

## Polytechnic-Austrian “SOLTRAIN” project to boost local solar system manufacturing capacity

By Ingrid Thandi Shilunga\*

Local manufacturing capacity for the production of components for solar thermal systems in Namibia is set to increase significantly, thanks to a new initiative of the Polytechnic of Namibia, the Institute for Sustainable Technologies in Austria, and funding from the Austrian Development Cooperation agency. The partners will collaborate on a capacity-building project known as “SOLTRAIN” - the Southern African Solar Thermal Training and Demonstration Initiative.

The project took another giant step forward recently when a high-level Austrian delegation led by the Speaker of the Austrian National Assembly, Dr. Barbara Prammer, visited the Polytechnic of Namibia for a meeting with its SOLTRAIN partners in Namibia.

The delegation was received by Dr. Tjama Tjivikua, Rector of the Polytechnic of Namibia. Also present was Mr. Kudakwashe Ndhlukula, head of the Polytechnic’s Renewable Energy Resources Centre and SOLTRAIN project coordinator in Namibia. The Renewable Energy Resources Centre manages the SOLTRAIN project in Namibia.

SOLTRAIN is a collaborative project between the Institute for Sustainable Technologies Austria (AEE) and partner institutions in Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Its primary objective is to expand local manufacturing capacity in the production of solar system components by providing training for individuals and companies. Local manufactured components are expected to help to reduce the cost of solar systems. The project is scheduled to run from May 2009 to April 2012, and is being funded the Austrian Development Cooperation agency.



The Speaker of the Austrian National Assembly, Dr. Barbara Prammer and Rector of the Polytechnic of Namibia, Dr. Tjama Tjivikua at the recent SOLTRAIN meeting.

Several challenges facing the energy sector in the region were discussed during the meeting at the Polytechnic of Namibia. These included the electricity deficit within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the high costs of equipment needed to exploit renewable energy resources, the effectiveness of solar thermal energy as an alternative resource, and the expectations and challenges facing the popularisation of the technology in Namibia.

The Polytechnic’s Renewable Energy Resources Centre will be responsible for monitoring the solar thermal equipment currently in use at the Centre as well as the two state hospitals in Windhoek.

The project is indicative of the strong network of mutually beneficial relationships the Polytechnic of Namibia is developing with Austrian Universities. Cooperation programmes typically include technical and research collaboration, academic programme design and staff and student exchange programmes.

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