

Morocco sees 12% of power from sun by 2020

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A Moroccan engineer cycles past the panels of the solar power station at Ain Beni Mathar near Oujda. Morocco said Tuesday it is "very confident" of finding the investment needed to build vast solar power plants in its southern desert regions and become a world-class solar energy producer.

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"Our target is that in 2020, 42 percent of our power supply will come from renewable [energy](#), including 14 percent from solar," Deputy Energy Minister Mohammed Zniber told AFP on the sidelines of a conference in Marrakesh.

"At the moment we have only one solar installation, in the east of Morocco, at Ain Beni Mathar, with an installed capacity of 20 megawatts."

But Zniber said the country expects to build five new [solar plants](#) over the next eight years, with a combined production capacity of 2,000 megawatts and at an estimated cost of "less than 9 billion dollars."

"We are sure that a lot of investors will be interested and that we can find the money for these projects. We are very confident about that," he added.

Morocco is experiencing a surge in energy demand in 2012, with [power consumption](#) to rise by 10 percent, according to Zniber, up from 6.5 percent in recent years.

Unlike its North African neighbours, the kingdom has no hydrocarbon reserves to speak of, forcing it to spend billions of dollars each year on fuel imports and relying on Spain to supply its [surplus electricity](#) needs via two interconnectors.

But this has also spurred Morocco into positioning itself as a world-class producer of renewable energy, harnessing the power in particular of the wind and the sun, both abundantly available.

The [pilot project](#) at Ain Beni Mathar is a hybrid plant—solar and gas—but the new plants will use only the sun, with the first, located near the desert frontier town of Ouarzazate, to have a 500 megawatt production capacity.

"This is the biggest project of its kind in the world," said Obaid Amrane, from the Moroccan Agency for Solar Energy (MASEN), explaining that it was being built in two phases and, when completed in 2015, would cover 3,000 hectares.

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