



Operation & Maintenance

Best Practice Guidelines
South Africa edition

SolarPower
Europe

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Foreword

Welcome to the South Africa edition of the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Best Practice Guidelines. Building on Version 4.0 of SolarPower Europe's O&M Best Practice Guidelines, this edition is adapted to the South African context. It is a joint effort between SolarPower Europe and several solar PV experts active in South Africa and supported by GIZ SAGEN and SAPVIA, the South Africa PV Association.

South Africa has the continent's most developed PV market. As its fleet of power plants age, proper "health care" is becoming an increasingly important aspect when looking to consistently meet performance expectations. Today, O&M has become a standalone segment within the solar industry, with an increasing number of solar companies in South Africa providing specialised services. Yet there are still significant quality discrepancies between services from different providers.

To address these challenges, SolarPower Europe joined forces with SAPVIA, supported by the South African – German Energy Programme (SAGEN), funded by the German Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation, and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, to develop the South African edition of the O&M Best Practice Guidelines. Our joint South African-European O&M taskforce was launched in April 2021, assembling 39 leading solar experts from South Africa and Europe. The kick-off meeting was followed by a series of online working meetings, in which we updated Version 4.0 of SolarPower Europe's O&M Best Practice Guidelines to reflect the market and business conditions in South Africa. The result is a guide that we hope will help South African solar stakeholders improve the quality of the O&M segment. This document is aimed at O&M service providers, as well as other parties involved in the operation of solar power plants, such as owners and investors, lenders, technical advisors, and data-related service providers. It will help establish common standards and increase transparency in the sector. It is also worth noting that solar O&M is especially value intensive as a segment, supporting many local jobs, and driving important solar innovations, notably in the field of digitalisation.

In the South Africa edition, all chapters of the original document have been thoroughly reviewed and revised with a focus on unique aspects of the country. The recommendations have been updated with reference to the latest version of the South African Grid Code. The document also draws out key points from the South African Operational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) to ensure that O&M service providers are fully aware of their obligations. A key objective was to make sure that this edition would also be useful for operators of C&I and rooftop solar installations. For this, we have tweaked the requirements for smaller installations where necessary, such as for simplified Documentation Management Systems or Monitoring System. We have also considered that dust and water scarcity may be issues in some South Africa. This has certain repercussions for operators' environmental and social responsibilities, and operators are encouraged to reduce the amount of water used for module cleaning through various innovations. Finally, we introduced a new chapter on "O&M for standalone solar systems with storage", to assist in the application of best practices to off-grid systems. These are only some examples from the many updates that we implemented to make these Guidelines as useful as possible for solar businesses in South Africa.

We encourage all solar operators in South Africa to consider adopting these Guidelines and reach out to SAPVIA with any questions or suggestions.



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List of abbreviations

AC	Alternating Current	KPI	Key Performance Indicator
AGM	Absorbed Glass Mat batteries	kW	kilowatt
AMP	Annual Maintenance Plan	kWh	kilowatt-hour
AMR	Automatic Meter Reading	kWp	kilowatt-peak
AMS	Annual Maintenance Schedule	LAN	Local Area Network
API	Application Programming Interface	LCOE	Levelised Cost of Electricity
BESS	Battery Energy Storage System	LIB	Lithium-Ion Batteries
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television	LTE-M	Long-Term Evolution Machine Type Communication
CMMS	Computerised Maintenance Management System	LPWAN	Low-power wide-area network
COD	Commercial Operation Date	LV	Low voltage
CSMS	Cybersecurity Management System	MAE	Mean Absolute Error
DC	Direct Current	MIT	Minimum Irradiance Threshold
DMS	Document Management System	MPPT	Maximum Power Point Tracking
DOR	Division of Responsibility	MV	Medium Voltage
DSCR	Debt Service Coverage Ratio	MW	Megawatt
DSL	Digital Subscriber Line	O&M	Operation and Maintenance
EG	Embedded Generation	OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturer
EH&S	Environment, Health and Safety	OS	Operating System
EMS	Energy Management System	PAC	Provisional Acceptance Certificate
EPC	Engineering, Procurement, Construction	PLC	Programmable Logic Controller
EPI	Energy Performance Index	POA	Plane of Array
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning System	PPA	Power Purchase Agreement
ESIA	Environmental, Social Impact Assessment	PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
ESMP	Environmental, Social Management Plan	PR	Performance Ratio
ESS	Energy Storage System	PV	Photovoltaic
FAC	Final Acceptance Certificate	REIPPPP	Renewable Energy Independent Power Producers Procurement Programme
FIT	Feed-in tariff	RMSE	Root Mean Square Error
FTP	File Transfer Protocol	ROI	Return on Investment
FVR	Forecast Variation Ratio	RPAS	Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (drone)
GPRS	General Packet Radio Service	RPP	Renewable Power Plant
H&S	Health and Safety	RTU	Remote Terminal Unit
HV	High Voltage	SCADA	Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition
IEC	International Electrotechnical Commission	SLA	Service-level Agreement
IECRE	IEC System for Certification to Standards Relating to Equipment for Use in Renewable Energy Applications	SPV	Special Purpose Vehicle
IED	Intelligent Electronic Device	SSEG	Small-scale Embedded Generation
IGBT	Insulated-Gate Bipolar Transistors	STC	Standard Test Conditions (1000 W/M ² , 25°C)
IPP	Independent Power Producer	TF	Task Force
IR	Infrared	UPS	Uninterruptible Power Supply
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency	VLA	Vented Lead Acid Batteries
ISO	International Organization for Standardization	VRLA	Valve-Regulated Lead-Acid batteries

Executive summary

South Africa is Africa's largest PV market by far and reached GW-scale in 2016. In 2020 the country's solar capacity stood at 3.7 GW and is expected to increase to just over 10 GW by 2025, according to SolarPower Europe's business-as-usual scenario. As its fleet of power plants begin to age, proper "health care" is becoming increasingly important and will be vital in maintaining confidence in solar PV as a long-term, sustainable solution to the country's energy demand. Operation and Maintenance (O&M) has become a standalone segment within the solar industry, and it is widely acknowledged by all stakeholders that high-quality O&M services mitigate potential risks, improve the Levelised Cost of Electricity (LCOE) and Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) prices, and positively impact the return on investment (ROI). Responding to the discrepancies that exist in the country's current solar O&M market, the South Africa edition of the O&M Best Practice Guidelines makes it possible for all to benefit from the experience of leading South African and European experts in the sector, and increase the level of quality and consistency in O&M. These Guidelines are meant to be used by O&M service providers as well as installers, owners, investors, financiers, monitoring tool providers, technical consultants and all interested stakeholders in South Africa. In this edition, the requirements presented in SolarPower Europe's O&M Best Practice Guidelines Version 4.0 have been adapted to match the South African market context. One such example is the inclusion of O&M best practices for smaller Commercial and Industrial (C&I) installations, in the 100s of kW scale, in these Guidelines.

This document begins by contextualising O&M, explaining the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders such as the installer or the O&M service provider, and by presenting an overview of technical and contractual terms to achieve a common understanding of the subject. It then walks the reader through the different components of O&M, classifying requirements into "minimum requirements", "best practices" and "recommendations".

Environment, health & safety

Environmental problems are normally avoidable through proper plant design and maintenance, but where issues do occur, the O&M service provider must detect them and respond promptly. Environmental compliance may be triggered by components of the PV system itself, such as components that include

hazardous materials and by-products that may be used by the O&M service provider such as herbicides and insecticides. In South Africa, water scarcity should be considered in certain arid regions, and it is important to have a plan to avoid local disputes over water.

In many situations, solar plants can support agriculture and are a valuable natural habitat for plants and animals alongside the primary purpose of power production. Solar plants are electricity generating power stations and have significant hazards present which can result in injury or death. Risks should be reduced through proper hazard identification, careful planning of works, briefing of procedures to be followed, documented and regular inspection, and maintenance. Personnel training and certification and personal protective equipment are required for several tasks. Almost all jobs have some safety requirements such as fall protection for work at heights and electrical arc-flash, lock-out tag-out, and general electrical safety for electrical work, eye, and ear protection for ground maintenance.

Whilst the principles of health & safety for ground mounted systems are universal, rooftop C&I installations in the 100kW – 1MW category have different requirements that consider their unique placement on buildings with public access.

Personnel & training

It is important that all O&M personnel have the relevant experience and qualifications to perform the work in a safe, responsible, and accountable manner. These Guidelines contain a skills matrix template that helps to record skills and identify gaps.

Technical asset management

Technical Asset Management encompasses support activities to ensure the best operation of a solar power plant or a portfolio, i.e., to maximise energy production, minimise downtime and reduce costs. In the South African context, especially in the C&I and residential segments, Technical Asset Management, power plant operation and power plant maintenance, are often assumed by the same entity, the installer. However, in cases where these roles are separated, and the technical asset manager and the O&M service provider are separate entities, close coordination and information sharing between the two entities is indispensable. Technical Asset Management also

includes ensuring that the operation of the PV plant complies with national and local regulations and contracts, and also advising the asset owner on technical asset optimisation. For more information about commercial and financial Asset Management (an increasingly standalone segment in Europe), please refer to SolarPower Europe's Asset Management Best Practice Guidelines, which can be downloaded from www.solarpowereurope.org.

Power plant operation

Operation is about remote monitoring, supervision and control of the PV power plant or portfolio and it is an increasingly active exercise as grid operators require more and more flexibility from solar power plants. Power plant operation also involves liaising with or coordination of the maintenance team. A proper PV plant documentation management system is crucial for operations. A list of documents that should be included in the as-built documentation set accompanying the solar PV plant (such as PV modules' datasheets), as well as a list of examples of input records that should be included in the record control (such as alarms descriptions), can be found in the annex of these Guidelines. Based on the data and analyses gained through monitoring and supervision, the O&M service provider should always strive to improve PV power plant performance. As there are strict legal requirements for security services in most countries, PV power plant security should be ensured by specialised security service providers. Considering that the typical C&I installation size in South Africa is in the 100s of kW scale, this version of the Guidelines proposes adjusted or simplified procedures or solutions, for elements such as the Documentation Management System.

Power plant maintenance

Maintenance is usually carried out on-site by specialised technicians or subcontractors, according to the operation team's analyses. A core element of maintenance services, Preventive Maintenance involves regular visual and physical inspections, functional testing and measurements, as well as the verification activities necessary to comply with the operating manuals and warranty requirements. The Annual Maintenance Plan (see an example in Annex b) includes a list of inspections and actions that should be performed regularly. Corrective Maintenance covers activities aimed at restoring a faulty PV plant,

equipment or component to a status where it can perform the required function. Extraordinary Maintenance actions, usually not covered by the O&M fixed fee, can be necessary after major unpredictable events in the plant site that require substantial repair works. Additional maintenance services may include tasks such as module cleaning and vegetation control, which could be done by the O&M service provider or outsourced to specialist providers.

Revamping and repowering

Revamping and repowering are usually considered a part of extraordinary maintenance from a contractual point of view. However, revamping and repowering's significance has increased rapidly in solar O&M markets around the world, with South Africa being no exception to this. It is expected that revamping and repowering will gain traction in South Africa in the years to come. Therefore, these Guidelines address them in a standalone chapter. Revamping and repowering are defined as the replacement of old, power production related components within a power plant by new components to enhance the overall performance of the installation. This chapter presents the best practices in module and inverter revamping and repowering and general, commercial considerations to keep in mind before implementation.

Spare parts management

Spare Parts Management is an inherent and substantial part of O&M aimed at ensuring that spare parts are available, in a timely manner, for Preventive and Corrective Maintenance, minimising the downtime of a solar PV plant. As best practice, spare parts should be owned by the asset owner while maintenance, storage and replenishment should be the responsibility of the O&M service provider. It is considered best practice not to include the cost of replenishing spare parts in the O&M fixed fee. However, if the asset owner requires the O&M service provider to bear replenishment costs, a more cost-effective approach is to agree which are "Included Spare Parts" and which are "Excluded Spare Parts". These Guidelines also include a minimum list of spare parts that are considered essential. In the South African context, when setting spare parts' stocking levels, the availability of spare parts needs to be considered as it may be more limited due to manufacturers not having a local representative.

Data and monitoring requirements

The purpose of the monitoring system is to allow supervision of the performance of a PV power plant. Requirements for effective monitoring include dataloggers capable of collecting data (such as energy generated, irradiance, module temperature, etc.) from all relevant components (such as inverters, energy meters, pyranometers, temperature sensors) and storing at least one month's worth with a recording granularity of up to 15 minutes. In addition, a reliable Monitoring Portal (interface) is needed for visualising the data collected and calculating KPIs. Satellite data is being used increasingly as a comparison reference for on-site pyranometers. As a best practice, a monitoring system should ensure open data accessibility to enable an easy transition between monitoring platforms and the interoperability of different applications. As remotely monitored and controlled systems, PV plants are exposed to cybersecurity risks. It is therefore vital that installations undertake a cyber security analysis and implement a cybersecurity management system. To evaluate monitoring tools, it is recommended to refer to the Monitoring Checklist of the Solar Best Practices Mark, which is available at www.solarbestpractices.com. Considering that the typical C&I installation size in South Africa is in the 100s of kW scale, this version of the Guidelines proposes adjusted or simplified procedures or solutions for some requirements, such as the monitoring system functionalities and types of data collected.

Key Performance Indicators

Important KPIs include PV power plant KPIs, directly reflecting the performance of the PV power plant; O&M service provider KPIs, assessing the performance of the O&M service provided, and PV power plant/O&M service provider KPIs, which reflect power plant performance and O&M service quality at the same time. PV power plant KPIs include important indicators such as the Performance Ratio (PR), which is the energy generated divided by the energy obtainable under ideal conditions, expressed as a percentage, and Uptime (or Technical Availability) which are parameters that represent, as a percentage, the time during which the plant operates over the total possible time it can operate. O&M service provider KPIs include Acknowledgement Time (the time between the alarm and the acknowledgement), Intervention Time (the time between acknowledgement and reaching the plant by a technician) and Resolution Time (the time to resolve the fault starting from the moment of reaching the PV plant). Acknowledgement Time plus Intervention Time are called Response Time, an

indicator used for contractual guarantees. The most important KPI which reflects PV power plant performance and O&M service quality at the same time is the Contractual Availability. While Uptime (or Technical Availability) reflects all downtimes regardless of the cause, Contractual Availability involves certain exclusion factors to account for downtimes not attributable to the O&M service provider (such as force majeure), an important difference for contractual purposes.

