

Dr Mayaki, distinguished members of the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency, Colleagues from the PIESA secretariat, the opportunity for me to say a few words on this occasion is appreciated.

Much has been said in many forums about the vital role that access to electricity plays, directly or indirectly in the uplifting of people from subsistence levels, and indeed levels of abject poverty, in pursuance of the millennium development goals. I need not expand on that here - it is well known to all those here present.

It is against that background, that in the late 1980's discussions among stakeholders led to the recognition that there was a great need among electricity utilities in the regions for the strengthening of technical capacity, if the aspirations of governments and peoples for the increases in electrification was to be realized and was to be sustainable. Thus the Power Institute for East and Southern Africa, PIESA, was established in 1989 with the specific aim at that time of technology cooperation among electricity utilities in the East and Southern African Regions. PIESA provides a forum to collaborate on technical issues of mutual interest, so as to benefit from each others' experiences; to share information, and to organize, collectively, capacity building initiatives.

As PIESA became recognized as a credible forum, through its various workshops and its outputs, and the electricity supply industry in each country evolved, in particular to be structured so as to focus on first-time electrification, the membership of PIESA has also evolved, and several national rural electrification agencies are now affiliate members of PIESA. PIESA's activities have also attracted the attention of the Regional Energy Regulators Association, RERA, in respect of harmonized standards that can be used or referenced as the basis of technical regulations. Regional harmonization of standards is also a specific aim of the national standards bodies in the region, notably through the SADC structure SADCSTAN, and here too, PIESA has a technical cooperation agreement whereby PIESA can motivate for standards it identifies to be absorbed into the harmonization programme of SADC. Notably this is also in support of one of the important issues identified in the founding documents of NEPAD -that is - to strengthen the standardization infrastructure on the African continent.

PIESA operates in a fairly lean structure of working groups reporting to a Board, facilitated by a secretariat under the direction of its Chief Operating

Officer. It is now formally constituted as a section 21 not-for-profit association registered in South Africa. Its Board comprises representatives from the technical management structures of the utility members, and so there is collective ownership of PIESA and its programmes.

In recent years, the primary deliverables of PIESA have been

- 1) agreement on technical standards and
- 2) capacity building through the organizing of training courses.

It is the latter where there is specific synergy between the aims of the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency and PIESA, and hence it is a significant step in the right direction that the two parties have been able to conclude a cooperation agreement.

Albeit **A** step in the right direction, what we also need is the willingness and drive on both sides to use the agreement to deliver practical outputs. The PIESA Secretariat has already demonstrated its capability to organize the training courses and workshops that its members have required. PIESA itself has already established linkages with other organizations such as the International Electric Research Exchange (IERE), which is providing valuable support and access to technology experts across the world. No doubt together we can explore others, with the aim of maximizing the value of otherwise independent initiatives. I am confident that the NPCA will prove invaluable in being able to work with PIESA to identify both the added-value capacity building programmes required, and the organizations that can support them, to meet the needs of the wider electricity industry, not only in the regions of direct interest to PIESA, but for the electricity industry in Africa as a whole.

We do however need to recognize that PIESA has limited funds that come directly from members subscriptions; being a not-for-profit organization it is incumbent on the secretariat and the Board to ensure that these limited funds are used for the benefit of the members, mainly by way of transfer of skills though the sharing of the practical experience of members.

We know there is a great need for such transfer of skills, particularly in a rapidly developing technological environment, but also recognizing that members still require on-going access to skills development in the mature technologies used in the electricity infrastructure.

We have the means to do that, and it has been supplemented from time to time by professional knowledge from voluntary academic input and relations built up with research organizations such as IERE. Occasionally we retain the services of visiting academics and experts such as Professor Trevor Gaunt from the University of Cape Town.

For the cooperation agreement to be mutually beneficial, PIESA will be looking to NPCA to identify and access additional resources so that the centre of excellence we envisage can provide an extended range of technical capacity building initiatives to a wider audience in the African electricity industry.

PIESA, with its membership focussed in the Anglophone countries in the Southern and East African regions, and recognising the limitation of funds, operates only in the English Language. This is limiting for some potential members, where French and Portuguese are the principle languages. It would indeed be advantageous if through this cooperation with NPCA, the capacity building initiatives could be extended to more countries through either simultaneous translation, or translated documentation, or both.

I feel privileged that this cooperation agreement, and the envisaged centre of excellence is being established during my term of office as Chairman of PIESA; on behalf of all PIESA members, I thank the NEPAD Secretariat for approaching us with the proposal. I have indeed been fortunate to be involved with several initiatives designed to facilitate the role of electrotechnology in the development of Africa; this cooperation now being concluded between the NEPAD NPCA and PIESA is one I believe will be able to deliver positive results for the benefit of all stakeholders.

In conclusion, thanks are due in particular to Professor Elmissiry for the initial approach to PIESA, and to the Chief Operating Officer of PIESA, Paul van Niekerk, for following through and making it happen.

Thank you, Dr. Mayaki, for your cooperation and your direct involvement here today.

Thank you all for your attention.