek Show, Africa's leading educational exhibition, at Gallagher Estates, Midrand on 29 and 30 June. At the PERT stand you will see many of the trainers pictured in this article as well as several training institutions offering targeted short courses.

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