Contractual framework

In the South African market, O&M service providers are mostly required to provide Performance Ratio guarantees, particularly in the case where a project is funded through project finance. PR guarantees are particularly suitable in cases where installer is the same entity as the O&M service provider, which is often the case in South Africa. In certain cases, parties agree to use Availability and Response Time guarantees. As best practice a minimum Availability of 98% over a year should be guaranteed, with Contractual Availability guarantees translated into bonus schemes and liquidated damages. When setting Response Time guarantees, differentiating between periods with high and low irradiance levels is recommended. The same goes for fault classes, i.e., the (potential) power loss.

Innovations and trends

O&M service providers are increasingly relying on innovations and more machine and data-driven solutions to keep up with market requirements. The most important trends and innovations shaping today's O&M market are summarised in this chapter, grouped under three headings: (1) smart PV power plant monitoring and data-driven O&M, (2) retrofit coatings for PV modules, and (3) waterless cleaning for PV modules, which is particularly relevant for arid regions.

O&M for standalone solar installations with storage

This chapter assists in the application of the best practices, detailed in the previous chapters of the document, to standalone, off-grid PV plants with storage. All best practices mentioned in these Guidelines could be theoretically applied to the smallest systems. However, Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) require different O&M services to ensure the effective management of energy supply and demand. The chapter discusses the various types of BESS that are in use in South Africa and details best practice recommendations for quality management of these systems.



1.1. Rationale, aim and scope

According to SolarPower Europe's market data, the South African market reached GW-scale as early as in 2016 and the cumulative installed capacity is due to rise to over 4.5GW in 2021, under a business-as-usual scenario. This makes it comfortably Africa's most established and largest solar market. As its fleet of power plants age, the industry has realised that proper "health care" is indispensable for power plants to meet performance expectations. Today, O&M has become a standalone segment within the solar industry, with an increasing number of solar companies in South Africa providing specialised services. Yet there are still significant quality discrepancies between services from different providers.

A professional Operation & Maintenance (O&M) service package ensures that the photovoltaic system will maintain high levels of technical, safety and consequently economic performance over its lifetime. Currently, it is widely acknowledged by all stakeholders that high quality O&M services mitigate the potential risks, improve the levelised cost of electricity (LCOE) and Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) prices and positively impact the return on investment (ROI). This can be highlighted if one considers the lifecycle of a PV project which can be broken down into the four phases below. The O&M phase is by far the longest:

- Development phase (typically 1-5 years).
- EPC phase (engineering, procurement, construction - depending on the size of a project, up to a few months).
- Operational phase (involving O&M typically 30+ years).

- Decommissioning phase including recycling and disposal (depending on the size of a project, up to a few months).

Since the operational phase covers by far the longest period during the lifetime of a PV power plant project, increasing the quality of O&M services is important and, in contrast, neglecting O&M is risky. According to several studies, yield can be reduced by up to 70% if a PV power plant is not well monitored and maintained. In exceptional cases, temporary yield reductions of up to 100% have been reported. Inoperative situation or performance issues need to be detected instantly to avoid such type of yield losses. By way of example, just the effect of soiling resulting from regular, wind induced, dust carryover can result in a performance loss of 10%+ within two weeks, and of 30%+ within a matter of six weeks.

The O&M services segment of the solar PV industry is relatively young and serious harmonisation of best practices is yet to take place. Although this is partly logical, reflecting the specificities of each system, topologies, installation sites and country requirements, there is some confusion and a lack of clarity on the part of asset owners and finance providers (investors or/and banks) as to what the minimum requirements (scope) should be.

Today, existing standardisation still does not fill in all the gaps or clarify all the requirements and their implementation. Although in maintenance, there are a number of international technical standards that cover all aspects of power plant operation, there are many shortcomings. Therefore, it is crucial to develop and disseminate best practices to optimise power

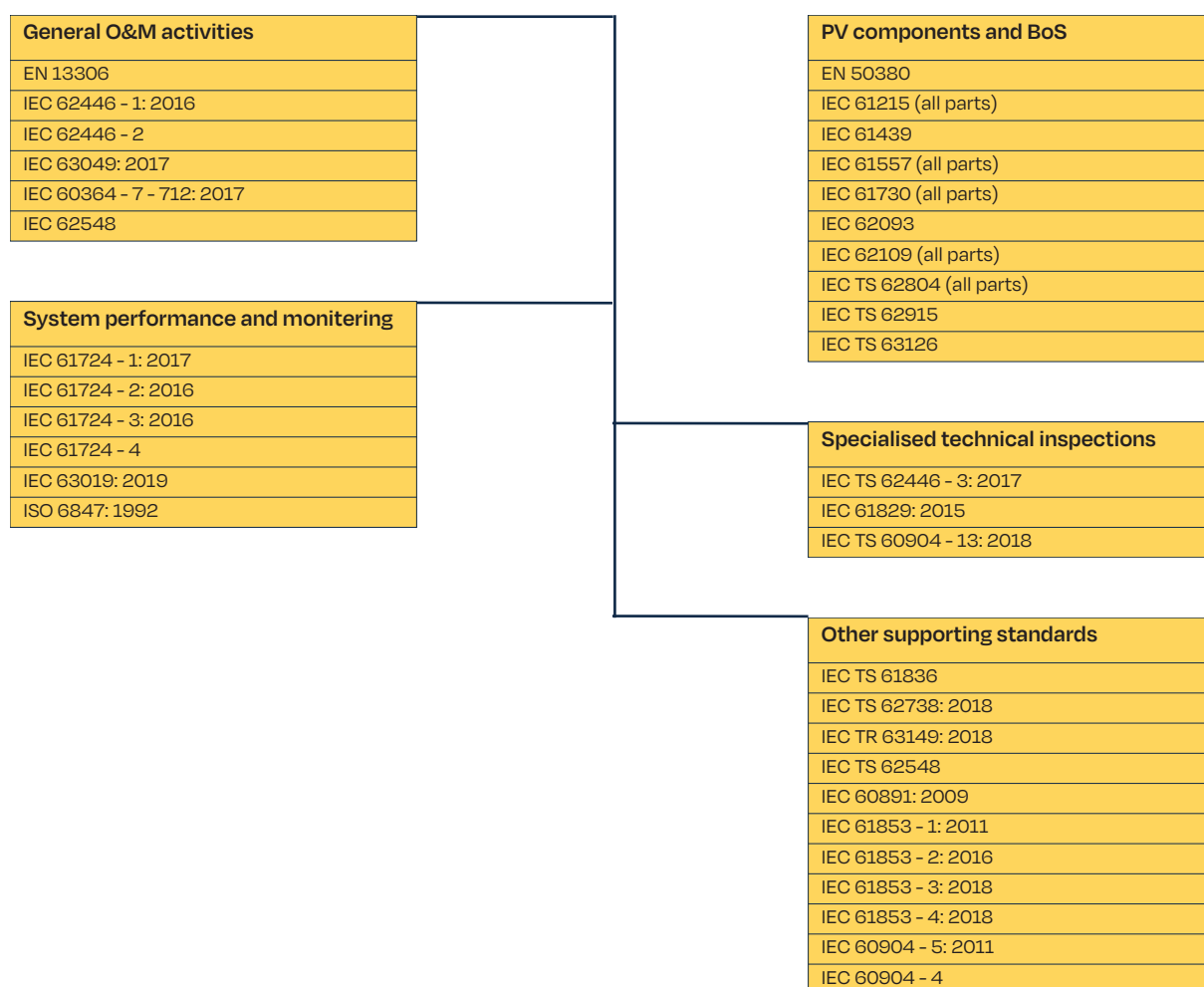
1 Introduction / continued

plant operation and, thus, energy production, power plant management and resulting benefits. Best practices that set the quality bar high will enhance investors' understanding and confidence.

This report also features a list of international standards to support these best practises and to avoid misunderstandings in wording and application. For more detailed information, please refer to *Annex A*.

The South Africa edition of the O&M Best Practice Guidelines is a key tool to set quality standards for service providers and enhance investors' understanding and confidence.¹ Their design has been industry-led and is based on the knowledge and experience of leading O&M service provision, project development and construction (EPC), and asset management firms, alongside utilities, manufacturers and monitoring tool providers. In this edition, the

FIGURE 1 OVERVIEW OF A SELECTION OF APPLICABLE STANDARDS FOR O&M (STATUS: 2019)



NOTE: This list is not exhaustive and new standards are under development.

requirements presented in SolarPower Europe's O&M Best Practice Guidelines Version 4.0 have been adapted to match the South African market context.

Thus, the scope of the current work includes smaller scale solar PV installations in the 100s of kW scale, such as Commercial & Industrial (C&I) installations that are very prevalent in the South African solar market. These are divided into two categories, Small-scale Embedded Generation (SSEG) installations of 100kWp – 1MWp and Embedded Generation (EG) of 1MWp – 10MWp.

Recommendations for utility-scale PV can be applied to both EG and SSEG C&I installations. However, this is not always practical due to stakeholders, the location of the installation and financial implications being different. For the C&I segment, primary consideration should be made to provide the highest possible standard of care, in the most cost-efficient manner, to deliver the lowest levelised cost of electricity (LCOE) to distributed Asset Owners – typically home or business owners or public entities. Three key factors need to be considered when establishing best practices for the distributed solar segment, as compared to utility scale solar:

1. **Different set of stakeholders:** Asset owners are not solar professionals.
2. **Different economics:** Additional monitoring hardware, on top of inverter costs, accounts for a greater percentage of the total investment. Costs of physical site inspections and callouts are proportionally higher compared to savings.
3. **Higher incidence of uncertainty:** Greater shade, lower data accuracy, less visual inspection.

New to this edition of the O&M guidelines is a chapter on Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). Given the unreliable grid supply in South Africa, BESS are becoming an increasingly popular when coupled with SSEG systems. Their growing importance and the specifics of BESS technology means that stakeholders from asset owners to O&M service providers will be required to understand how to best take care of these installations and the cost of doing so.

The content covers technical and non-technical requirements, classifying them, when possible, into:

1. **Minimum requirements**, below which the O&M service is considered as poor or insufficient, and which form a minimum quality threshold for a professional and bankable service provider.
2. **Best practices**, which are methods considered state-of-the-art, producing optimal results by balancing technical and financial aspects.
3. **Recommendations**, which can add to the quality of the service, but whose implementation depends on the constraints that the Asset Owner or Asset Manager are operating under, such as available budget.

As for the terminology used in this document to differentiate between these three categories, verbs such as “*should*” indicate minimum requirements, unless specified explicitly otherwise, as per this example: “*should, as a best practice*”.

1.2. How to benefit from this document

This document includes the main considerations for successful and professional O&M service provision. It can be used by all stakeholders to help improve understanding of the mandatory requirements and importance of O&M, whilst providing key recommendations for inclusion in service packages. Any stakeholders in the following section can benefit from the quality advice and recommendations that this work has to offer, and it serves as a baseline for assuring the maximum efficiency of solar PV plants.

Although the focus is South Africa, most of the content can be used in other regions around the world. The requirements described in the maintenance part can be useful for regions with similar conditions and additional requirements or modifications can easily be made for other regions with unique characteristics. With regards to the operations and technical asset management part, the requirements apply to PV assets regardless of their location.

1 In addition to the O&M Best Practice Guidelines we recommend SolarPower Europe's Asset Management Best Practice Guidelines and EPC Best Practice Guidelines, which are further useful tools to enhance investors' confidence and improve service quality. These reports can also be downloaded from www.solarpowereurope.org.

1.3. Stakeholders and roles

In the distributed or C&I solar O&M segment in South Africa, the two central stakeholders are the system owner (or asset owner) and the installer, with the latter interacting with other stakeholders such as equipment suppliers, third party engineers, authorities, and lenders. It is important to note, that in the distributed solar segment in South Africa, the installer assumes the multiple roles beyond installation, including O&M service provision and asset management. These can be abstracted to the following basic roles:

Asset Owner (or System owner or Investor)

The stakeholder that contributes to the equity financing of construction and operation of the PV power plant is normally the investor (or a group of investors), who can be classified as (1) private individuals, investment companies, or investment funds and (2) Independent Power Producers (IPPs) or utilities. Assets are generally owned by "Special Purpose Vehicles" (SPV). These are limited liability companies, specifically incorporated for building, owning, and operating one or more PV plants.

Installer

In the distributed solar segment in South Africa (and in many parts of the world), it is common for the installer to assume multiple roles: the roles of the Retailer, Project Developer, the EPC service provider, the Asset Manager and the O&M service provider (see below).

- **Retailer.** The Retailer is the entity that buys solar products, such as PV modules and inverters, from a manufacturer (supplier), and sells them to the Asset Owner.
- **Project Developer.** The project developer is the entity that initiates the project and focuses on selecting an appropriate site, identifying customers, conducting preliminary studies, applying for permits, securing financing and selecting the EPC service provider. Project developers may own the project in the early development stages or even longer.
- **EPC service provider.** The entity in charge of the engineering, procurement, and construction of the solar power plant. The EPC service provider, usually

simply referred to as the installer in the C&I and residential segments, is responsible for delivering the full solar power plant to the asset owner from authorisation to commissioning and grid connection. Their role is very important in ensuring the procurement of quality components and quality installation, which have a large impact on the long-term performance of the solar power plant. Many EPC service providers offer O&M services for the solar power plants that they have built. EPC service providers often provide a 2-year performance warranty period, after the Commercial Operation Date (COD), lasting until the Final Acceptance Certificate (FAC). In many cases it is after FAC that a third-party O&M service provider is contracted to take over the O&M of the solar power plant. In certain mature markets the EPC service provider role is increasingly split between different entities..

Asset Manager

The Asset Manager ensures that the PV power plant or SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle or project company) and the contracted service providers fulfil their contractual obligations. They are also responsible for site or portfolio management, supervising energy sales, energy production, and O&M activities to ensure optimal profitability of the PV power plant. Asset managers also ensure that all administrative, fiscal, insurance and financial obligations of the SPVs or the PV power plants, are fulfilled. In the distributed solar segment, asset management is usually a strongly reduced role.

O&M service provider

The entity that has been contracted by the asset owner and that is responsible for the O&M activities as defined in the O&M contract. In some cases, this role can be subdivided into:

- **Technical Asset Manager**, in charge of high-level services such as performance reporting to the asset owner, contracts management, invoicing and warranty management.
- **Operations service provider** in charge of monitoring, supervision and control of the PV power plant, coordination of maintenance activities.

