

## **African Countries Want to Add Nuclear Power Centers**

But activists are worried about the environmental and security risks of nuclear energy | As It Is

Hello, and welcome to *As It Is* from VOA Learning English!

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today, we report on plans to satisfy the growing need for electricity in Africa by building nuclear power centers. Many African countries now burn coal or use hydropower, or water power, to produce electricity. But African leaders say those methods do not create enough power for the continent's growing population. They say nuclear energy is the only way to satisfy Africa's need for electricity.

"We expect to conclude the procurement of 9,600 megawatts of nuclear energy."

But activists say there are environmental and security issues with nuclear power -- especially in Africa...

“There’s a lot of conflict and political tension in Africa. A lot of increasing terrorist activity, in, particularly north and central Africa -- crime syndicates operating.”

Today, we tell about the African nations that want to set up nuclear reactors, and the concerns that activists have about nuclear power. Those are our subjects on *As It Is*.

## **African Countries Want Nuclear Power Centers**

At least three African nations have expressed an interest in nuclear power. Kenya and Nigeria each want to start producing nuclear energy. And South Africa wants to expand its nuclear energy operations. South Africa is the only country south of the Sahara Desert with nuclear power centers.

Until now, African nations have depended heavily on coal and hydropower to produce electricity. But those production methods have caused problems -- including displacing communities and damaging the environment.

The World Bank says fewer than 10 percent of African homes are connected to electric power lines. This hurts development on the world’s poorest continent.

The need for electricity has led a growing number of African nations to consider nuclear energy. For many years, some governments and activists have opposed plans to build nuclear reactors in Africa. But in recent years, more and more people have expressed support for nuclear power. The building of nuclear reactors is becoming increasingly popular in both developing and developed countries, including the United States.

Kelvin Kemm is a South African nuclear physicist. He is also the head of a group called Nuclear Africa. He says Africa cannot continue to depend on water and coal to make electricity.

“Africa’s very largely fueled with hydropower. And in Africa it’s possible to have droughts that last a couple of years. Therefore it’s very risky to build an economy on hydropower. Many are not fortunate enough to have coal and gas, and therefore nuclear is an ideal solution for Africa.”

South Africa is the only African nation that has successfully developed nuclear technology. Today, the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station produces about five percent of South Africa’s electricity.

President Jacob Zuma recently said he wants more nuclear power to reduce his nation's dependence on coal.

"We expect to conclude the procurement of 9,600 megawatts of nuclear energy."

## **Kenya, Nigeria Want Nuclear Power**

Kenya and Nigeria say they want to build nuclear power centers to meet rising electricity needs from their growing populations.

Kelvin Kemm says the power needs are so great that traditional methods of producing power cannot meet the demand the way nuclear power can.

"They need to double electricity consumption immediately, and then double it again, and again, and again, and again for their people."

Critics of nuclear energy say it is not always safe. They note the nuclear disasters at Fukushima in Japan, and Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union. But those concerns may not be heard over the rising demand for electricity.

Experts say it will be years before African nations can meet their energy needs, either with nuclear power or other sources.

## **Activists: Nuclear Centers Bring Risks**

Experts say more than 600 million people in Africa are not connected to electrical power lines. They think nuclear power will solve the problems of the growing continent. But some activists are worried about the cost, environmental damage and possible security issues.

Dominique Gilbert lives near the Pelindaba Nuclear Research Center in South Africa. From the 1960s to the 1980s, government researchers developed nuclear bombs there.

Ms. Gilbert helped launch a group called the Coalition Against Nuclear Energy/South Africa. She is worried that the government is moving too quickly on its plans for more nuclear power without telling people about the risks.

“Unfortunately, there hasn’t been that much information spread around the general public about the dangers of nuclear, and certainly the costs of nuclear. So it’s not just health. But we

believe it will bankrupt this country. It's, it's totally and utterly unaffordable."

Dominique Gilbert says South Africa has done little to study the effects of nuclear energy on communities near nuclear power centers. And she says the government has failed to educate people about the possible dangers of nuclear power.

Activists around the world have been worried about the risk of radiation exposure for many years. But some experts believe nuclear fuel creates fewer health risks than the burning of coal. South Africa burns a great deal of coal to produce electricity.

We heard from Kelvin Kemm earlier in the program. He is a nuclear physicist and head of the group Nuclear Africa. He says people have been given misleading information about the safety of nuclear power.

"Of all the energy sources that there are, nuclear has shown itself to be the safest. And it's quite amazing how much of a public misconception there is about this. That there's been absolute scare tactics developed."

But perhaps the biggest concern about a nuclear-powered African continent is a lack of security in many African nations. Activists are worried that nuclear reactors are likely targets of attack. Dominique Gilbert is especially worried about the possible theft of nuclear materials for weapons.

“There’s a lot of conflict and political tension in Africa, a lot of increasing terrorist activity in particularly north and central Africa, crime syndicates operating.”

Knox Msebenzi is the Managing Director of the Nuclear Industry Association of South Africa. He admits there are risks of building nuclear reactors in Africa. But he believes those risks can be controlled.

And that’s our program for today. It was based on stories from reporters Anita Powell and Peter Cox in Johannesburg.

I’m Christopher Cruise reporting from VOA Learning English headquarters in Washington.







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