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### **Solar energy; the power to empower**

*With an abundance of natural sunshine and wide open horizons South Africa is the ideal location for harnessing solar energy, and Solairedirect is taking the lead with the completion of Vredendal's first photovoltaic solar power plant, and a second solar power plant in Aurora due for completion by the end of October 2014*

While Eskom is hard at work developing additional generation capacity, with the coal-fired Medupi power station announced to come online in December 2014 or early next year, renewable energy resources such as solar, wind and hydro are rapidly coming on line and generating more and more clean energy for the Country's future requirements.

Both the Vredendal and Aurora Solar Power Plants are the result of Solairedirect's successful bid in the second round of the South African Government's Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement (REIPPP), with investment partners Old Mutual and the J&J Group funding the equity required and Rand Merchant Bank securing the debt finance.

Aside from easing the burden on the national grid, the Vredendal solar power plant is seen as a point of pride for this small town on the southern edge of the Little Namaqualand. "In addition to creating employment opportunities and skills development, we hope the power plant benefits the whole community by stimulating business with improved infrastructure and a secure power supply," remarks Managing Director of Solairedirect Southern Africa, Ryan Hammond. "The project, through the shareholding by the Community Trust" will receive benefits for the full 20 year life of the project which will flow straight back into community projects. The ongoing maintenance requirements have resulted in enterprise development, including the development of woman-owned vendors who will be supplying the project throughout its 20 year operating life," he adds.

Production and assembly of the photovoltaic modules is done at Solairedirect's ultra-modern factory in Bellville, Cape Town. There are a number of advantages to producing locally, explains Hammond: "We have employed and upskilled over 100 staff and can oversee the whole process from start to finish. There is also significantly less of an environmental impact in having to transport from Cape Town to the Northern Cape than from China where the majority of photovoltaic modules are produced."

Solairedirect is particularly proud of the fact that the project was built almost exclusively by South African citizens, with a small number of foreign personnel being involved in the final commissioning process. "From the civil works, to mechanical structures, to module manufacture and installation, even the inverter station assembly and electrical installation, all have been done by South African businesses" explained Hammond, adding, " We firmly believe that a successful renewable energy industry needs to have a meaningful local manufacturing presence and our projects are a working example that we do have the local expertise and skills to successfully design and build these projects."

Focus is now shifting to Solairedirect' s Aurora Solar power plant where Hammond expects to connect to the grid soon: "Producing the solar modules locally means that we that we don't to have to deal with delays waiting for a supplier to deliver while exchange rates fluctuate and the investors get nervous. And by controlling the whole process - from project development to production and installation - we offer a cost effective model for producing clean energy that can be replicated throughout South Africa."

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