- Maintenance service provider carrying out maintenance activities.

The three roles are usually assumed by a single entity (which is often the installer itself) through a full-service O&M contract. (In the utility-scale segment, the above roles are sometimes assumed by separate entities and service providers.) A comprehensive set of O&M activities (technical and non-technical) is presented in this report.

Lender (financing bank)

The lender or debt provider (financing bank) is not considered an asset owner even if the loans are backed up by securities (collateral). In principle, the interests and performance expectations of the investor (equity provider) and the lender are different. The lender normally measures risk based on the Debt Service Coverage Ratio (DSCR). The role of the lender is becoming increasingly smart and less passive, with a focus on the requirements for the debt provision.

Technical advisors, engineers, and assessors

Individuals or teams of experts that provide specialised services (e.g., detailed information, advice, technical consulting). Their role is important as they ensure that procedures and practices are robust and of high quality – according to standards and best practices – to maintain high performance levels of the PV plant. Technical advisors can represent different stakeholders (e.g., investors and lenders) but often an independent engineer is employed, whose opinions about the technical aspects of the project are not biased in favour of any stakeholder.

Component manufacturer or supplier

A firm that manufactures or supplies modules, inverters, cables, hardware or any other component that is required in an extensive building project such as a PV power station.

Specialised suppliers

Providers of specialised services (e.g., technical or operational systems consulting) or hardware (e.g., electricity generating components or security system).

Authorities

An authority is a government body that has the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience. Depending on the jurisdiction, an authority may be local (e.g., the municipality), regional (e.g., the provincial or regional authorities supervising environmental constraints), national (e.g., the national grid operator, government departments), or international (e.g., the authors of a common grid code of several countries such as a power pool).

In South Africa, among others, the following entities can be considered as authorities:

- Department of Mineral Resources and Energy ([DMRE](#)): on 29 May 2019 the two departments of South African government for mineral resources and for energy were merged into DMRE. The new department shall be at the forefront of the transformation of South Africa's economic growth agenda, through the sustainable development of the mining and energy sectors.
- National Energy Regulator of South Africa ([NERSA](#)) is a regulatory authority established as a legal person in Section 3 of the National Energy Regulator Act, 2004. NERSA's mandate comes from the Electricity Regulation Act (2006), Gas Act (2001), and Petroleum Pipelines Act (2003) and is to regulate the electricity, piped gas and petroleum industries.
- [Eskom](#): the state-owned South African electricity utility. It is the largest producer of electricity in South Africa and operates the transmission and distribution grids.
- Renewable Energy Technical Evaluation Committee (RETEC): the RETEC team consists of NERSA, Eskom, municipal and industry representatives. It verifies that milestones and technical requirements are met and carries out the grid code compliance checks.
- Single Buyer Office (SBO): the SBO manages the energy purchasing agreements of all IPP (Independent Power Producer) programmes and handles any potential claims that may arise. Currently, the SBO consists of a core team, with Eskom staff providing expertise, complemented by advisors, as required.

- Independent Power Producers office ([IPP Office](#)): DMRE, National Treasury (NT), and the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) established the IPP Office for the specific purpose of delivering on the Independent Power Producers Procurement Programme (IPPPP) objectives. A primary objective is to reduce the country's reliance on fossil fuels by stimulating production of renewable energy by the private sector. The programme also contributes to the broader national development objectives of job creation, social advancement, and broadening of economic ownership. Hence, the IPP office provides professional advisory and procurement management services as well as monitoring, evaluation, and contract management services. For example, IPP Office receives the reports concerning Economic Development Obligations.

Off-taker

The entity that transmits or consumes and pays for the produced electricity. This role is still evolving and is often subdivided according to national renewable power support schemes:

- A local or regional utility.
- Energy traders or direct sellers in a direct marketing scheme.
- End customers in schemes that underline autonomy in energy supply.

Aggregator

An entity combines multiple customer loads or generated electricity for sale, for purchase or auction in any electricity market. From the points of view of asset owners, asset managers, and O&M service providers, the aggregator allows the distributed renewable energy production or storage assets to access various energy markets, such as the electricity markets, the balancing markets or other future flexibility markets. This enables direct marketing of the energy produced by distributed assets and can unlock new revenue streams from flexibility services. This type of entity is uncommon in South Africa, however it could become more prevalent in coming years.

Data-related service providers

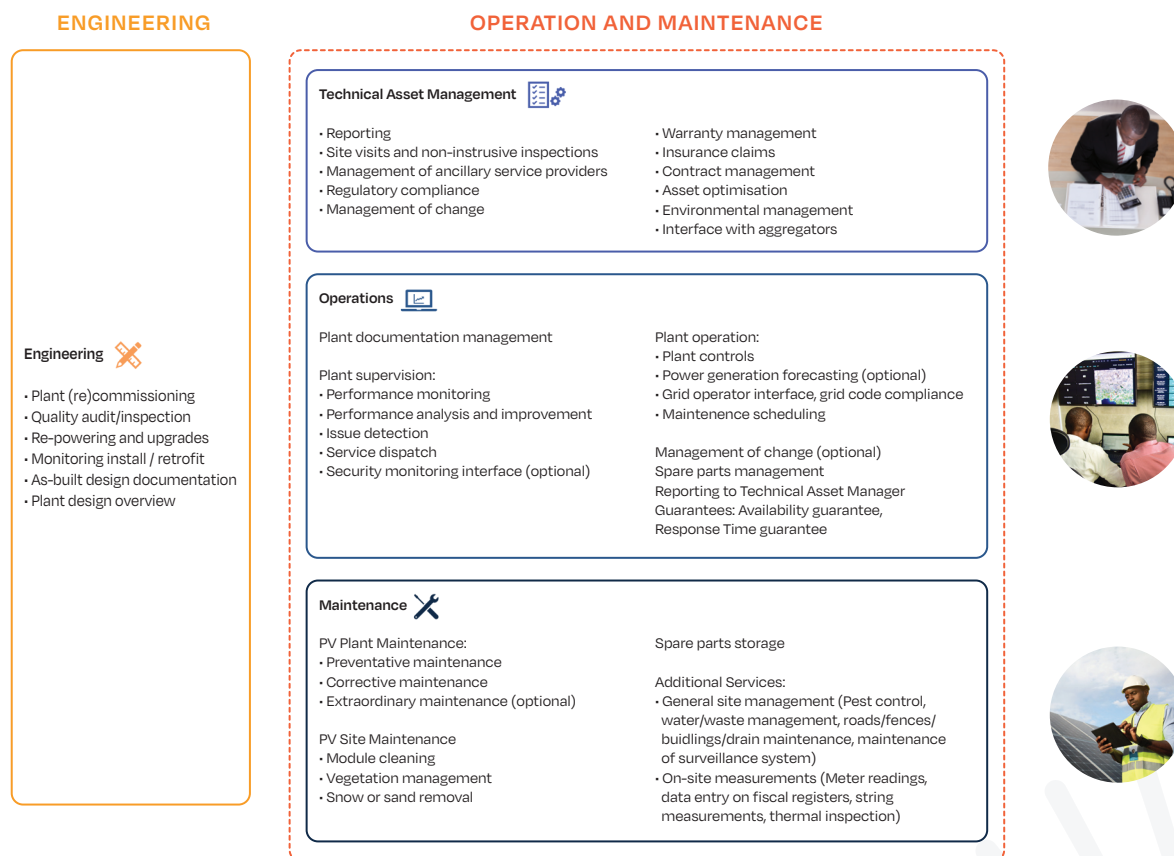
Providers of hardware and software solutions such as Monitoring Systems, Asset Management Platforms, Computerised Maintenance Management Systems (CMMS) or Enterprise Resource Planning Systems (ERP) that acquire data from a site and analyse it to calculate KPIs (analytical tools) and/or provide data repository for key site information whilst facilitating some administrative workflows. Site data is crucial to ensure owners, and AM and O&M service providers are aware of what is occurring on site and how the equipment is behaving throughout its lifetime. It is crucial to ensure that prompt action is taken once a fault is identified and provide vital information on potential areas of underperformance. The tendency in the industry is to opt for solutions that integrate the functionalities of all above mentioned systems and platforms into one software package, which has several advantages and can be considered a recommendation.

Figure 2 on the following page provides an overview of the different responsibilities of the O&M service provider. This figure is redesigned and based on a figure of GTM (2013).

The large number of responsibilities and interdependencies may result in areas where responsibilities, assignments or tasks do not have one clear owner. This can be the case mainly for larger systems, where the different roles are assumed by different entities. With this in mind, it is important that contracts define as precisely as possible scope, the rights and obligations of each party and the general work order management. Where doubt exists over the allocation of responsibility, it should be raised quickly with the asset owner so that unnecessary yield loss, future accusations and litigation can be avoided.

Therefore, all stakeholders are encouraged to have a good understanding of both technical and financial aspects of a PV power plant operation in order to ensure a successful and impactful implementation of services for all parties involved. This train of thought requires Asset Managers to have technical skills in-house or to hire an independent technical advisor (engineer) for a meaningful supervision and proper assessment of the technical solutions, and O&M service providers to have the ability to cost-assess and prioritise their operational decisions and maintenance services.

FIGURE 2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES BY DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FIELD OF O&M



NOTE: The responsibilities of the Asset Manager and the O&M Contractor sometimes overlap, and Technical Asset Management and even some aspects of Procurement can be assumed by either the O&M Contractor or the Asset Manager.

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1.4. Costs and benefits of best practices

Best practices describe a method or technique that is generally accepted as superior to any other alternative method or technique to attain a certain result. Therefore, best practices may exceed the minimum requirements expressed in standards. The benefit of adopting best practices by consistent application typically result in lower cost over the entire cycle, even though the initial cost to implement best practices may come along at a premium. In particular, adhering to best practices is (1) an effective element in risk management and (2) can result in significant yield optimizations.

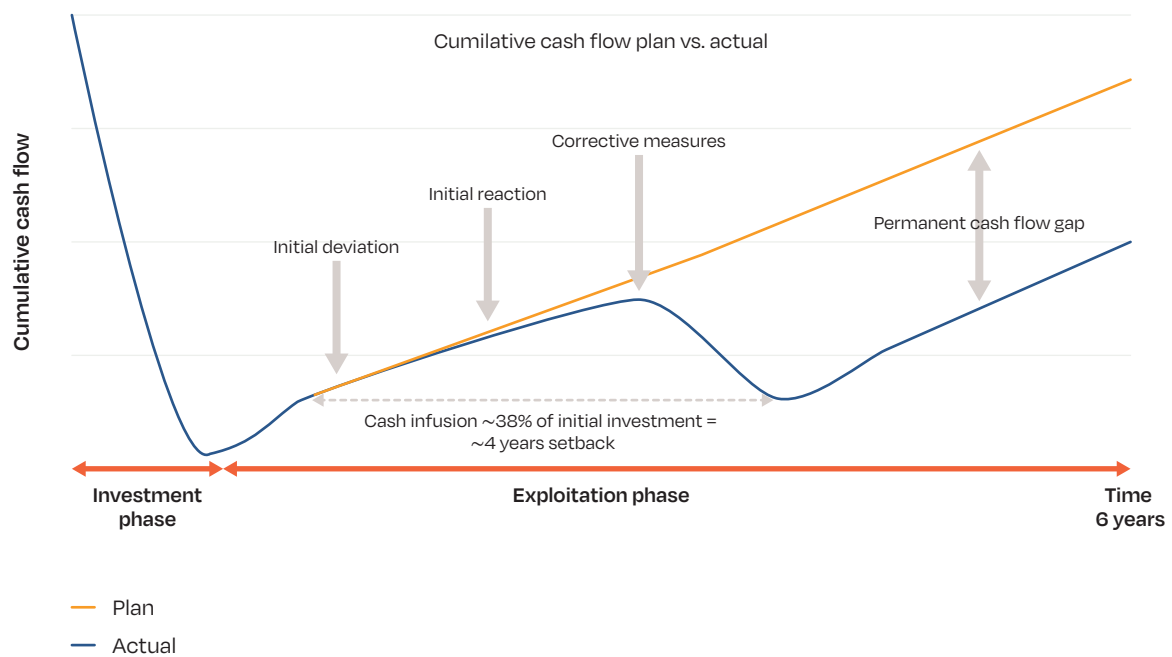
For solar PV, some investors may tend to believe that building a PV power plant delivers automatic, reliable returns, and therefore, operations and maintenance may be of secondary importance, if at all. In fact, solar power plants have the capability to require relatively little maintenance compared to technical devices subject to mechanical movement, high thermal stress loads etc. That said, solar power plants are not free of any operations and maintenance requirements. O&M is crucial to ensuring safe operation and maintaining proper yield. When exercising best practices as outlined in this document, yield optimisation exceeding planned performance and early detection of any deviations will proof to be a rewarding outcome.

1 Introduction / continued

The case study illustrated in Figure 3 shows the effects of negligence on practicing good operations and maintenance. The creeping decline of the performance of a PV power plant that has started early in the lifetime of the PV power plant project, however, was not observed by the operators. As a consequence, instead of reacting early to the issue (it turned out to

be PID), when a relatively low-cost mitigation would have been possible, it took several years before the deterioration was ascertained and evidenced. Consequently, at that point, a major part of the modules had to be replaced, amongst other measures, resulting in an additional “re-investment” of approximately 38% of the initial investment.

FIGURE 3 CASE STUDY OF A YIELD REVIEW OF A CHALLENGED PV POWER PLANT PROJECT



SOURCE: EXXERGY.

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This section introduces a basic set of definitions of important terms that are widely used in the O&M field (contracts) and is necessary for all different stakeholders to have a common understanding. In general, there are standards in place that explain some of these terms, however, it is still difficult in practice to agree on the boundaries of those terms and what exactly is expected under these terms or services (e.g., the different types of maintenances or operational tasks).

Indeed, it is more challenging for terms in the Operational field since those are less technical and not standardised as in the case for Maintenance. The chapter provides a short list (alphabetically ordered) which is not exhaustive but reflects the different sections of this document. For the definitions relating to Maintenance the standard EN 13306 ("Maintenance terminology") was used as a basis.

