

A passion for people

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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Veronique Isaacs is passionate about developing people. She is determined that every community project surrounding renewable power plants is purposefully designed to achieve direct significant and sustainable improvements to the lives of the local communities, both during and well beyond the lifespan of operations.



Veronique Isaacs

After 10 years working within the Western Cape provincial government implementing infrastructure-related community and business development initiatives, Isaacs joined the renewables group of companies ([Umoya Energy](#), [Renewable Energy Investments South Africa](#) (Reisa) and [Cookhouse](#)) in August 2016, where she heads up the community operations department for Umoya Energy and Reisa.

■ What role do communities play in the renewable energy space?

I believe they have a dual role to play. They are not only consumers of electricity, but they also benefit from the many opportunities afforded by the renewable energy independent power producer (REIPP) programme through its community ownership mandate, as well as its socio-economic and enterprise development commitments. The programme was specifically designed to bring infrastructure and economic development opportunities to the most rural of communities.

Communities are the life force of this programme. They lobby government to design and implement revolutionary, unique programmes to meet their needs. They are convinced that RE will inevitably ensure sustainability, not only of the environment, but also to create opportunities for people to become economically active.

It is our duty to continuously educate communities to participate and understand their role in the REIPP programme.

■ Describe a typical day in your life

A typical day involves managing multiple risks by recommending sound, mitigating strategies.

I would receive a telephone call from my local community operations officers presenting a challenge/concern regarding projects on the ground. They look for a sounding board to bounce off their ideas. I encourage taking ownership of challenges and bringing sound resolutions to the table. My team is empowered to run with their projects. They have my full support – I have their backs.

A vast amount of requests for information constantly floods my inbox. The information must be carefully sifted through and packaged to meet the requirements of the relevant stakeholder.

Stakeholder engagement is essential in establishing long-term relationships – you need to build up a balance of goodwill as you never know when you might need an ally on your side.

The design of strategic projects to derive maximum impact takes lots of time, energy and research. This is what makes up the rest of the day.

■ What is the future of renewable energy?

I believe that we have only brushed the surface of RE in South Africa. There is still so much more to do and to come. The longevity of RE in South Africa is still debatable, however, I believe that it is inevitably one of the most progressive solutions to a number of challenges facing SA. It will be around for many more years to come.

RE is a conduit that can be used to propel future generations into sustainable, economic activity. We just have to ensure that the mantra of the REIPP programme is entrenched in business practices with an honest commitment to building sustainable rural communities.

■ What is the most challenging part of your job?

The greatest challenge is trying to match the available funding to the ever-increasing needs of communities. Once the match is completed, the next challenge is educating people on why the specific project has been implemented. There are common needs across the communities, but there are also unique needs that should be addressed in an ingenious manner. It is sometimes challenging to find the best-fit solution for the needs of people. We want to ensure that we implement an empowering, sustainable solution and this often takes some time.

Another challenge is managing a vibrant team of community development practitioners scattered across the country, and trying to ensure that our vision of implementing meaningful projects is understood and consistently applied across all of our projects.

■ Who inspires you?

Strong women inspire me – no matter their skin colour, religion, creed or preference. They are your everyday women wanting to make a difference in the lives of their family and communities. The many mamas who sacrifice their time and energy to look after and teach their grandchildren; the single moms who want to make a better life for their children; the “boss ladies” changing the landscape of the corporate sector; the praying moms and wives; and the many community development practitioners who put their heart and soul into growing their communities.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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