

South Africa Leads Africa in Nuclear Development

And, Nigeria makes plans to build a nuclear reactor | *As It Is*

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

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today we report on South Africa's nuclear activities.

"South Africa is involved in nuclear research, nuclear power generation for the last 27 to 30 years."

And we look at plans by another African country to develop nuclear power...

"Nigeria is on course on it's, in its plans to have nuclear power."

Nuclear development in South Africa and plans to bring nuclear power to Nigeria: those are our subjects today on *As It Is*.

South Africa Leads Continent in Nuclear Development

South Africa is the only nuclear power in Africa. In the 1990s, South Africa became the first country to voluntarily give up its

nuclear weapons. The government then promised to be completely open about its nuclear activities, which include research and power production.

Today, we look at what South Africa can teach the continent about nuclear technology.

South Africa is the strongest economy in Africa. Most homes are connected to electric power lines. But the government estimates that about three million South Africans live without electric power. So the government plans to build more nuclear reactors to provide electricity to the country's growing population.

Dikobe Ben Martins is the South African Minister of Energy.

"South Africa has the requisite expertise to embark on further nuclear programs."

South Africa is the only African nation south of the Sahara Desert to possess a strong nuclear power and research system.

Wolsey Barnard is the Deputy Director-General of Energy Programs and Projects at South Africa's Department of Energy.

“South Africa is involved in nuclear research, nuclear power generation for the last 27 to 30 years. So it’s nothing new to us. And currently five percent of our electricity is generated by means of two generators that situate with Koeberg Nuclear Power Station, and we also have some nuclear facilities which is used extensively for medical research purposes, and also isotopes for medical purposes.”

South African companies say they have the expertise and desire to develop nuclear technology.

Jabulile Tlhako helps lead a business called Murray & Roberts. It builds nuclear power centers. She says nuclear energy is the only probable solution to South Africa’s energy challenges.

“Nuclear energy is safe, it is reliable and it’s affordable. It’s a form of energy that is affordable and its safe and we have to go through that route because now the energy industry in South Africa is threatened.”

The population of African cities continues to expand. South African officials say the country’s nuclear knowledge may help bring the continent into the modern world.

Nigeria Plans to Build Nuclear Power Centers

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan recently announced that his country plans to use nuclear energy for development purposes. But some observers say Nigeria should first learn how to use its own natural resources before building a nuclear power center.

Nigerians first began talking about nuclear power in 2007. That was when then-President Umaru Yar'Adua said the country planned to add nuclear energy to the nation's electric power grid by 2017.

It does not appear the country will meet that goal, although officials say the plan to develop nuclear power has yet to be cancelled. Eli Jidere Bala is the Director-General of the Energy Commission of Nigeria.

“Nigeria is on course on its, in its plans to have nuclear power that is used of nuclear energy for peaceful use. And one of the things we've done is to have the institutional framework in place.”

Mr. Bala says Nigeria has established research centers and is working with the International Atomic Energy Association.

“We are planning between 1,000 megawatts and 2,000 megawatts for the first instance before, very shortly. I know it takes time to plan nuclear -- you must plan. It takes about eight years for planning and etcetera and etcetera. So we are targeting at 1,000 to 2,000 megawatts.”

Nigeria currently produces just 4,000 megawatts of electricity. That means about half of the country’s 160 million people have no electricity at all. And most others only have it for a few hours a day.

Wole Olaoye has been reporting on Nigeria’s power industry for almost 40 years. He says since Nigeria became a democracy in 1999, every president has promised to provide electricity to everyone. But the promises were never kept.

“President Jonathan promised us, ‘Oh, in 18 months’ he would do it. Then it became 24 months. Then it became 36 months. Then it became 2013. Then it became 2014. And now they are saying 2015.”

He adds that even if the government's plan to add nuclear power is successful, he does not think it is a good idea. He says Nigeria already has enough oil and other resources to provide enough power for everyone. But he says the power industry has problems because of corrupt officials and bad management. He says the country may have the expertise to develop nuclear reactors, but it does not have the ability to operate them safely.

"We have security problems in, in Nigeria now, right now. And I don't want to think of a situation where we will manage the fallout of a nuclear leakage. With the level of incompetence with which we have treated our hydro-power stations, I don't see us managing nuclear power competently and efficiently."

Boko Haram militants have been fighting the Nigerian government since 2009. Mr. Olaoye says it could be dangerous for his country to add anything that might be turned into a weapon of mass destruction.

Other observers support President Jonathan's plan. They say nuclear energy can also be used for medical purposes, to make drinkable water from seawater and for space programs. They note that the issue of nuclear energy can create strong emotions

among anti-nuclear activists and power industry representatives. But they say the Nigerian leader would not raise the issue if he was not serious.

And that's our program for today. It was written in Special English from reports by Anita Powell in Johannesburg and Heather Murdock in Abuja.

Every day on *As It Is* we report on issues that we believe are of interest to you as we help you learn to read, write, speak and understand everyday American English.

We present a new *As It Is* every day at zero hour 30 Universal Time (0030 UTC), with many rebroadcasts throughout the day.

Our story on South Africa's plans to expand its use of nuclear power came from a VOA television report. You can see that report on our website.

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

Jim Tedder will be here tomorrow with another edition of *As It Is*.
I hope you'll join him then, here on The Voice of America.



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