Additional services	Actions and/or works performed, managed or overseen by the O&M service provider, which are not (but can be if agreed) part of the regular services and normally charged "as-you-go", for example, ground maintenance, module cleaning, security services etc. Some of the additional services can be found as a part of the Preventive Maintenance, depending on the contractual agreement.
Asset management	Asset Managers are responsible for the commercial and financial management of a solar investment and the supervision and control of technical activities. They manage a company or a portfolio rather than a power plant, often across different geographies, dealing with a variety of regulatory frameworks and business models. Asset management is also defined as the coordinated activities of an organisation to generate value from its assets (ISO 55000).
Asset management platform	A software package or suite of tools that is used by the Asset Manager to store and manage technical and non-technical data and information collected from and relating to the solar asset, portfolio or SPV. It combines the abilities of a Computerised Maintenance Management System (CMMS) and an Enterprise Resource Planning System (ERP).
Computerised Maintenance Management System (CMMS)	A software designed to measure and record various O&M KPIs (e.g., Acknowledgement Time, Intervention Time, Reaction Time, Resolution Time) and equipment performance (e.g., Mean Time Between Failures) and thus optimise maintenance activities.
Contract management	Activities related to the proper fulfilment of O&M contract obligations such as reporting, billing, contract amendments, regulator interaction etc.

2 Definitions / continued

Commercial Operation Date (COD)	The term "COD" means "Commercial Operation Date" and is referred to as the day that the PV power plant becomes fully operational and can begin selling power under the terms of the PPA, a FIT, or a merchant business model.
Commissioning	System commissioning closes the construction phase of the solar power plant to move towards the commercial operation. Commissioning includes performance and reliability tests to make sure that the solar power plant is built according to the international standards and best industry practice complies with the agreed Employer's Owner's Requirements, grid specifications.
Construction	In the Construction phase, the solar power plant is installed based on installation manuals provided by suppliers. Construction works involve civil works (mounting structure) and electro-mechanical works (modules, inverters etc.) and supervisory and monitoring equipment. Some parts of the construction may be subcontracted by the EPC service provider.
Contractual framework	An agreement with specific terms between the Asset Owner and the O&M service provider. This agreement defines in detail the O&M services, both remote operations services and local maintenance activities, the management and interfaces of those services, as well as the responsibilities of each party. Liquidated damages and bonus schemes are also part of the contractual commitments.
Control Room Services (also known as Operations Centre Services or Remote Operations Centre)	Comprehensive actions like PV plant monitoring, performance analysis, supervision, remote controls, management of maintenance activities, interaction with grid operators, authorities, Asset Owners, and the preparation and provision of regular reporting performed by experienced and qualified staff in a control room during operational hours for 365 days/year.
Corrective maintenance	Actions and/or techniques (immediate or deferred) taken to correct failures, breakdowns, malfunctions, anomalies or damages detected during inspections, or through monitoring, alarming, or reporting or any other source. The actions are desired to restore the PV system back into regular and required operation mode.
Data and monitoring requirements	Hardware and software, technical and functional specifications to collect, transmit and store production, performance and environmental data for plant management.
Development (Project development)	Development is the phase that precedes the EPC phase in the lifecycle of the project. It usually includes the initiation of the project, site selection, customer identification, conducting preliminary studies, application for permits, securing the financing and selection of the EPC service provider. Project developers may own the project in the early development stages or even longer. The term "Project development" is sometimes considered to include some parts of Engineering and Procurement.
Distributed solar generation	Distributed solar generation refers to solar installations which are small-scale (usually below 1 MWp DC power). An important characteristic of distributed solar generation is that the generation unit is usually located close to the consumption point, as opposed to the case of conventional and centralised power generation. Distributed solar installations may be equipped with battery storage and may be connected to the utility grid or be part of a microgrid, or be standalone off-grid systems.
Documentation management system	A management system that records, manages and stores documents required for O&M, such as technical plant and equipment documentation and drawings, maintenance manuals, photos and reports, including the various versions that are being created by different users, reviews and approvals. Documentation management system also defines a proper format and use (information exchange).

Economic development obligations	Obligations relating to job creation, local content, structure of ownership and management control, preferential procurement, enterprise development and socio-economic development of the project.
Engineering	The Engineering phase starts off as a basic technical concept, the engineering design is itself a process that evolves and is constantly refined as the project development advances into a detailed execution design blueprint, issued for construction. Once construction and commissioning are completed, a detailed set of "as built" set of documents is handed over to the O&M service provider.
Environment, Health & Safety (EH&S)	Environment, Health and Safety indicates the activities performed to ensure environmental protection, occupational health and safety at work and on site, applicable to staff and visitors according to the national applicable laws and regulations.
Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC)	EPC refers to companies that deal with the Engineering, Procurement, Construction and Commissioning of solar systems. The EPC service provider is responsible for delivering the fully built solar power plant to the Asset Owner from authorisation to commissioning and grid connection.
Enterprise Resource Planning System (ERP)	A business management software that a company (such as an O&M service provider or an asset manager) can use to gather, store, manage and analyse all types of data relevant for their operations.
Extraordinary maintenance	Actions and/or works performed in case of major unpredictable faults, such as serial defects, force majeure events etc, that are generally considered outside of the ordinary course of business.
Feed-in tariff (FiT)	A policy mechanism where renewable energy producers are remunerated, at a fixed price agreed in a long-term contract, for each unit of energy produced and injected into the electricity grid.
Good industry practice	Good Industry Practice means those practices, methods, techniques, standards, codes, specifications, acts, skills and equipment generally applicable in the international solar power industry (including construction and installation of solar power facilities) and followed or used by good contractors that, in the exercise of prudent, proper and good judgment, in light of the facts known or that reasonably should have been known at the time a decision was made or an action taken or omitted, would have been expected to accomplish the desired result in a manner consistent with applicable laws and permits, are reliable and safe, protect the environment, are economically efficient and are done with the degree of skill, diligence and prudence that would ordinarily be expected.
Grid code compliance requirements	Equipment, procedures, actions and activities required by the respective grid operator(s) in order to comply with grid safety, power quality and operating specifications.
Insurance claims	Actions taken to claim a reimbursement based on specific insurance policy claims.
Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	A technical parameter that helps the stakeholders to evaluate the successful operation of a PV plant and/or the success of the O&M service provider's activities.
Management of change	Management of change defines the way to handle necessary adjustments of the design of a PV power plant after the Commercial Operation Date. Changes require a close cooperation between the plant owner and the O&M service provider.

2 Definitions / continued

Monitoring system	The digital platform used for the overall monitoring of the functioning, energy generation and reference data of the PV plant and its components or PV plant portfolio, which is performed through real-time monitoring software. The monitoring operates 24 hours a day, all year, and is fed by in-plant data logging systems that collect data from different plants as well as by irradiation and temperature measurements from particular sensors and other sources such as meteorological information.
Off-grid solar	An off-grid solar installation is a solar installation which is not connected to the utility grid, as opposed to an on-grid or grid-connected installation. An off-grid system may be part of a microgrid or a standalone system such as a solar home system with battery storage.
Performance analysis & improvement	Measurements, calculations, trending, comparisons, inspections etc performed in order to evaluate the PV plant, segments and/or single component performance, site conditions, equipment behaviour etc, and to provide reports and assessment studies to interested parties (customer, public authority, etc).
Personnel & training	Operators, technicians, engineers and managers employed for the execution of the O&M activities and training plans/programmes to train them on relevant PV plant related aspects and to keep them continuously updated on their respective roles.
Power plant controls	Actions required by the grid operator, for controlling active and/or reactive power being fed into the grid, other power quality factors that are subject to adjustments and/or (emergency) shut down (if applicable).
Power plant supervision	The activity to supervise and analyse data provided by the monitoring system which is performed by experienced human resources during daylight hours and managed by one or more control rooms (365 days/year). The reception and qualification of the alarms from the monitoring tool is also considered to be part of the supervision.
Predictive maintenance	Actions and/or techniques that are performed to help assess the condition of a PV system and its components, predict/forecast and recommend when maintenance actions should be performed. The prediction is derived from the analysis and evaluation of significant parameters of the component (e.g., parameters related to degradation). Monitoring systems and expert knowledge are used to identify the appropriate actions based on a cost benefit analysis.
Preventive maintenance	Actions and/or testing and/or measurements to ensure optimal operating conditions of equipment and of the entire PV plant and to prevent defects and failures. Those take place periodically and according to a specific maintenance plan and maintenance schedules.
Power generation forecasting	Adoption of forecasting tools calculating expected power production for a certain timeframe from weather forecasts in order to supply the expected power production to owner, grid operator, energy traders or others. This is normally country and plant dependent.
Quality	Quality is a perceptual, conditional, and somewhat subjective attribute and may be understood differently by different people. It is a commitment to customers in the market. It can also be defined as fitness for intended use. Quality also takes into account the reduction of waste that a product may cause to the environment or human society.
Quality Management (QM)	Quality Management is the process through which an organisation ensures Quality. Its four pillars are Quality Control & Assurance, Quality Monitoring & Review, Quality Improvement and Quality Planning.

Regulatory compliance	Compliance to any law, statute, directive, bylaw, regulation, rule, order, delegated legislation or subordinate legislation directly applicable in the country where the service is provided, as well as to any mandatory guidelines and measures issued by a utility and any other competent public authority.
Reporting and other deliverables	Deliverables produced periodically, according to requirements detailed in the O&M agreement or following best market practices, including PV plant performance, Key Performance Indicators, maintenance activities and work orders performed, alarm handling, equipment status, warranty handling activities and spare parts tracking and any other analysis performed in compliance with the O&M contract requirements.
Risk	Risk is defined as the “effect of uncertainty on objectives”. The major categories of PV risk include, but are not limited to, financial risks, country and regulatory risks, contractual risks, commercial risks, technical risks and reputational risk.
Risk management	The practice of identifying and analysing the risks to which solar power systems and operations are subjected and taking steps to mitigate them. The different risk management methods are risk avoidance, risk reduction, risk control, risk transfer. The risk that cannot be mitigated is called residual risk.
Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)	A company with its own rights, assets and liabilities, created for building, owning and operating one or more solar power plants. The SPV is also referred to as SPE (special purpose entity) or as a project company. SPVs are usually used for larger, utility-scale projects.
Security	Actions, procedures, equipment and/or techniques that are adopted on site and remotely in order to protect the plant from theft, vandalism, fire and unauthorised entry. Security services are to be provided by specialised security service providers.
Spare parts management	Activities that ensure availability of the right amount and type of components, equipment, parts etc, either on site or in warehouses or in manufacturers’ consignment stocks, for prompt replacement in case of failure and/or to meet guarantees under O&M contracts.
Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA)	Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) is a data acquisition system that connects various hardware and software components in a given site and is used to monitor and control the solar power plant remotely. SCADA systems are typically employed to send data to a centralised Monitoring System for monitoring and analytical purposes (see definition for “Monitoring System”).



Environment, Health & Safety

The Asset Owner has the ultimate legal and moral responsibility to ensure the health and safety of people in and around the solar plant and for the protection of the environment around it. The practical implementation is normally subcontracted to the O&M service provider.

3.1. Environmental Responsibilities

Renewable energies are popular because of their low environmental impact, and it is important that solar plants are operated and maintained to minimise any adverse effects. Environmental problems can normally be avoided through proper plant design and maintenance – for example, bunds and regular inspection of HV transformers will reduce the chances of significant oil leaks – but where issues do occur the O&M service provider must detect them and respond promptly. Beyond the environmental damage there may be financial or legal penalties for the owner of the plant.

Legal obligations, in South Africa among others the [National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998 \(NEMA\)](#), to be fulfilled by the O&M service provider (or the Technical Asset Manager) may include long-term environmental requirements to be implemented either onsite or off-site. Typical requirements can be amongst others water tank installation, tree clearing, drainage systems installation, amphibian follow-up, edge plantation, reptile rock shelters installation. Often, O&M service providers are required to comply with the Equator Principles. Such requirements should be implemented and managed by the O&M service provider to comply with the authorisation. As a best practice, the O&M service provider's environmental

preservation activities can go beyond legal obligations. If projects are funded by third party debt or equity finance, O&M service providers are required to comply with the Equator Principles² or a similar environmental and social risk management framework.

Further, the use of water needs to be considered. Water is used in many installations of solar plants in South Africa. Primarily the water is used for cleaning of the solar modules, further water is used in sanitary installations of the solar plants. In many instances the water is taken from nearby sources through contractors that also conduct the cleaning of the solar modules. The contractors for cleaning the solar modules are often local farmers that conduct the cleaning of the solar modules to complement their income .

In South Africa water use licenses are compulsory when extracting borehole water for commercial use. License application procedure can be obtained from the department of Water and Sanitation <https://www.gov.za/about-sa/water-affairs>. In areas where it is possible to collect bulk water from a local municipality, the permit application and price negotiations should be handled by the project company before the start of O&M activities. Quantities used per washing cycle will largely depend on the washing method used on a specific site. Manual washing equipment could be able to use less than 1 litre per module where robotic methods could use as little as 200 ml per module. For waterless cleaning see [Chapter 13.3](#).

The water demand from a solar plant can play a significant role in the water balance of a region. This is

2 For more information, see www.equator-principles.com.

of particular importance considering that water scarcity and dwindling groundwater resources are a wide-spread and increasingly alarming phenomenon. In many incidences, the operators of the solar plant or their sub-contractors are in a stronger position to source the scarce water and, therefore, they may endanger the livelihoods of the local population. This

situation is to be avoided by all means. Solar plants are typically installed in regions that have abundant sunshine and consequently are rather arid. Thus, the likelihood of disputes over water is rather high and it will increase with the expected fast expansion of installed solar capacity.

BOX 1

Preserving and enhancing the Natural Capital values of large-scale solar plants

The growth in ground-mounted solar parks is occurring at a time when there is increasing recognition of the benefits the natural environment provides to society, and how these are under threat from ongoing environmental degradation. When well-managed and in suitable locations, solar parks offer an opportunity to improve the state of the natural environment alongside their primary purpose of generating electricity. This potential is becoming increasingly pertinent with the development of initiatives that prioritise the environment, such as the European Union-funded project Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services (NCAVES), which is active in five countries worldwide including South Africa, and global frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and related Sustainable Development Goals. Further, promoting good environmental stewardship will enhance the solar industry's profile, contribute to corporate Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) objectives, help to meet planning policy goals, and improve community and landowner relations.

'Ecosystem Services' and 'Natural Capital' are two related frameworks that are being used to characterise and quantify the benefits that the environment provides for us. Natural Capital is the stocks of environmental assets (e.g., water, air, soil, and living material), from which ecosystem goods (e.g., crops and drinking water) and ecosystem services (e.g., climate regulation and pollination) that society rely on are derived.

