

Work on Africa's biggest wind farm in Kenya to begin

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Wind turbines are seen in the Ngong hills, near Nairobi. The construction of what is to become Africa's biggest wind farm will start by June in an arid region of northern Kenya, the project's officials have said.

The construction of what is to become Africa's biggest wind farm will start by June in an arid region of northern Kenya, the project's officials said on Saturday.

A total of 365 [wind turbines](#) will be erected near Lake Turkana, where winds blow predictably and regularly, averaging speeds of 11 metres per second.

After seven years of study and funding negotiations, the 585 million euro (\$775 million) project is to take off in June once risk guarantees

from the Ida and Miga [financial institutions](#) -- part of the World Bank Group -- are finalised, Carlo Van Wageningen, head of Lake Turkana [Wind Power](#), told AFP.

"All the contracts are in place. We're ready to start" the work once we get these guarantees, he said.

The first step will be to improve on or build 204 kilometres (126 miles) of road in northern Kenya for the trucks that will make 12,000 trips to bring in all the materials for the project in the remote, neglected region.

"We're in the middle of nowhere. There is no infrastructure whatsoever," Van Wageningen said, adding that the wind farm site resembles "photos of the surface of the moon."

A 428-kilometre transmission line will also be built to link the wind farm to the national grid at an additional cost of 142 million euros.

The [transmission line](#) will be built by Isolux Corsan of Spain and financed by loans from the Spanish and Kenyan governments.

The wind farm is expected to start production of the first 50 MW in mid-2014 and reach full capacity in early 2015, by which time it should have an installed capacity of 300 megawatts.

Total [energy generation](#) in Kenya was 6,460 MW hours in 2008, half from [hydroelectric power](#), one-third from oil and 16 percent from geothermal power, according to the Global Energy Network Institute.

Morocco currently boasts Africa's largest wind energy production, with a capacity of 140 [megawatts](#) from 165 turbines.

The consortium for the Kenyan project has entered into a contract to sell

the power produced to utility firm Kenya Power over 20 years at a cost of 7.52 euro cents/kwh, a price, which, together with geothermal, is the lowest in Kenya.

"Here you can produce windpower at an interesting cost, without subsidies," unlike the case in Europe, Van Wageningen said.

The African Development Bank said it was "heading the financing process" to arrange for a loan that will cover 70 percent of the project cost. Others are Britain's Standard Bank and South Africa's Nedbank.

The remaining 30 percent is financed by investment funds and co-developers.

Van Wageningen said the project is the largest private investment in East Africa.

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