

RENEWABLE ENERGY

# Powering Up

## SA solar plant to connect to the grid next month

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THE largest concentrated photovoltaic (CPV) solar plant in South Africa is expected to connect 50% of its 44 MW capacity to the national electricity grid next month.

The plant, which is being developed by French semiconductor manufacturer Soitec, is being constructed outside Touws River, in the Western Cape. Construction began in April last year.

The plant is one of the 28 solar and wind projects, collectively totalling 1 415 MW of capacity, that reached financial close following South Africa's first bid window under the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP).

Specialist fund manager Mergence Investment Managers has invested R50-million in the plant, which uses concentrated sunrays and solar trackers to generate energy evenly throughout the day.

The investment is in line with Mergence's, and its clients' commitment to invest in assets to support the country's infrastructural and growth needs, including long-term energy security, while generating sustainable returns.

Mergence Investment Managers portfolio manager and head of impact investing **Mark van Wyk** says, once completed, the project will be one of the largest CPV power plants worldwide.

"Mergence Investment Managers has also committed funds to nine other REIPPPP projects across solar and wind projects in South Africa.

"The projects are predominantly in rural areas, have a high degree of community involvement and contribute to the reindustrialisation of South Africa," he says.

The Soitec plant entails the construction and

erection of 1 500 CPV units, 50% of which will be installed and connected before the project's commissioning in June.

At full capacity of 44 MW, the energy generated should supply electricity to 10 000 average South African households.

CPV panels are an innovation, compared with standard photovoltaic technology, as they concentrate the sun's rays through Fresnel lenses and the panels track sunlight from east to west throughout the day.

The Soitec project will create more than 4 100 person months jobs during the one-year construction period and more than 15 000 person month jobs during the 20-year operation period.

By the end of last year, 400 people from the Touws River community were employed and trained on the job in each step of the process.

Over the life of the project, R535-million will be spent on local content procurement, R64-million on social economic development and R39-million on enterprise development.

ENGINEERING NEWS COUPON ON PAGE 30 E317139