



A brighter place

Jorge Lascas is a firm believer in the social and economic growth of Africa. Here he speaks with Suzanne Pritchard about how the African Power Platform is striving to make Africa a brighter place for all

Below: **The aim of the African Power Platform is to ultimately improve the quality of life for all African people**



"MY LOVE AND COMMITMENT to Africa played a major role in the decision to launch the African Power Platform (APP)," says Jorge Lascas, founder and managing director of the organisation which is working to assist with social and economic growth across the African continent. "It started as a personal project," he adds. "But I wanted to create an organisation that could have a meaningful impact for a greater audience."

Lascas has over 15 years of experience working in business development roles across the engineering and construction sector, specialising in international tenders for consulting services throughout Africa. After working on its development for a couple of years, he launched the African Power Platform in August 2018.

Lascas describes the APP as an umbrella organisation that connects public and private stakeholders in the African power sector. Although it advocates the use of renewable energy, it embraces all technologies, resources and all sizes of development. It was imperative, according to Lascas, to create one platform where independent power producers,

developers, financiers, consultants, and other like-minded individuals, along with ministries, regulators and utilities, could share ideas and possible solutions concerning the lack of electricity in Africa.

Indeed, the challenges facing African power development are perhaps as vast as the continent itself. With more than 600 million people without electricity, more than US\$500 billion of investment is needed, along with the installation of 25GW of power, by 2040. To facilitate such power development, over 100,000km of transmission lines need to be in place.

"Power is critical for every single country in Africa, and we are here to support all of them equally," Lascas says.

Vision

The African Power Platform's vision is for everyone to access power across Africa in an affordable and reliable way, allowing for social and economic development. Described as a channel of communication, it assists in circulating and propagating tenders, business opportunities and intelligence to members of the sector, while also



Main image: **Panoramic view of the 20MW Maguga Dam on the Komati River in Hhohho, Swaziland. Larger hydropower projects are becoming harder to develop**

Left: **Mini hydropower station in Rwanda. African governments are increasingly supporting the development of small hydropower projects, according to Jorge Lascas from the African Power Platform**

helping to promote local resources and develop a balanced energy mix.

Soon after its launch, it became apparent that helping to provide access to finance was one of APP's key roles. As Lascas acknowledges, the bankability of projects is one of the most challenging aspects of African power development. Raising finance on the African continent has historically proven to

be "a difficult endeavour" and there are multiple projects at various stages of development far from financial closure. Consequently, APP found that demands for supporting power projects had become "unmanageable" and it had to come up with a new way of dealing with this.

So, in a move towards more bankable projects, the Africa Power Access Accelerator (APAA) was f



Above: **Site visit for a run-of-river mini-hydro project in Karonga region, Malawi**

Below: **Headworks at Chonanga River, Karonga region, Malawi**

Bottom right: **Group picture with management committee for Hara Water Users Association in Karonga region, Malawi**



Powerful membership

The African Power Platform currently has about 30 members, including companies such as Arup, African Trade Insurance Agency, Dulas, Mott MacDonald and Germark Holdings. However, its community reach is an audience in the region of 15,000 active members of the power sector. Members range in size from major multi-nationals through to small start-ups, institutions and independent professionals. Member benefits include access to market intelligence, news, research, business opportunities, communication and support.

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launched to provide support and bridge the gap between the key pillars of power project development: preparation, structuring and financing. Its aim is to provide an accelerated programme to create a pipeline of projects that are aligned with the sustainable goals of the United Nations and development finance institutions.

The first application window for APAA closes on 31 March 2019. After selected projects have been evaluated under criteria such as community engagement, local government support, financial and technical viability, and contribution to UN Sustainable development goals, successful projects will start receiving support from September 2019 when an action plan towards implementation will be put in place. If selected, developers may get access to equity/debt financing, grants, development funding and co-developers.

Lascas urges hydro developers to apply for the programme and reflects upon the experiences of hydro development across Africa.

“At the moment and in the near future, governments across Africa have not aligned their transmission and generation strategies. They have focused a lot on generation but not transmission. Now,” Lascas explains, “governments have realised that you can’t go live without adequate transmission. You need to put up these transmission lines, cross boundaries and put big infrastructure in place so that big hydropower projects can get back to life again. The next couple

of years may be hard for large hydro,” he adds, “but governments are putting the right conditions in place for them to boom again.”

However, Lascas sees a shift from large to smaller hydro projects across Africa. He says that it is harder to make large hydro project happen, especially when smaller schemes get closer to the communities, have less impact and are getting more government support for development.

“My view,” Lascas adds, “is that there is room for everything in Africa.” Talking about the global energy mix, he says that it’s not fair that the developed world is putting limits on Africa in terms of emissions, especially when most emissions come from the developed world.

“Africa should do its part,” Lascas acknowledges, “but it should also take advantage of the resources it has on the ground. If resources are there, they should be developed and exploited for the benefit of the people, African countries and the continent of Africa. But balance is still important and there should be a balance between fossil fuels and renewable energy.”

The African Power Platform, Lascas believes, can help improve access to power and social and economic development for African people. “Such development is integral to improve quality of life,” he says. “And power is the basis for such development to improve conditions for the poor. Our motive is to make Africa a brighter place,” he comments. “And this is what makes our work here more meaningful.” ●