



## INFRASTRUCTURE

# Farmers lease out land to solar project

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 By **TheReporter**

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**By Teboho Serutla**

Thirty-six field owners at Ha Ramarothole in the Mafeteng district are to be offered M800 000 as second instalment of compensation for loss of their crop fields to implementation of a solar energy project.

This emerged on Wednesday during a visit to the project by the Lesotho Electricity and Water Authority (LEWA) to source the public's views on the impact of the project on the livelihoods of the inhabitants.

Forty fields owned by small crop farmers have already been identified as a site for implementation of this project estimated to cost M400 million.





The project is a collaboration between the local and foreign investors and will be carried out around the villages of Ramarothole, Ha Raliemere and Lempetje

Already the field owners have been compensated to the tune of M600 000 in phase I.

During his address at the public gathering, One Power Lesotho director Kopano Tsenoli said the project was the first of its kind in the country in which the government partners with local and foreign investors for energy production.

This project known as Neo 1, according to Tsenoli, is expected to add up 30 percent of energy supply to the country which will reduce Lesotho's dependency on outside energy supply.

He said the field owners have formed a company to be known as Likhoele Khubetsoana (Pty) Ltd.

It has entered into a 25-year contract with Neo 1 to lease out land for the construction of the solar energy plant based on agreements to be signed soon at the start of its life span.

The country buys power from South Africa's Eskom and Mozambique in addition to the energy produced from 'Muela project in the Lesotho highlands.

He said One Power has partnered with funders from Scatec and the Norwegian Development Fund known as Norfund. Scatec will be the major investor who will lead the construction of the plant.

In addition, the Pension Fund Association of Lesotho and Izuba Energy will hold some shares in the project.

Tsenoli said Scatec has extensive knowledge in solar energy construction and have implemented similar projects in Mozambique and Rwanda.

He said the project has sought experts to determine the loss incurred by those affected by its implementation "so as to be fairly compensated for their loss."

Tsenoli also revealed that an extensive feasibility study was conducted in order to assess the environmental impact of the works to be done.

The power produced at the infrastructure will be sold to the Lesotho Electricity Company (LEC) to augment energy supply in the kingdom. If the sale contract ends and is not renewed, the fields are to be returned to the ownership of the farmers.





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The chief executive of LEWA, Motlatsi Ramafole confirmed at the meeting that his authority sought to further consult with the affected communities. "Once we issue a licence to an operator, he/she has to comply with the rules and regulations so as to avoid manipulating electricity prices as the authority is the power regulator," said Ramafole.

The assistant administration officer at the Mafeteng district administration office Taelo Mohloai said the multi-million project would bring an end to a lack of electricity supply in the area especially for Raliemere residents.

"This electricity will help to decrease the rate of crime rate in the area since perpetrators will be likely to be identified," Mohloai said.

The area chief of Likhoele, Fako Leshoboro applauded LEWA for what he called transparency in consulting with the communities ahead of the project being carried out. He said consideration was made given its impact on the ecological system and the cultural dimensions.

The tender inviting bids for investment in solar energy supply business was issued in the financial year 2015/16 by the ministry of energy and meteorology.

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