Solar parks offer an excellent and relatively untapped opportunity to enhance natural capital and ecosystem

services as they occupy a notable amount of land for 25-40 years, which is predominantly used solely to produce low carbon energy. The land remains relatively undisturbed, apart from by maintenance activities. Moreover, because the parks are commonly located in agricultural landscapes, the land they occupy, and its immediate surroundings stand to benefit significantly from enhancement. For example, introducing pollinator habitats on solar parks could improve pollination of surrounding crops leading to higher yields, and changes to the intensity of mowing and grazing can be used to enhance biodiversity.

In the United Kingdom, collaborative research between solar park stakeholders, nature conservation bodies and researchers has produced the Solar Park Impacts on Ecosystem Services (SPIES) decision support tool. The SPIES tool provides an accessible, transparent and evidence-based means of informing management actions on and around solar parks. It is free to use and enables users to explore the impacts of different management scenarios, which can be outputted as PDF documents suitable to support planning applications.

Whilst currently deployed in a UK context, alternative versions of SPIES could be readily developed for other ecosystems. By engaging more actively in the natural capital and ecosystem services agendas, the solar industry would boost its environmental credentials, enabling it to continue to produce urgently needed low-carbon electricity while also improving the state of the natural environment upon which society relies.

The SPIES tool is a collaboration between Lancaster University and the University of York funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NE/N016955/1 & NE/R009449/1). The web-based version of the SPIES tool was developed by Simomics Ltd.³

3 For more information, see: www.lancaster.ac.uk/SPIES and www.energyenvironment.co.uk.

To avoid disputes the power plant's water requirement and the feasibility of sourcing it locally needs to be analysed, before implementing the project, as part of the Environmental Social Impact Assessment (ESIA). This can be considered as best practice for C&I projects and a recommendation for small-scale projects. The ESIA can lead to the optimisation of the powerplant's design and ensure that measures to minimise or mitigate wider risks are included in the project's Environmental, Social Management Plan (ESMP), which is monitored throughout a plant's lifecycle.

Previously in cases where the risk of disputes arising over water has been deemed high rainwater harvesting systems have been identified as a possible remedy. In practice these rainwater harvesting systems have shown to be simple to install and effective in saving water. Further dry-cleaning - in particular robotic dry-cleaning - has been tried in various installations and has also shown to be very effective. Both rainwater harvesting and robotic dry-cleaning approaches, however, require planning prior to the installation of the solar plant to allow for more accurate costing. Therefore, the early development phase of a PV project should include a soiling study to better understand soiling dynamics.

During O&M all aspects determined in the ESMP concerning the use of water are to be monitored. In case no ESMP has been developed prior to the installation of the solar plant, then the question of water use and potential disputes over it are to be analysed by a suitable expert and the measures determined through this analysis are to be implemented.

Other aspects that need to be taken into account, as best practice, are recycling of broken panels and electric waste so that glass, aluminium and semiconductor materials can be recovered and reused, and hazardous materials disposed of in a safe manner complying with legal requirements.

In many situations, solar plants offer an opportunity, where managed sympathetically, to provide opportunities for agriculture and a valuable natural habitat for plants and animals alongside the primary purpose of generation of electricity. A well thought out environmental management plan can help promote the development of natural habitat, as well as reduce the overall maintenance costs of managing the grounds of the plant. It can also ensure the satisfaction of any legal requirements to protect or maintain the

habitat of the site. In any case, environmental requirements from building permits should be complied with. Maintenance services should comply with things such as the proper application of herbicides, pesticides, and poisons used to control rodents . It is a best practice to avoid herbicides and pesticides. The use of solvents and heat-transfer fluids also need to be controlled. Cleaning agents (soap) should be specified to be environmentally friendly (no chlorine bleach) and applied sparingly to avoid over-spray and run-off . Petrol and diesel should be kept above collecting reservoirs.

3.2. Health and safety

Managing the risks posed by the solar plant to the health and safety of people, both in and around the plant, is a primary concern of all stakeholders. Solar plants are electricity generating power stations and pose significant hazards present which can result in permanent injury or death. Risks can be mitigated through proper hazard identification, careful planning of works, briefing of procedures to be followed, and regular and well-documented inspection and maintenance (see also 6.10. *Power plant security*). In South Africa, the [Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993](#) (OHSA) defines the rules to be observed.

The dangers of electricity are well known and can be effectively managed through properly controlled access and supervision by the O&M service provider. Any person accessing a PV plant should expect some form of introduction to ensure they are briefed on any hazards and risks. Staff working on electrical equipment must be appropriately trained, experienced and supervised, but it is also key that others working around the equipment - for example panel cleaners - are equally aware of the potential risks and have safe methods of working around HV and LV electricity.

Hazardous areas and equipment should carry appropriate markings to warn personnel of possible hazards and wiring sequence. Such markings should be clear and evident to all personnel and third parties (and intruders) entering the plant premises.

As well as the inherent dangers of a typical solar plant, every site will have its own set of individual hazards which must be considered when working on the plant. An up-to-date plan of hazards is important for the O&M service provider to use to manage their staff and

to provide third party contractors with adequate information. It is usually the case that the O&M service provider holds the authority and responsibility to review and, where necessary, reject works taking place in the plant. Failure to carry this out properly has important consequences to general safety.

Besides workers on the solar plant, it is not unusual for other parties to require access to it. This may be the Asset Owner, or their representative, the landlord of the land, or in some situations members of the public. It is important that the plant access control and security system keeps people away from areas of danger and that they are appropriately supervised and inducted as necessary.

The Asset Owner is ultimately responsible for the compliance of H&S regulations within the site/plant. The Asset Owner must make sure that, at all times, the installation and all equipment meet the relevant legislations of the country and also, that all contractors, workers and visitors respect the H&S Legislation by strictly following the established procedures, including the use of established personal protective equipment (PPE).

At the same time, the O&M service provider should prepare and operate its own safety management systems to be agreed with the Asset Owner taking into account site rules and the Works in relation to health and safety and perceived hazards. The O&M service provider should ensure that it complies, and that all subcontractors comply with the H&S legislation.

The Asset Owner will have to require from the O&M service provider to represent, warrant and undertake to the Owner that it has the competence and that it will allocate adequate resources to perform the duties of the principal contractor pursuant to specific national regulations for health and safety.

Before starting any activity on site, the Asset Owner will deliver risk assessment and method statements to the O&M service provider who will provide a complete list of personnel Training Certifications and appoint a H&S coordinator. During the whole duration of the contract the O&M service provider will keep the H&S file of each site updated.

The O&M service provider must have their personnel trained in full accordance with respective national legal and professional requirements that generally result in specific certification to be obtained, for example in

order to be allowed to work in MV and/or HV electrical plants. Examples of standards used today are ISO 14001, OHSAS 18001, etc). Site certification should be dated and renewed every 1 or 2 years.

All personnel involved in switching of HV and MV equipment must be authorised to do so after successful completion of the ORHVS (Operating Regulations for High Voltage Systems) training.

In order to achieve a safe working environment, all work must be planned in advance. Normally written plans are required.

Risk assessments need to be produced, which detail all of the hazards present and the steps to be taken to mitigate them.

The following dangers are likely to exist on most solar plants and must be considered when listing hazards in order to identify risks. The severity of any injuries caused is commonly exacerbated by the terrain and remoteness common on solar plants.

- 1. Medical problems.** It is critical that all personnel engaged in work on solar farms have considered and communicated any pre-existing medical conditions and any additional measures that may be required to deal with them. Occupational site entry and exit medicals are standard practise for many O&M service providers, with some repeating the examinations on an annual basis.
- 2. Slips, trips and falls.** The terrain, obstacles and equipment installed on a solar farm provide plenty of opportunities for slips, trips and falls both at ground level and whilst on structures or ladders; and for carport systems, fall-protection and additional equipment is required when working at heights. For large roof-top systems, additional fall protection equipment or systems such as cat ladders, lifelines or walkways are recommended.
- 3. Collisions.** Collisions can occur between personnel, machinery/vehicles and structures. The large areas covered by solar farms often necessitate the use of vehicles and machinery, which when combined with the generally quiet nature of an operational solar farm can lead to a lack of attention. General risks such as difficult terrain, reversing without a banksman and walking into the structure supporting the solar panels require special attention. All permanent workers should be insured.

4. **Strains and sprains.** Lifting heavy equipment, often in awkward spaces or from uneven ground, presents increased risk of simple strains or longer-term skeletal injuries.
5. **Electrocution.** Operational solar farms, whether energised or not, present a significant risk of electrocution to personnel. This risk is exacerbated by the nature and voltage of the electricity on site and the impossibility of total isolation. Staff engaged in electrical work obviously suffer the greatest risk but everybody on site is at risk from step potential and other forms of electrocution in the event of a fault. Specific training needs to be given to all those entering a solar farm as to how to safely deal with the effects of electrocution. In addition to general electrical safety, common issues for PV plants include arc-flash protection when working on energized circuits; and lock-out-tag-out to ensure circuits are not unintentionally energised.
6. **Fire.** Several sources of combustion exist on a solar farm, the most common being electrical fire. Others include combustible materials, flammable liquids, and grass fires. Safe exit routes need to be identified and procedures fully communicated. All personnel need to be fully aware of what to do to both avoid the risk of fire and what to do in the event of a fire. Long grass can pose a real danger to the entire PV installation. Fires can be contained, if the site team can react fast with the necessary equipment. It is always a good idea to have a dedicated fire trailer on site.
7. **Mud and water.** Many solar farms have water travelling through them such as streams and rivers, some have standing water, and some are floating arrays. Mud is a very common risk particularly in winter as low-grade farmland is often used for solar farms. Mud and water present problems for access as well as electrical danger.
8. **Mechanical injury.** Hand-tools, power tools, machinery as well as such mechanisms as unsecured doors can present a risk of mechanical injury on site.
9. **Weather.** The weather presents a variety of hazards, the most significant of which is the risk of lightning strike during an electrical storm (relatively high frequency of lightning events in South Africa). Due to the metal structures installed on a solar farm an electrical storm is more likely to strike the solar array than surrounding countryside. A solar farm MUST be vacated for the duration of any electrical storm. Working in cold and rainy weather can cause fatigue and injury just as working in hot sunny weather presents the risk of dehydration, sunburn, and sun stroke. Working during sunny days to perform maintenance and/or testing can lead to sunstroke. To avoid this, drinking sufficient water and staying in the shade is recommended. In South Africa, there is no cut off temperature to call out stop work. This decision will be a company policy or internal arrangement. However, extremely hot temperatures exceeding 38 degrees Celsius should be managed carefully with frequent water breaks and shade cover. Sunblock must be available for employees working in the field. It is best practice to plan works according to weather conditions. During hot periods, heavy work outside should be shifted to the early morning or evening hours.
10. **Wildlife and livestock.** The renewable energy industry is proud to provide habitats for wildlife and livestock alongside the generation of electricity. Some wildlife however presents dangers. There are plants in different regions which can present significant risk, some only when cut during vegetation management. Animals such as rodents, snakes, insects such as wasps and other wildlife as well as livestock can present significant risks. The nature of these risks will vary from place to place, and personnel need to be aware of what to do in the event of bites or stings. Snakes, spiders, ticks, bees and bugs are common and pose a number of hazards where snake bites can be lethal, spider bites can cause pain and inflammation, ticks bites can result in tick bite fever, bees can cause allergic reactions and bugs can fly into people's eyes. In South Africa, every shift should have a trained snake handler – PPE should include snake chaps/gaiters. Engage with nearest medical facilities to make sure they can treat venomous snake bites – emergency phone numbers should be clearly displayed.

It is therefore important that all precautions are taken to prevent or manage these incidents. Storage and application of pesticides, herbicides (if not avoidable), and rodent poisons also introduce health and safety hazards. For example, Glyphosate was very common in controlling vegetation at PV plants and has been found to be carcinogenic, besides its damaging effects on biodiversity. Mowing has several hazards including flying objects. These should be avoided (also for the protection of the modules) by using machines with protection shields. Every job at a PV site should have safety precautions identified and implemented.

Everyone entering a solar farm, for whatever reason, should be trained on the dangers present on solar farms and on the individual task that they will be

performing. People who work on the PV plant should have the PPE and tools necessary to carry out the work in the safest way possible. The work should be planned in advance, and everyone concerned should have a common understanding of all aspects related to the safe execution of their task. Different countries will mandate written and hard copy paperwork to meet legislation, but best practice is to exceed the minimum requirements and to embrace the spirit of all relevant legislation.

Best practice in H&S sees the ongoing delivery of training and sharing of lessons learned and work methods. By increasing the skills of persons involved in the industry, we can make the industry both safer and more productive.

BOX 2

Health and safety for C&I rooftop solar

Regarding Health & Safety considerations for C&I rooftop solar, the necessary precautions outlined in Chapter 3, *Environment, Health & Safety* should be taken into account, but need to be complemented in order to address the dangers associated with working at height (see for example [Best practice guidelines for working at height in New Zealand](#), [HSA Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work](#) or [IACS Guidelines for Working at Height](#)). These additional precautions include:

- Presence of permanent guardrails or other forms of edge protection
- Presence of maintenance corridors
- Use of mobile elevating work platforms, forklift platforms, etc.,
- Use of safety mesh
- Use of temporary work platforms (also to avoid damage of modules)
- Marking of dangerous areas (for example, fragile roof material)
- Correct use of harness systems and lifelines
- Correct use of ladders

As a best practice, aerial inspections using drones offer rooftop PV installations a particular advantage in health and safety as they reduce or even eliminate the manhours required to undertake the necessary regular inspections manually. Drone inspection flights can safely and accurately capture visual and thermographic data in significantly less time than it takes to manually inspect the entire array. The images and reports generated allow O&M service providers to identify precise locations and even the types of rectifications required. This enables swifter, safer repairs that also deliver the additional advantage of saving costs in terms of repair manhours required. Everyone working on a C&I installation should receive training on the dangers present. This is different to utility scale solar because here we are normally in a context of co-activity and people who are not necessarily familiar with PV technology have some kind of access. Implications of co-activity are manifold: an installation on carports will have to handle the presence of the public, one on the roof of a chemical factory that of explosive substances etc. Security requirements need to be very specific to the context, and it is necessary to define a security strategy for it. This may include measures to restrict access or specific training to personnel that needs to be present.



Personnel & training, social embeddedness

It is of critical importance that all O&M personnel have the relevant qualifications to perform the works in a safe, responsible and accountable manner. This can be a challenge in emerging markets and in certain rural areas in South Africa, as the necessary technical skills to execute quality O&M services are not always available. To address the lack of skills, standard trainings can be relied upon. Such trainings are already provided in a number of African countries by public training institutes and international organisations.

