

Summary Report

Africa-EU Renewable Energy Research and Innovation Symposium (RERIS) 2018

23-26 January 2018 - Maseru, Lesotho



Background

With more than 600 million Africans living without access to electricity and over 730 million relying on dangerous, inefficient forms of cooking, fast but sustainable development of African renewable energy markets is needed. Applied research and innovative business roll-outs play a key role in boosting this development, helping to secure energy supply in both rural and urban areas, increasing generation capacities and energy system resilience. While an increasing number of academic institutions in Africa are dedicated to work on renewable energy, the transition from research into practice remains a challenge.

To address this challenge, the Africa-EU Renewable Energy Cooperation Programme (RECP) and the National University of Lesotho (NUL) organized the second edition of the Africa-EU Renewable Energy Research and Innovation Symposium (RERIS 2018) in combination with the NUL International Science and Technology Innovation Conference and Expo (NULSITICE) in January 2018, in Maseru, Lesotho. Attended by 242 participants, the event was a big step towards better Africa-EU research cooperation and innovations for renewable energy.

Objectives

The primary focus of this research symposium was on translating science into practice. Specific objectives were to:

- Facilitate Africa-EU renewable energy research collaboration
- Increase public and private sector participation in renewable energy research
- Build capacities for applied research and promote university business spin-offs



Conference Summary

The panel discussion on **‘How to translate research into practice’** addressed a number of challenges that slow down this translation. While the communication between technology-developers with electricity distributors is generally on a good level, the needs of the consumers – especially those in rural communities without access to the grid – are not considered sufficiently. In the specific case of Lesotho, its National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) formulates the aim to foster research – also to address the marginalized consumers – but its implementation remains a challenge. In this context, the panel furthermore stressed the importance for countries like Lesotho to invest in its own production of e.g. PV cells, rather than relying solely on imports.

The session on **EU-Africa joint programmes** addressed funding and cooperation opportunities for both researchers and private project developers. Horizon 2020 provides a total of EUR 30 billion, of which 5.9 billion are allocated to secure clean and efficient energy. Regarding international cooperation, the programme funds general openness. The opportunity to request support from the European Commission in strengthening capacities to write research proposal was emphasized. The EU delegation to Lesotho outlined the funding opportunities provided by the European Development Fund 11 (2014-2020) with a focus on water, energy and environment.

During various **thematic sessions and poster sessions**, invited speakers presented their research and innovative projects covering the areas of power generation, distribution and transmission; decentralised and household energy solutions; energy socio-economics; promotion of energy research, innovation, education and entrepreneurship; and energy resource mapping and planning. All abstracts and presentations are available at the [event’s Energypedia page](#).

In a **“cooperation pitch session”**, conference partners highlighted cooperation opportunities with the respective organisations related to the event’s focus. These included [NUL research & innovations](#), [RECP](#), [GIZ-Lesotho](#), [LCEDN](#), [UniPID](#), [Energypedia](#), [MicroEnergy International](#), [SACREEE](#), [PAUWES](#), [Enigma](#), [Tangerine](#), and [Econet Telecom Lesotho](#).

On the last day of the conference, MicroEnergy International organized a **workshop on “from energy research to bankable power practice”**. Energy research and practice often run in parallel, with little knowledge exchange and consideration of the other. Energy practitioners, for example, rarely refer to research outputs, even if peer reviewed and reputable. Energy researchers, on the other hand, rarely prioritise engaging in actual practice implementation, thereby generating research that lacks apparent practical relevance. The workshop triggered a change of perspective on both sides, resulting in the formulation of several business ideas based on research findings.

The conference was concluded with a **gala dinner**; His Majesty King Letsie III of Lesotho delivered the keynote address. At the gala dinner, NUL officially launched its Energy Research Center (ERC) and the Master’s programme in Sustainable Energy – both established with the support from the RECP. Furthermore, an MoU was signed between the NUL and the Management Center Innsbruck, and the best RERIS poster was awarded through the head of EU delegation to the Kingdom of Lesotho.

