

Hello. Let's do it again. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington with the program that helps you learn and improve your American English. At the same time, we give you important details about things happening in our world ...As It Is.

On today's program, Kenya looks to the future in hopes of solving energy needs. But one proposal is causing problems. We'll tell you why.

Then we will hear from the United Nations concerning the need for food aid in Mali. It is a bigger problem than they had expected.

VOA is on the air, and is coming to you from Washington.

Kenya is moving forward with plans to build a nuclear power plant by 2025 as part of a larger development program. But, as in other countries, Kenya has activists who do not believe nuclear power is safe compared to other kinds of energy. Christopher Cruise joins us.

At the University of Nairobi, some students are training for the jobs of the future -- at what is expected to be Kenya's first nuclear power center.

The Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology trains 15 students a year to be technicians and engineers. The students will earn a master's degree at the end of their study program.

David Maina is the director of the Institute. He says producing more electricity is important to Kenya's development.

"The kind of things this country is imagining that they want to do require a lot of power. And here we are with only 1,600 megawatts. What can we do? If you compare that to a country like (South) Korea which has 43,000 megawatts, you see we are a tiny consumer compared to those big economies."

About 69 percent of Kenyans live in homes without electricity.

One nuclear reactor could produce up to 1,000 megawatts of power for those homes.

At a recent meeting in Nairobi, supporters of the nuclear project talked about whether it could happen. The project would require a major investment of public money, and increased security.

William Ruto is Kenya's Deputy President. He believes nuclear power can change his country for the better.

"Kenya's stated intention of using nuclear energy for electricity generation reflects the sort of thinking which can propel a country from relative mediocrity to the realms of greatness."

Some developed nations have turned away from nuclear power after the disaster at Japan's Fukushima plant in 2011. Germany plans to close all of its nuclear plants by 2022.

Some activists in Kenya fear a nuclear plant could increase the possibility of a Fukushima-like disaster. And they are worried that it could become a target for terrorists.

On the hills near Nairobi, workers are building another power project. When it is finished, the Ngong Hills wind farm will provide about 50 megawatts of power. That is much less than a nuclear plant could generate.

Moses Ole Kinaiya works at the Maasai Integrated Development Initiative. He would like see Kenya build more wind farms.

“Renewable energy I think is more safe because for example as you see the turbines here, they have been planted, they’re producing power, it’s not, it doesn’t have any major health risks, doesn’t have any major even security risks because you just have a guard, nobody is necessarily targeting it in term of creating mass destruction.”

Kenya is also developing projects using coal and geothermal energy, which makes energy from heat deep in the ground.

While nuclear power may be the most productive source, it is also the most costly. The cost for a single nuclear power station is more than \$4 billion.

I'm Christopher Cruise.

Food Crisis in Mali

The United Nations says the humanitarian crisis in Mali is getting worse. The agency says by June hundreds of thousands more people may have trouble getting enough food. It says the money being provided for humanitarian assistance in the West African nation is much less than is needed. And it says the problem is getting worse because people who fled the conflict in the country in 2012 and 2013 are now returning.

The United Nations says 1.4 million people in Mali now need food aid. That is an increase from 812,000 last December. The agency fears the number could increase to 1.9 million by June.

Late and unreliable rains last year, added to conflict in the north, meant farmers throughout the country could not grow many crops.

David Gressly is the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Mali.

“Mali continues to face very important humanitarian challenges in 2014. People have just gone through a very, very difficult time, particularly in the north, with the conflict, with the occupation. People are even more vulnerable than normal because of all of this. We’re seeing, in particular, on the food side, continued food insecurity. So we’re quite concerned.”

Mr. Gressly says about 500,000 children under the age of five in Mali will suffer from moderate to severe malnutrition this year. He says 136,000 children will suffer severe malnourishment. He says there could be an increase in child deaths in Mali if they do not get enough food.

He says aid workers are also worried that the food problem will worsen as people displaced by the conflict return, including internally-displaced persons called IDPs.

“We’re seeing increasing numbers of refugees coming home. Half the IDPs have come home. That puts an additional burden on local communities as the numbers increase. It will take a while before those who are coming home can also contribute to production. The agricultural campaign is just now starting. So they can start, but we won’t see any output from that until the end of the year.”

Mr. Gressly said the number of people returning to the country could increase quickly in the next few months, especially if there is progress in peace talks.

The UN says it needs \$568 million for aid efforts in Mali, including food aid, in 2014. By the end of last month, donors had given only about ten percent of that. Mr. Gressly is worried.

“It’s unfortunate, but there are many crises around the world right now -- in South Sudan, Central African Republic, Syria, etcetera -- which seem to be drawing the resources that are also needed in places like Mali. And the problem I see with that, not only the humanitarian impact, but if you look at the overall needs of Mali, trying to stabilize after the conflict of 2012, insufficient humanitarian assistance actually has a destabilizing impact as well.”

Mr. Gressly says the UN is trying to persuade more countries and organizations to help the people of Mali by showing them there is still a great need.

We have just enough time to give you some Americana ...what is happening in the United States. Today more than 3 and a half million people will be in San Antonio, Texas, to enjoy parades, sports, fireworks, dances, artwork, and fun. The festival also remembers those who fought at the Alamo for Texas independence in 1836.



Thank you for spending some time with us today. There is world news at the beginning of the hour. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. This is VOA.

