

Renewable energy champions rebrand to Zutari

Paul Nel, Energy lead for Africa for the renewable energy champion Aurecon, which has now been renamed Zutari, talks about the brand change and outlines the company's rich legacy of involvement with some of Africa's most prestigious renewable energy projects.

About 70% of utility-scale renewable energy projects undertaken under the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement (REIPPP) programme in South Africa to date have seen the involvement of engineering, design, and advisory company Aurecon, according to Paul Nel, Energy Lead for Africa. The company is currently in the process of rebranding as Zutari, after officially announcing the separation of the African business from the Aurecon Group, effective from 1 January 2020.

The new name, Zutari, reflects the company's African heritage and was derived by combining two words in Swahili, the most spoken language on the continent: mzulia (invent) and nectari (nectar).

With a strong engineering presence in Cape Town and Pretoria, the energy division is divided into four business lines, namely generation, transmission and distribution, industrial energy solutions, and power sys-

tem studies. This ensures fully-integrated solutions for its diverse customer base, which includes international and local project developers, institutional clients such as Zambian electricity utility ZESCO, and local government clients such as the City of Cape Town.

In addition, Aurecon/Zutari is also involved with regional initiatives such as the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP) and, to a certain extent, the East African Power Pool (EAPP), where the main focus is on large interconnector projects. At present, it is undertaking projects in South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, Mozambique, Madagascar, Ghana, Tanzania, and Nigeria. Apart from the large interconnector studies, the focus here is mainly hydroelectric and solar power, with some clients looking at wind energy in East Africa, for example.

"We have really been involved across the board in terms of renewable energy projects in Africa, including hydro power. We have deep insight into what it takes to connect to



the grid at the utility-scale level, but also have specific experience in smaller industrial-scale solar power projects specifically for industry. Here hybrid solutions often provide the best energy mix, especially as battery-storage technology has not yet become cost-competitive with more traditional solutions," Nel explains.

Africa, in particular, requires robust and durable solutions, which often means that clients prefer tried-and-tested technology rather than the latest cutting-edge innovations. Despite this, Aurecon/Zutari remains up-to-date with the latest research and development (R&D) in order to assist the market as it matures. This has resulted in a steady



Aurecon acted as owner's engineer on the 140 MW Cookhouse wind farm project, providing a wide range of technical advisory services to help progress the project through feasibility and financing phases.



As the EPCM contractor for Stortemelk Hydro, a Renewable Holdings company, Aurecon was responsible for the entire detailed design, construction supervision, ECO monitoring, contract administration and programming, as well as the health & safety oversight for the Stortemelk Hydropower Project in South Africa.

advance from fixed-access solar energy to single-access tracking. "We are currently looking at supporting some clients with bifacial photovoltaic (PV) technologies on their projects," Nel reveals.

Aurecon/Zutari has also been actively supporting some of its energy clients with advanced data analytics, cutting-edge drone-based construction monitoring and complex, bespoke business decision support solutions. "I believe we currently offer some clients unique, digitally-advanced solutions that no one else in our space is doing. We are also actively looking at ways to increase our digital offering, helping our clients to remain relevant in this fast-changing digital world."

Nel points out that the need for power and water on the continent is growing unabated, especially because of increasing urbanisation and, to some extent, industrialisation across Africa. This has allowed Aurecon to achieve significant traction in the energy market.

"We are always keen to get involved with difficult problems knowing that, through this, we not only bring tangible relief, but make a significant contribution to the socioeconomic development of Africa. We have strong institutional experience across the continent, but specifically in South Africa, that can assist our country to get back on track in terms of its electricity needs," Nel assures.

The main challenge facing South Africa is its fossil fuel-based energy mix that is heavily dependent on the mining industry for supplying coal and employment opportunities. "We



The Kathu Solar Energy Facility in the Northern Cape, which has an installed capacity of 100 MW and a 75 MW PV system mounted on a tracking system to follow the sun throughout the day. Kathu owners Reisa and Building Energy appointed Aurecon as owner's engineer to ensure technical compliance on all civil, electrical and construction issues, and to assist with the resolution of technical queries and disputes.

are dependent on the government to free up the power generation sector," says Nel, pointing to the long-awaited Round 5 of the REIPPP programme.

Transitioning from coal-based power to renewable energy is a long and complex journey, as witnessed by the government's ongoing efforts to separate the transmission, distribution and generation business units of electricity utility Eskom. "This unbundling is a prerequisite for the freeing up of the electricity market. Eskom's inevitable reorganisation will be a slow process. What we are ultimately hoping for is an independent system operator mandated to trade power between private and public entities. This will also free up

significant investment opportunities for the private sector," Nel says.

In terms of nuclear power, it is vital that options are considered to extend Koeberg's operating life in order to ensure stability of the national grid, especially as this is the only base-load generation capacity in the entire Western Cape. New technology such as Pebble Bed Modular Reactors will likely still have a long development lead-time. Traditional nuclear generation solutions also remain very expensive and complex to develop, and hence Nel believes additional nuclear power will not be considered an option for South Africa's energy mix in the foreseeable future. □