It is difficult to define exactly the suitable employee profile to carry out the work, but in general, it is not advisable to be rigid in the necessary requirements. The necessary knowledge and experience can be gained through career development and through different engagements.

The solar industry benefits from a wide range of skills and experience. Team members with a range of electrical, mechanical, financial, business and communications skills are required to handle different tasks and all of them strengthen the positive impact of the service provision.

Everyone who enters a solar plant needs to be trained in the dangers present in addition to their individual skills and experience required for the tasks that they normally perform. Awareness of the necessary health and safety regulations is a must.

The challenge would always be to have a good engineering team that can support your on-site personnel remotely.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act no85 of 1993 is clear on which competencies are needed under the General Machinery Regulations. O&M service providers must appoint the required competent persons to operate and maintain the installation.

A good starting point for all technical personnel involved in maintenance activities on utility power plants in South Africa, would be training in ORHVS – (operating regulations for high voltage systems)

This is a standard syllabus covering all aspects of risks, supervision, operating and safety in high voltage environments.

Further useful training comprises first aid, working at heights, driving utility vehicles, and snake handler training.

As the solar industry globally is a growth industry, it follows that skills will need to be taught in order to create a suitable workforce. It is therefore incumbent on all employers in the industry to create a training scheme both internally and externally which creates opportunities for qualifications and development. Worldwide, there is a huge gender disparity in the industry. As best practise, O&M service providers should make an effort to improve diversity and inclusion, ensuring there are training, work, and professional development opportunities for everyone. Whilst it is inevitable that some staff will choose to leave, it is unrealistic to imagine that any company can always employ already skilled and qualified staff.

A further consideration for project developers working in South Africa is that, often Economic Development Obligations (see definitions for explanation) need to be considered in PV projects. As most renewable projects are located in remote regions where few or no training facilities are available, the O&M service provider must take into account the additional cost to develop their team. This can be seen as a positive contribution towards skills development as required by most power plant agreements.

The creation of a training matrix such as shown on the proposed skills matrix in *Annex b* enables a company to record skills, both formal and informal, to identify gaps and to provide training to fill the gaps.

With the tendency to promote good technical personnel to senior positions, it must be realised that they might lack financial, personnel management and report writing skills. These skills need to be developed in additional training. As the industry grows, there is a rapid rate of technological change as well as emergent best practices, which require a programme of continuous personal development to which both individuals and companies need to be committed.

The matrix goes beyond any educational background and focuses on the skills required by the O&M service provider in a specific country. Therefore, many of the skills/requirements are adjustable due to different practices and regulations.



5

Technical Asset Management

Technical Asset Management (TAM) encompasses *support activities to ensure the best operation of a solar power plant or a portfolio, i.e., to maximise energy production, minimise downtime and reduce costs. It comprises the activities presented in this chapter.*

As highlighted in the Introduction, in the South African context, and especially in the residential and C&I segments, the installer usually assumes multiple roles in addition to installation. This usually includes the activities called “Technical Asset Management”.

In cases where the Technical Asset Manager and the O&M service provider are separate entities, close coordination and information sharing between the two entities is indispensable. This involves an integral knowledge about how much power and energy a project should be producing for any given time, considering factors such as weather, seasons, or degradation of assets, etc, ensuring long-term energy infrastructure reliability. It represents the entire value chain from investors to asset managers and service providers.

5.1. Technical reporting

The Technical Asset Manager is responsible for preparing and providing regular reporting to the Asset Owner and other stakeholders defined in the agreement between the Asset Owner and the Technical Asset Manager.

The frequency of the reporting can be set daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly or annually (with monthly being the most common and considered a best practice), with specifically defined content for each of these reports. Generating a report for any specific time range in the

past can also be possible. Detailed time-series data should also be reported or at least archived in the reporting system in order to improve the correct availability calculations. The spatial resolution of reports should be on the level of each inverter to better detect under-performing sections of the plants managed.

National Energy Regulator and the conditions of the PPA and interconnection agreement often require day and monthly forecasting in a prescribed format and to a desired format (see [Chapter 6.6](#) for details). Table 1 includes some proposed quantitative and qualitative indicators which should be in reports as a minimum requirement, a best practice or a recommendation. For more details on the individual indicators, see [Chapter 11. Key Performance Indicators](#).

A new trend in the industry is to extend the reporting beyond the pure PV plant indicators and to incorporate reporting on the actual activities. This means that both the Asset Manager and the O&M service provider can operate with an Asset Management Platform, ERP CMMS (Computerised Maintenance Management Systems) in order to measure various O&M KPIs (e.g., Acknowledgement Time, Intervention Time, Reaction Time, Resolution Time) and equipment performance (e.g., Mean Time Between Failures). The Technical Asset Manager should also report on Spare Parts Management and in particular on spare parts stock levels, spare parts consumption, in particular PV modules on hand, spare parts under repair. With the emergence of Predictive Maintenance, the Technical Asset Manager can also report on the state of each individual equipment. Furthermore, the periodic reporting can include information on the status of the security and surveillance system. In this case, the

TABLE 1 PROPOSED INDICATORS/VALUES REQUIRED FOR THE REPORTING

TYPE OF DATA	PROPOSED INDICATOR	TYPE OF REQUIREMENT
Raw data measurements	Irradiation	Minimum Requirement
	Active Energy Produced	Minimum Requirement
	Active Energy Consumed	Best Practice
PV Power Plant KPIs	Reference Yield	Recommendation
	Specific Yield	Recommendation
	Performance Ratio	Minimum Requirement
	Temperature-corrected Performance Ratio	Best Practice
	Energy Performance Index	Best Practice
	Uptime	Best Practice
	Availability	Minimum Requirement
O&M service provider KPIs	Energy-based Availability	Recommendation
	Acknowledgement time	Minimum Requirement
	Intervention time	Minimum Requirement
	Response time	Minimum Requirement
Equipment KPIs	Resolution time	Minimum Requirement
	Mean Time Between Failures (MTBF)	Recommendation
	Inverter Specific Energy Losses	Recommendation
	Inverter Specific Efficiency	Recommendation
Environmental KPIs	Module Soiling Losses	Recommendation
	Environmental and Biodiversity KPIs may vary depending on the geography, the micro-climate and the conditions of each site	Best Practice
Incident Reporting	Main incidents and impact on production (including lightning events, industrial action/strike, curtailment, theft)	Minimum Requirement
	Warranty issues	Best Practice
	HSE issues	Best Practice
	Spare parts stock levels and status	Best Practice
	Physical and Cyber Security Issues	Minimum Requirement
	Preventive Maintenance tasks performed	Best Practice

security service provider is responsible for providing the relevant input to the Technical Asset Manager.

On top of the periodical standard reports (monthly, quarterly or yearly) where operations activities are reported by the Technical Asset Manager to the Asset Owner, it is a best practice for the Technical Asset Manager to provide an intermediate operation report when a fault is generating a major loss. A loss due to a fault is considered major when PR and availability are

affected by more than a certain threshold throughout the ongoing monitoring (or reporting) period. A best practice is to set this threshold to 1% of Availability or 1% PR within a reporting period of one month. . The report should be sent as soon as the fault is acknowledged or solved and should contain all the relevant details related to the fault together with recommendations for Extraordinary Maintenance when the necessary operations are not included in the maintenance contract.

5 Technical Asset Management / continued

- Typically, this maintenance report should contain: Relevant activity tracks (alarm timestamp, acknowledge time, comments, intervention time, operations on site description, pictures etc)–
- The estimated production losses at the moment of writing the report.
- The estimated production losses for the total duration of the period, counting on the estimated resolution time if the issue is not solved yet.
- The device model, type and Serial Number when the fault is affecting a device.
- The peak power of the strings connected to the device(s).
- The alarm and status log as provided by the device.
- The resolution planning and suggestions. Eventual replacement needed.
- Spare parts available.
- Estimated cost for the extra-ordinary maintenance.

When dealing with owners who are not professional solar stakeholders, additional thought must be given to the information provided to them at all stages of project lifecycle.

- Installers (O&M service providers) should be clear about the need for ongoing maintenance and make sure this is reflected in any financial analysis provided to customers. Best practice would involve:
 - Either the retailer providing maintenance service themselves.
 - Or ensuring a clear and continuous handover to third party O&M service providers.
- Installers (O&M service providers) should provide a manual to the owner with contact information and description of operational indicators and procedures they can do, including clear documentation that states the customer as responsible for maintaining original insolation/ shade.

5.2. Site visits and non-intrusive inspections

It is recommended as a best practise that Technical Asset Managers undertake a bi-annual site visit in coordination with the O&M service provider to

perform a non-intrusive visual inspection, address current maintenance issues and plan out in cooperation with the O&M service provider and the ancillary service providers (if different) a maintenance improvement plan. These may coincide with visits to be carried out by the Lender's Technical Advisor.

5.3. Management of ancillary service providers

Technical Asset Managers or the O&M service provider is responsible for managing providers of ancillary (additional) services related to PV site maintenance such as panel cleaning and vegetation management; general site maintenance such as road management, site security; or on-site measurement such as meter readings and thermal inspections. For more information see section [7.5. Additional services](#).

This requires managing a process which spans from tendering for those services all the way to assessing the deliverables and assuring, in coordination with the O&M service provider, compliance with environmental, health and safety policies.

5.4. Interface with local energy authorities & utilities & regulatory compliance

Technical Asset Managers and O&M service providers should be made aware of the Economic Development Obligations of the project and which of these will fall under their mandate. The O&M service provider as well as appointed sub-contractors will often be major contributors to job creation, local business support and skills development initiatives.

The Technical Asset Manager is responsible for ensuring that the operation of the PV plant is in compliance with the regulations. Several levels of regulation have to be considered:

- Many countries have a governing law for the operation of energy generating assets or renewable energy and PV plants in particular. This is something the O&M service provider should be aware of in any case, even if the O&M service provider and the Technical Asset Manager are separate entities.
- For projects in South Africa, the National Energy Regulator (NERSA), as well as Eskom and its subsidiaries, Renewable Energy Technical Evaluation Committee (RETEC), the Single Buyer Office (SBO)

and the Independent Power Producer's (IPP) office are main authorities and regulatory compliance bodies. Some projects connected at the municipal level, may require Power Purchase Agreements (PPA) and Connection and Use of System Agreements and other agreements with the transmission system operator and/or the distribution system operator (if applicable) are also to be known and respected by the Technical Asset Manager. They should be familiar with all required reporting obligations within the PPA including reports related to outages, curtailment, availability, energy forecasting and meteorology.

- Power generation licenses, if applicable, need to be made available by the Asset Owner to the Technical Asset Manager so that the Technical Asset Manager can ensure compliance with the regulations of these licenses.
- Specific regulation for the site such as building permits, environmental permits, management plans and regulations can involve certain requirements and the need to cooperate with the local administration. Examples include restrictions to the vegetation management and the disposal of green waste imposed by the environmental administration body or building permits restricting working time on site or storage of utilities. The O&M service provider should also be aware of the land lease conditions and ensure compliance.
- It is the O&M service provider's responsibility to ensure grid code compliance and power generation forecasting. See 6.6. *Power Generation Forecasting* and 6.7. *Grid code compliance*. It is the responsibility of the Asset Manager to engage the DNO on discussions which will minimise outages and identify measures to safe-guard export capabilities.
- The Technical Asset Manager plays an important role in supporting the cooperation between the aggregator and the grid operator by informing the aggregator about plant production data, unavailable times, transferring network unavailability information from the grid operator, assuming discussions with the grid operator about the attachment to the balancing portfolio of the respective aggregator, and executing plant shutdown requests (in case of negative prices identified in the day-ahead market).

- Technical Asset Manager has to ensure compliance to Economic Development Obligations and report about this to IPP office, for qualification of the IPP to continue to operate in line with the implementation agreement.
- Other issues requiring formal compliance include reporting of safety plans and incidents, historic/cultural resource protection, noise ordinances that may limit work at night, and any other regulations imposed by an authority having jurisdiction.

As a minimum requirement the agreement between the Technical Asset Manager and the Asset Owner should list all the relevant permits and regulations and specify that the Asset Owner makes relevant documents available to the Technical Asset Manager.

As a best practice, all regulations, permits and stipulations should be managed within the electronic document management system. This allows the Technical Asset Manager to track reporting and maintenance requirements automatically and report back to the Asset Owner or the administration bodies.

5.5. Warranty management

The Technical Asset Manager can act as the Asset Owner's representative for any warranty claims vis-à-vis the suppliers of PV plant components. The agreement between the Asset Owner and the Technical Asset Manager should specify warranty management responsibilities of the Technical Asset Manager and the Asset Owner and set thresholds under which the Technical Asset Manager can act directly or seek the Asset Owner's consent. The Technical Asset Manager or the Operations team will then inform the Maintenance team to perform warranty related works on site. Usually, the warranty management scope is limited by Serial Failures (see definition below in this section). Execution of warranty is often separately billable.

The O&M Service provider should be fully aware that risks of reporting and managing failures are their responsibility. Bad record keeping of failures that could lead to future serial defect claims might be a good reason for warranty providers to reject claims. This includes formal and informal discussions with warranty providers. It is worth bearing in mind that serial defects occur over time and will only be acknowledged if your evidence is good enough.

5 Technical Asset Management / continued

Warranty management can be challenging in the South African market due to the limited local representation of component suppliers and logistical difficulties linked to importing replacement components. These aspects are addressed in chapter 9 on Spare Parts Management.

For any warranty claims the formal procedure provided by the warranty provider should be followed. All communications and reports should be archived for compliance and traceability reasons.

Objectives of Warranty Management:

- Ensure premature equipment failure risks are mitigated
- Improve the efficiency in claim processes
- Help to reduce the warranty period costs
- Receive and collect all the warranty claims
- Support the claim process
- Negotiate with manufacturers more efficient claim procedures
- Study the behaviour of the installed equipment
- Analyse the costs incurred during the warranty period

Types of warranties on a PV Plant:

- No Defects Warranty
- Warranty of Equipment (Product Warranty)
- Performance Warranty

No defects warranty

During the warranty period, anomalies can occur in the facility, which the EPC service provider is liable for. The anomalies must be resolved according to their nature and classification, in accordance with what is described in the following sections.

