

Load shedding is here to stay

While South Africans celebrate the lifting of many Covid-19 restrictions and the full reopening of the economy, the news is not all good as Eskom has reported a severely constrained power system, resulting in continued load shedding.



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This latest round of load shedding comes as 10 generation units at seven power stations have suffered breakdowns in the last 48 hours. "These power interruptions are inconvenient, but they come at a massive cost to the economy," says Barry Bredenkamp, general manager, energy efficiency & corporate communications at the South African National Energy Development Institute, (Sanedi).

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has reported an economic loss of R338bn over the past 10 years due to load shedding, with 2019 being the worst year on record for blackouts. "Continued outages are something we can ill-afford coming out of a global pandemic, as such energy efficiency is vital for improved electricity provision and economic recovery," he says.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) has reported that in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has transformed the energy landscape and the priorities of governments around the world. "Despite energy efficiency's tremendous potential, the world is struggling to capture its full benefits," it says.

Energy efficiency

Like many other countries, South Africa's efforts have been focused on disaster management, but Bredenkamp stresses the importance energy efficiency as a key tool that governments can use to respond to the severe economic, environmental, and social development consequences of the crisis. "Ambitious energy efficiency action can be mobilised quickly to create jobs, stimulate local economic activity, and improve energy affordability, thus helping South Africa to accelerate the achievement of our recovery goals."

According to the IEA, there is evidence that well-designed stimulus programmes with efficiency considerations can rapidly support the existing workforce, create new jobs, and boost economic activities in a range of key sectors. “In addition, energy efficiency programmes will help relieve the burden on South Africa’s constrained grid,” says Bredenkamp.

However, the question remains, how can this be achieved? Bredenkamp suggests that strong collaboration could be the answer. “Energy affects everyone and therefore strong collaboration between all role players in society plays an important role and can help scale up the market and create demand for energy efficient solutions. For this to be successful, all sectors of society should be engaged, from businesses to local government and everyone in between.”

The importance of prioritising energy efficiency is clear. The IAE estimates that without the energy efficiency improvements that have been made since 2000, the world would be using 13% more energy today, and energy-related carbon emissions would be 14% higher. Efficiency progress is also enhancing energy security and access to affordable, reliable energy in other countries – something much-needed in South Africa.

“Improving the energy landscape in South Africa is an important and achievable goal. There is still much untapped potential and we should look at setting more ambitious targets, supported by action-oriented effort. To overcome the hurdles in implementing energy efficiency, we can learn from global best practice in policy selection, design and implementation, adapting to our unique local circumstances,” says Bredenkamp.

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