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## Newly launched initiative to strenghten solar research capabilities

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A three-year 'Soltrain' regional solar thermal initiative has been launched in Pretoria and was said to be on course to develop solar research capabilities in southern Africa.

Soltrain is sponsored by the Austrian Development Agency, and is aimed at transforming energy systems from fossil based to more sustainable solar energies, specifically targeting solar thermal applications in South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

Soltrain regional coordinator professor Dieter Holm explains that there are three main features of the Soltrain programme, starting with three intensive "train the trainers" workshops, where training institutions were brought up to speed with the latest international developments.

Workshops for energy policy decision makers consider the most successful energy policies and measures implemented globally. Existing systems will be monitored with suggested improvements being incorporated in a limited number of solar water heating systems in social institutions.

Finally, the Soltrain programme contributes to upgrading solar thermal research, training and test facilities in Southern Africa with a view to providing much needed research and development feedback to the solar industries in the region.

"The comprehensive initiative addresses all aspects from policy to technical issues and it is a privilege to be involved," says Holm, who also runs the programme for the Sustainable Energy Society of Southern Africa, in Gauteng.

"This should lay the foundation for a coordinated national and regional growth in clean energies with the concomitant work opportunities," he adds.

Although Austria is not known for sunshine, the country is a global leader in solar thermal applications. The Austrian Institute for Sustainable Technologies is involved in the initiative, and MD Werner Weiss was said to be a pioneer in the industry, as well as being the recipient of many solar energy awards, including one from the International Solar Energy Society.

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