The anomalies or malfunctions that might occur within the facility warranty period might be classified in the following way:

- **Pending Works**, in accordance with the List of Pending Works (or Punch List) agreed with the client during EPC phase.

- **Insufficiencies**, these being understood as any pathology in the facility resulting from supplies or construction, that although done according to the project execution approved by the client, has proven to be inadequate, unsatisfactory, or insufficient.
- **Defects**, these being understood as any pathology resulting from supplies or construction executed in a different way from the one foreseen and specified in the project execution approved by the client.
- **Failure or malfunction of equipment**, being understood as any malfunction or pathology found in the equipment of the photovoltaic facility – Modules, Inverters, Power transformers or other equipment.

Anomalies handling

During the warranty period, all the anomaly processing should, as a best practice, be centralised by the Technical Asset Manager/O&M service provider, who is responsible for the first acknowledgment of the problem and its framework according to its type and is the main point of contact between the internal organisational structure and the client in accordance with the criteria defined below.

Anomalies and their effect or potential effect on energy production should be quantified. The Asset Owner, EPC service provider and Operator should then be equipped to determine an appropriate response. Asset Managers may request that the EPC service provider and Operator conduct a credible Root Cause Analysis (RCA).

Pending works, insufficiencies and defects

In the case of anomalies of the type "Pending Works", "Insufficiencies" or "Defects", the Technical Asset Manager must communicate the occurrence to the EPC service provider, who shall be responsible to assess the framework of the complaint in the scope of the EPC contract, determining the action to be taken.

Resolution of failures in the case of anomalies of the type "Failures"

The Technical Asset Manager should present the claim to the equipment supplier within 14 days and follow the claims process. O&M service provider and Technical Asset Manager should also be aware of the particular warranty conditions.

Serial defects (endemic failures)

Serial defects (endemic failures) are product failures at or above the expected failure rates resulting from defects in material, workmanship, manufacturing process and/or design deficiencies attributable to the manufacturer. Serial defects (endemic failures) are limited to product failures attributable to the same root cause. Asset Manager, O&M service provider, and EPC service provider should understand the defect threshold limit provided in the relevant EPC contract/equipment provider agreement, prior to undertaking a root cause analysis.

Performance warranty

EPC service providers usually provide a 5-year performance warranty period after the Commercial Operation Date (COD). In projects which are funded by way of project finance, the warranty period may be longer depending on the term of the project finance. During the warranty period, it is the responsibility of the Technical Asset Manager to monitor, calculate, report and follow-up the values of Performance Ratio and other KPIs guaranteed by the EPC service provider.

Within this scope, it is the responsibility of the Technical Asset Manager to:

- Manage the interventions done within the scope of the warranty in order to safeguard the performance commitments undertaken under the contract.
- Periodically inform the Asset Owner about the condition of the contracted performance indicators.
- Immediately alert the Asset Owner whenever the levels of the indicators have values or tendencies that could indicate a risk of failure.

Warranty enforcement

A warranty may be voided by mishandling or not observing instructions or conditions of the warranty. For example, storing modules improperly on site, such that the packaging is destroyed by rain, may void a warranty. In another case, partial shading of a thin-film module voids the warranty. Failure to provide adequate ventilation may void an inverter warranty. The manufacturer's warranty might cover replacement but not labour to remove, ship, and re-install an underperforming module.

A warranty often gives the manufacturer the option to "repair, replace, or supplement," with "supplement" meaning to provide modules to make up the difference in lost power. For example, if a system has 10,000 modules that are underperforming by 5%, the guarantor could satisfy the performance warranty by providing 500 additional modules to make up for the lost power, rather than replacing the 10,000 modules. However, increasing the plant size by 500 modules to restore guaranteed power might not be possible due to lack of rack space or electrical infrastructure. Also, expanding the system "nameplate" capacity would generally trigger a new interconnect agreement and permitting. For example, in South Africa most PPA contracts with Eskom do not allow to increase installed capacity.

Manufacturers also often have the option of paying a cash-value equivalent to the lost capacity of underperforming modules, but as the price of modules declines, this might be less than originally paid for the modules. Given the complications described above, this option is often preferred by system owners unless there is a required level of performance that must be maintained.

5.6. Insurance claims

The agreement between the Technical Asset Manager and the Asset Owner should specify insurance management responsibilities of the Asset Owner and the Technical Asset Manager. The Technical Asset Manager will at least be responsible for the coordination of site visits by an insurance provider's representative or technical or financial advisors in connection with the information collection and damage qualification, as well as for the drafting of technical notes to support the reimbursement procedure. The coordination of the insurance claim and the liaison with the insurers, brokers and loss adjusters, as well as finding the best insurance providers is usually with the Commercial/Financial Asset Manager (for more information on this, see section 6.13. *Suppliers account management* of the Asset Management Best Practice Guidelines).

For any insurance claims the formal procedure presented by the insurance provider should be followed. All communications and reports should be archived for compliance and traceability reasons. Timelines for submission of claims and associated information should be adhered to in order to avoid losses due to non-compliance.

Types of insurance related to PV plant operations and maintenance include:

- Property insurance, hazard insurance: coverage commensurate with the value of equipment and other improvements to a property; may also cover against other risks if included or unless excluded.
- Commercial general liability insurance: in a form covering all actions by owner or contractors, written on an occurrence basis, including coverage for products and completed operations, independent contractors, premises and operations, personal injury, broad form property damage, and blanket contractual liability. Liability of a fire started by the PV system has increased required liability coverage levels for PV systems. A liability policy should cover negligence claims, settlements, and legal costs too.
- Inland insurance or marine insurance: this insures against loss of equipment in shipping or not on the property premises. Inland insurance is often covered under property insurance policy.
- Workmen's compensation: covers costs for employee accidents.
- Professional liability insurance: this insures against errors and omissions often required by board of directors.
- Commercial vehicle insurance: insurance for owned and rented vehicles or personal vehicles used on company business.
- Warranty insurance: equipment warranty issued by manufacturer but backed up by an insurance company in the event that the manufacturing company goes out of business. Many insurance companies do not offer warranty insurance but rather cover such risk under property insurance.
- Business interruption insurance covers lost revenue due to downtime caused by covered event—this can be important in PPAs where revenue is essential for debt service and O&M expenditures.
- Energy production insurance covers cases when energy production is less than previously specified, which can improve access to debt financing and reduce debt interest rate (This is not widely available in South Africa).
- Mandatory legal insurance such as unemployment insurance.

Damage from lightning is a major concern for PV facilities in South Africa. However, lightning incidents are not universally covered by force majeure. The facility should have an acceptable and approved level of lightning and surge protection in accordance with the asset's insurance policy. The Technical Asset Manager and O&M service provider should maintain infrastructure in accordance with this design. All reporting obligations under the lightning protection section of the claims process should be noted and strictly adhered to.

The procedure for making claims described in the insurance policy should be followed to the letter, keeping copies of all submittals and correspondence with the insurance company. The insurance company (claims adjuster) will need to have access to the site provided to them in order to assess damage and to collect the information needed to process the claim.

With all of the above said, insurance solutions seem to provide an additional risk mitigation measure, and the variety of insurance solutions on the market triggers the challenge to understand the details of the terms and conditions subject to which insurance solutions are offered, and the resulting actual cover that the insurance policy provides. Many insurance solutions turn out to have significant exclusion clauses.

5.7. Contract management (operational contracts)

Contract management encompasses both technical and commercial/financial aspects. This document looks at contract management from a TAM point of view. For details on the perspective of the Commercial/Financial Asset Manager, see section 6.12. *Contract management (financial contracts)* of the Asset Management Best Practice Guidelines.

The Technical Asset Manager is in charge of ensuring compliance with the operational contracts in place, such as contracts related to O&M services, land lease, insurance, site security, communications and in some cases ancillary (additional) services such as panel cleaning and vegetation control or component procurement. (For more information on procurement, please refer to the Asset Management Best Practice Guideline's chapter 7. *Procurement*.)

Indeed, the oversight of and coordination with the O&M service provider is one of the key responsibilities of the Technical Asset Manager. Thus, the Technical

Asset Manager is responsible for performance supervision, too: proper oversight of O&M services, detecting when systems are underproducing and quickly and accurately diagnosing an under-performing plant.

The Technical Asset Manager oversees various contractual parameters, responsibilities and obligations of the Asset Owner and the contractual partners linked to the respective solar power plant. Contract management responsibilities depend largely on factors such as geographic location, project size, construction and off-taker arrangements.

As a minimum requirement, the initial step in this process is a comprehensive analysis of the contracts followed by a well-defined Division of Responsibility (DOR) matrix that clearly delineates which entity is responsible for which action on both the short and long term. Upon mutual agreement between the parties, the DOR can serve as the driving and tracking tool for term of life contractual oversight.

As a form of best practice, the Contract Manager's responsibilities often also extend to functioning as the initial contact for all external questions. This allows the Asset Owner optimal access to all areas of the service provider's organisation, and adherence to the contractual responsibilities. The Contract Manager also assumes the responsibility for invoicing of the O&M fees to the Asset Owner.

For quality purposes, the Technical Asset Manager should also track their own compliance with the respective contract, either O&M contract or Asset Management contract, and report to the Asset Owner in full transparency.

5.8. Asset optimisation (technical)

Technical Asset Managers also start being responsible for providing data and information analysis on assets they manage as well as to provide asset optimisation solutions. Primarily based on the following key areas:

- Plant performance
- Operation cost reduction
- Technology adaptation and upgrades (e.g., revamping and repowering)
- Technical people management and training

It is the role of the Technical Asset Manager to initiate and coordinate discussions with both the Owners and the O&M service providers to future-proof the assets and come up with a financial proposal based on data analysis which can assist the owners in making informed decisions.

Note that asset optimisation has commercial and financial aspects too, such as contract optimisation, presented in the Asset Management Best Practice Guidelines.

5.9. Environmental management

Depending on local and international environmental regulations, as well as on the Asset Owner's CSR (corporate social responsibility) and Environmental internal policies, the Asset Owner may have incentives to reduce or control negative environmental impacts.

An increasing body of scientific evidence indicates that well-designed and well-managed solar energy can support wildlife habitats and contribute significantly to national biodiversity targets. In fact, solar parks can have several additional advantages over other agricultural landscapes, in that they are secure sites with minimal human and technical disturbance from construction, require little or no use of chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers, and typically incorporate ecological features such as drainage ponds and hedgerows, which can be designed to maximize the value of their habitat.

The approach to managing biodiversity will be different for every solar park, and it is recommended that a site-specific plan be devised in each case (see [Chapter 3.1](#) for details).

Therefore, the Asset Manager is obliged to assess the impact or limitations of environmental legislation on the supplier's existing contracts. Furthermore, the Asset Manager is required to develop an action plan to address existing problems and minimise their impact.

As an example, the Asset Manager must oversee the O&M service provider's operational field work to ensure compliance with local environmental regulation (avoidance of chemicals to control vegetation, etc.); the security contract must be adapted, if possible, according to the wildlife existing around the photovoltaic plant and the appropriate security equipment, such as loudspeakers, spotlights and fences, must also be adapted.

Long-term environmental requirements can also include water tank installation, tree clearing, installation of drainage systems, amphibian follow-up, edge plantation, and installation of reptile rock shelters. As a best practice, the Technical Asset Manager's (or the O&M service provider's) environmental preservation activities should go beyond legal obligations.

The O&M service provider should ensure that the facility run in accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA Act) as well as the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA). Furthermore, the specific conditions as set out in the project environmental impact assessment (EIA) and permit should be aware to the O&M service provider and enforced as such.

5.10. Health & safety management

The Technical Asset Manager should oversee that the solar asset and the relevant suppliers comply with health & safety (H&S) requirements. If necessary, the Technical Asset Manager should hire an H&S expert to ensure compliance. For more information, see [Chapter 3. Environment, Health & Safety](#).

5.11. Lifetime conformity assessment

Conformity assessment is generally a widely used process used to show that a product, service, process, body, person or system meets specified requirements, be it international standards, local codes, best practice guidelines, or other relevant references. A conformity assessment report or certificate is issued by a competent, independent third-party body. That report or certificate will state that the referenced requirements are usually expressed as a form of "standard" that is typically prepared and adopted by an overarching member body based system. While a regular certification is based on a pass-fail logic, a rating differentiates different levels of quality and performance to facilitate the risk assessment for investors and banks. There are various conformity assessment systems, such as the IECRE system, which may be used by Technical Asset Managers. Rating systems like this are expected to become relevant, not only for South Africa but, for the whole African continent and other emerging markets.

5.12. Force majeure (pandemic) management

With the rise of COVID-19 pandemic, Owners and O&M service providers have been impacted in ways previously not seen. Reduced demand for energy as a result of lockdowns and reduced productivity has resulted in project curtailments which have been difficult to mitigate. Agreements between off-takers and power producers have been common to allow some exports to continue.

The human cost and travel restrictions have directly affected plants with reductions in available staff for O&M leading to delayed or deferred activities by smaller teams. For projects without spare parts on site, access to parts has proven challenging and the logistics of acquiring parts has been affected by global shipping delays. It is unclear if there are long-term lessons to be learned from all these items, but the process for O&M is under closer scrutiny than it has been for years.

The Technical Asset Manager's role in such circumstances is to negotiate the best possible terms with off-takers and authorities and implement internal measures in order to maintain business operations and revenues.

Labour unrest is also an increasingly common problem amongst solar facilities within South Africa. In the vast majority of instances these incidents are not covered by force majeure unless there are special mitigating circumstances.

6

Power Plant Operation

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Power Plant Operation is about remote monitoring, supervision and control of the PV power plant (in South Africa, mode controls such as voltage, reactive power or power factor control are required). It also involves subcontracting and coordination of maintenance activities. Power Plant Operation used to be a more passive exercise in the past, but with increasing grid integration efforts, more active and flexible operation will be required by grid operators. Examples include ordered shutdowns, power curtailment, frequent adjustment of settings such as power factor (source reactive power), frequency tolerances, and voltage tolerances. This section gives an overview of the operation tasks and requirements. As explained in the Introduction, in the South African context, especially in the C&I and residential segments, all aspects of O&M are assumed by the installer – including Power Plant Operation.

Figure 4 on pages 44 and 45 provides an overview of the most important tasks associated with power plant operation.

6.1. Documentation Management System (DMS)

SolarPV plant documentation is crucial for an in-depth understanding of the design, configuration and technical details thereof. It is the Asset Owner's responsibility to provide those documents and if not available, they should, as best practice, be recreated at the Asset Owner's cost.

