

# Green power booming thanks to Eskom woes

By JANE STEINACKER

● There is light at the end of Eskom's dark tunnel for businesses. Alternative and renewable energy companies are cashing in as commerce and consumers find ways to reduce their reliance on the utility's expensive and unpredictable product.

Kyle Bohnsack, managing director of Blockpower, said there is a push for independence from the state-owned enterprise not just because of load-shedding, but also due to tariff hikes and the cost of equipment failure from surges created by an unstable power supply.

Power systems that use solar or battery power can be prohibitively expensive, but financing options have made these systems more affordable.

Nafisa Fareed, CEO of Power4Less, said these financing options had prompted local businesses of all sizes to embrace solar solutions in growing numbers.

## Sunny skies and Nando's

In the past few months, her company has installed solar systems at the Nando's drive-through outlet at the Leaping Frog shopping centre in Fourways, a Shoprite centre in Rustenburg and a shelf manufacturer in Pretoria.

The systems, which Fareed said can allow users to cut their energy costs in half, have price tags upwards of R100,000. Power4Less clients can pay over five years by signing a rent-to-own contract.

Philip König, energy consultant and project manager at Royal HaskoningDHV, said leasing a renewable energy system had become a financially viable option for many businesses in light of Eskom's rising tariffs.

Peter Frolich, director of Nesa Holdings, said the leasing business model allowed companies to buy electricity at a saving of up to 50% on the Eskom price.

He said Nesa, which in 2019 bought the carport photovoltaic systems that Makro has set up at many of its stores, had installed solar panels worth more than R250m across SA in just over three years, and "it's only getting started now".

Demand for batteries has also spiked.

Lance Dickerson, CEO of Revov, an energy storage solutions company, said that in



Large solar generation facilities such as this one in Nyabira, Zimbabwe, are mushrooming in SA too. Picture: Reuters/Philimon Bulawayo



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the past 18 months the company had brought in an average of two container loads of lithium-ion batteries a month from Shenzhen, China, a total of more than 20,000 batteries.

Dickerson said Revov secured R20m in financing last month to ensure it had the cash flow to meet demand for its batteries, which can be used in homes and residential estates, light commercial enterprises and shopping centres.

He said the batteries Revov imports were previously used to power electric vehicles in Shenzhen. After five or six years these batteries reach the end of their lives as vehicle power sources but can still be used in homes and businesses for another 10-15 years.

Local production of solar energy components will also create jobs.

Keketso Ratsiane, MD of MEBS Energy Solutions, said orders for the company's im-



A DC battery with an inverter for AC appliances. Picture: Supplied

ported photovoltaic panels had risen 35% over the past year.

MEBS is building a solar panel manufacturing plant in Durban, which is due to be completed in March. This will create an estimated 100 jobs.

"We have the manganese, the skills and the manpower," said Ratsiane.

König warns that while solar solutions are attractive, companies need to think before they leap so they spend their money wisely according to what they need.

He said options to consider included a hybrid solution using both solar and Eskom power, going completely off-grid, or even applying for a generating licence from the National Energy Regulator of SA.

Such a licence is required for any solar plant with capacity higher than 1MW.

## Emergency power on wheels

Shaun Prithvirajh, CEO of Ellies Electrical, said that in the six months to end-October, 30% of the company's revenue came from the sale of inverter trolleys – mobile battery units that convert the direct current stored in batteries to the alternating current that most appliances and computer systems use, and are useful during load-shedding.

Prithvirajh said Ellies had shifted its focus to providing backup power systems.

Inverter units suitable for households and businesses range in price from R7,000 to R11,000 and Ellies offers solar power kits for homes in the R15,000-R16,000 range, Prithvirajh said.



Keketso Ratsiane, MD of MEBS Energy Solutions.