Before assuming any maintenance and/or operational activities, it is important to understand in-depth the technical characteristics of the asset. There are two important aspects related to the management of this information:

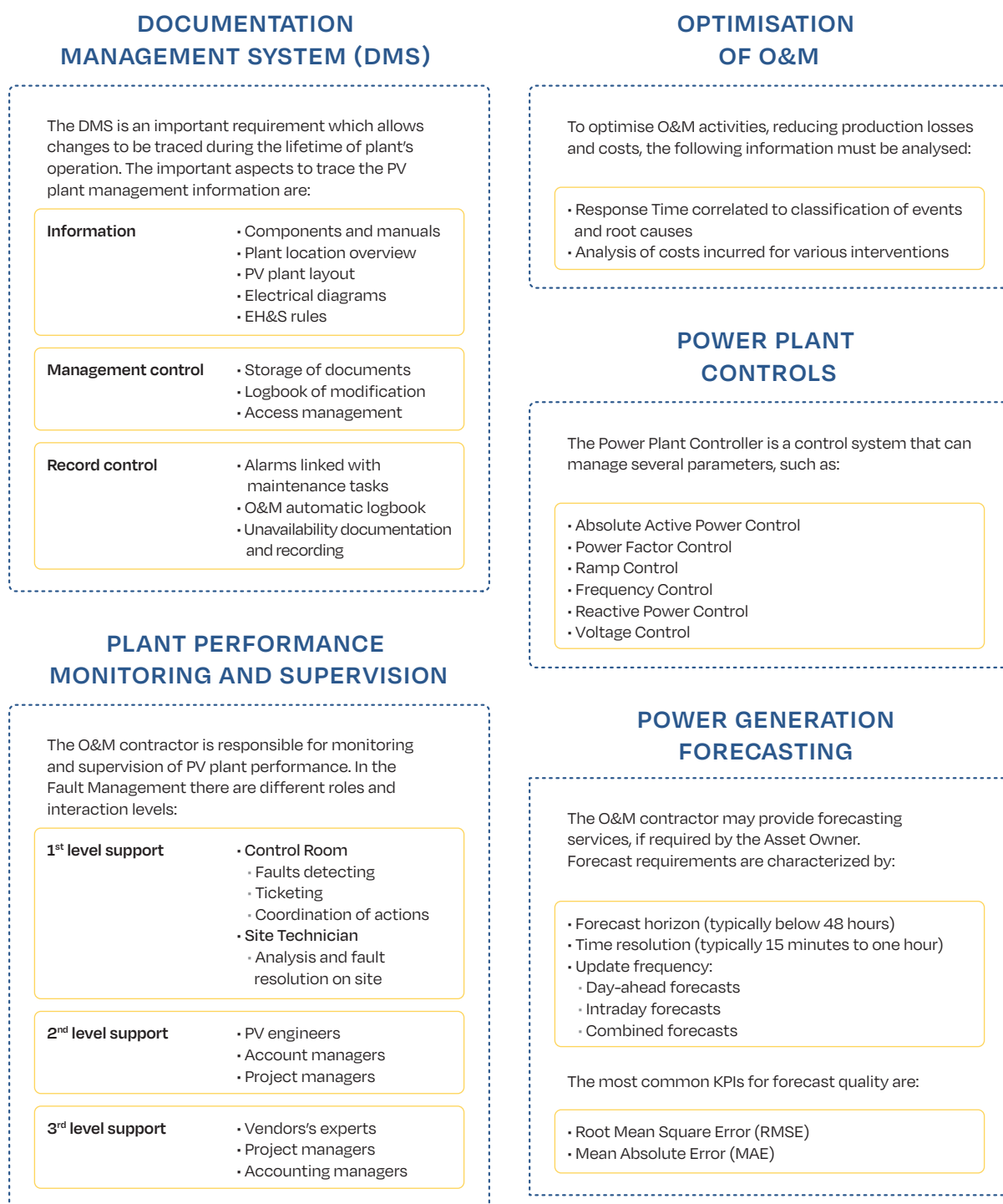
- Information type and depth of detail / as-built documentation
- Management and control

Moreover, for quality / risk management and effective operations management a good and clear documentation of contract information, plant information, maintenance activities and asset management are needed over the lifetime of the plant. This is what is called here:

- Record control (or records management)

Nowadays, there are different DMSs available and described by a series of standards (ISO) that can be implemented. This is an important requirement that would allow any relevant party to trace any changes during the lifetime of the plant's operation and follow up accordingly (e.g., when the O&M service provider changes, or the teams change, or the plant is sold etc). For single small and medium C&I and residential solar parks (hundreds of kWp) it is possible to consider simplified solutions, such as basic cloud storage services. In any case, the creation and following updating of the documentation is mandatory for a proper operational management of the solar parks. O&M service providers for small to medium C&I and residential solar parks with larger portfolios shall optimize their organization including the use of more advanced solutions similar to larger installations.

FIGURE 4 OVERVIEW OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TASKS IN POWER PLANT OPERATION



PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS AND IMPROVEMENT

The O&M contractor is responsible for the performance monitoring quality. The data, collected for different time aggregation, should be analysed at the following level:

Minimum requirement

- Portfolio level under control of the O&M
- Plant level
- Inverter level

Recommended

- String level

GRID CODE COMPLIANCE

The O&M provider is responsible for operating the PV plant in accordance with the respective national grid code. The requirements provided by the grid operator are usually:

- Power quality
- Voltage regulation
- Management of active power
- Management of reactive power

The specificities and quality requirements depends on the voltage level of the grid.

REPORTING AND TECHNICAL ASSET MANAGEMENT

The Operation team provides periodical report. For more details see Chapter 5. *Technical Asset Management*.

MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

In the event that the design of a PV power plant needs to be adjusted, the O&M contractor should be involved from the beginning in the following phases:

- Concept
- Design works
- Execution

SCADA/monitoring system needs to be updated after every change.

- Documentation of inverter replacement date
- Inverter manufacturer and type
- Inverter serial number

In order to optimize the activities, the adjustments needs to be applied to the following:

- Site Operating Plan
- Annual Maintenance Plan
- Annual Maintenance Schedule

POWER PLANT SECURITY

It is necessary that, together with the O&M Contractor, the Asset Owner puts in place a Security protocol in case of trespassing on the PV plant. A specialized security service provider will be responsible for:

- Intrusion systems
- Surveillance systems
- Processing alarms
- Site patrolling

An intrusion system may be formed by:

- Simple fencing or barriers
- Intrusion detection
- Alerting system
- Remote closed-circuit television (CCTV) video monitoring
- Backup communication line (recommended)

Process for liaison with local emergency services, e.g. police should be considered.

Information type and depth of detail / as-built documentation

The documentation set accompanying the solar PV plant should, as a best practice, contain the documents described in *Annex c*. The IEC 62446 standard can also be considered to cover the minimum requirements for as-built documentation.

In general, for optimum service provision and as a best practice, the O&M service provider should have access to all possible documents (from the project development, EPC and commissioning phases, as well as handovers). The Site Operating Plan is the comprehensive document prepared and provided by the plant EPC service provider, which lays out a complete overview of the plant location, layout, electrical diagrams, components in use and reference to their operating manuals, EH&S rules for the site and certain further topics. All detailed drawings from the EPC service provider need to be handed over to the O&M service provider and be stored safely for immediate access in case of PV plant issues or questions and clarifications with regards to permits and regulation.

Management and control

Regarding the document control, the following guidelines should be followed:

- Documents should be stored either electronically or physically (depending on permits/regulations) in a location with controlled access. An electronic copy of all documents should be available for all documents
- Only authorised people should be able to view or modify the documentation. A logbook of all the modifications should be kept. As a best practice, such a logbook should contain minimally the following information:
 - Name of person, who modified the document
 - Date of modification
 - Reason of modification and further information, for example, link to the work orders and service activities
- Versioning control should be implemented as a best practice. Involved people should be able to review past versions and be able to follow through the whole history of the document.

Record control

A key point is that necessary data and documentation are available for all parties in a shared environment and that alarms and maintenance can be documented in a seamless way. Critical to the Operations team is that the maintenance tasks are documented back to and linked with the alarms which might have triggered the respective maintenance activity (work order management system log). Photographs from on-site should complement the documentation (when applicable) – photo documentation. Tickets (ticket interventions) should be stored electronically and made available to all partners. The Asset Owner should also maintain ownership of those records for future references.

To learn from the past and ongoing operations and maintenance and to then be able to improve performance via for example Predictive Maintenance in the following years, it is crucial that all data, workflows and alarms are stored to create automatic logbooks of operation and maintenance and alarms. Such data collection together with those acquired by the monitoring tool can be used for further analysis and future recommendations to the client. Such analysis and the respective outcomes should also be recorded.

Last but not least, there should be a proper documentation for the curtailment periods as well as the repairing periods when the plant is fully or partly unavailable. This will all be recorded by the monitoring system to be able to calculate lost energy during maintenance activities. For this, having the correct reference values at hand is crucial. For important examples of input records that should be included in the record control, see *Annex d*.

As in the case of the as-built documentation, all records, data and configuration of the monitoring tool and any sort of documentation and log that might be useful for a proper service provision must be backed up and available when required. This is also important when the O&M service provider changes.

6.2. Plant performance monitoring and supervision

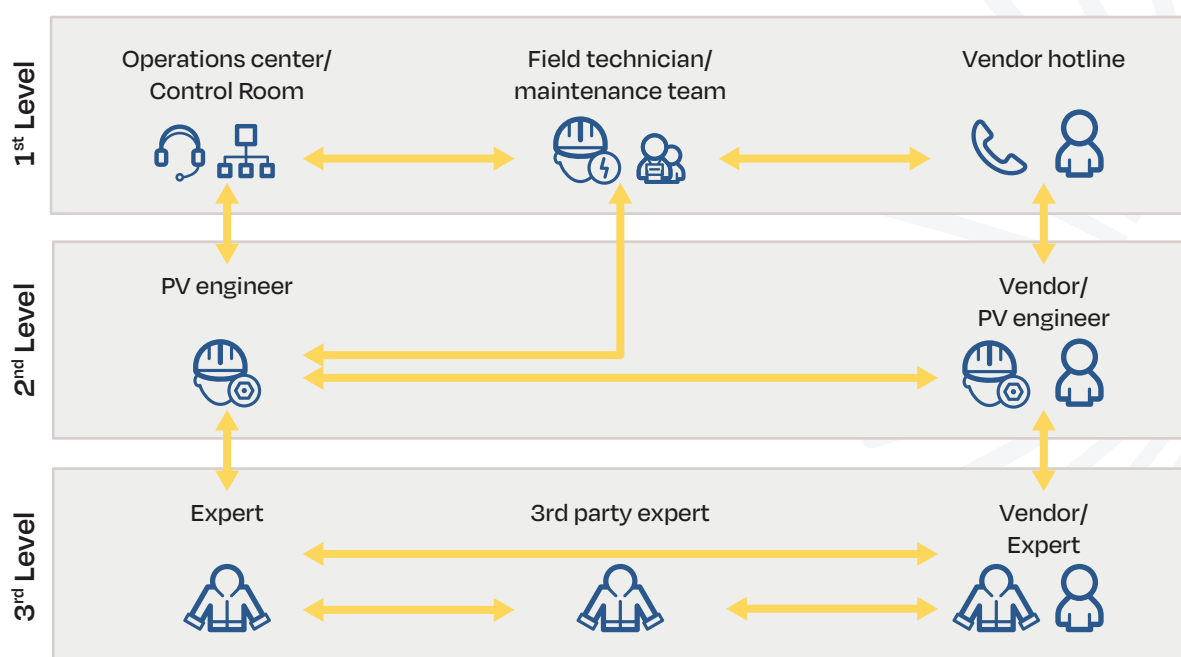
The Operations team is responsible for continuous monitoring and supervision of the PV power plant conditions and its performance. This service is done remotely through the use of monitoring software system and/or plant operations centres. The O&M

service provider should have full access to all data collected from the site in order to perform data analysis and provide direction to the Maintenance service provider/team.

Normally, in **Fault Management (Incident Management)** several roles and support levels interact:

- With the help of monitoring and its alarms the **Operations Centre (Control Room)** detects a fault. It is responsible for opening a “ticket” and coordinates the various actions of troubleshooting. It collects as much information and diagnostics as possible in order to establish an initial documentation, tries to categorise the issue and even to resolve it on the spot, for example, by rebooting the communication systems from distance. So, it becomes part of **1st Level Support**. Then it tracks the incidents until their resolution.
- If this doesn't help or the fault cannot be sufficiently categorised, the Operations Centre may call a **field technician** who can be a local electrician or member of the maintenance team. They try to analyse and solve the fault on-site (**1st Level Support**).
- If 1st Level Support is not able to resolve the incident right away, it will escalate it to **2nd Level Support**. It consists of **PV engineers** or **Project/Account Managers** who have greater technical skills, higher access permissions, and enough time to analyse the fault in depth. They may be internal or of the Vendor's staff.
- If the resolution of an incident requires special expertise or access, 2nd Level engineers might need to contact **experts** (inhouse, Vendor's or third party's experts; = **3rd Level Support**). In some organisations the Project/Account Managers can cover both the 2nd and 3rd Level Support, based on their seniority and experience.
- When the fault is solved, the Operations Centre closes the ticket.

FIGURE 5 SUPPORT LEVELS IN FAULT MANAGEMENT



6 Power Plant Operation / continued

For small to medium C&I and residential solar parks simplified procedures could be applied to plant performance monitoring and supervision activities. The Fault management could be performed on daily basis introducing a classification of alarms by priority, for example, with respect to rated power out of service.

Depending on the level of development of the local O&M market, it is also suggested to consider the opportunity to provide during the execution phase a first level maintenance training to local personnel eventually involved in the project. During the operation phase these local resources could be able (at least) to manage the first level troubleshooting and the small repairs, and so reduce the time it takes to intervene and restore production capacities.

Such kind of approach could also support the development of the local O&M market. O&M service providers for small to medium C&I and residential solar parks with larger portfolios might optimise their organisation by including cooperation with those local suppliers.

Besides the data from the site, if a CCTV system is available on site, the O&M service provider should, as a best practice, be able to access it for visual supervision and also have access to local weather information.

The O&M service provider is responsible for being the main interface between the plant owner, the grid operator and the regulator (if applicable) over the lifetime of the O&M contract regarding production data. The Operations team should be reachable by the Asset Owner via a hotline during daytime, when the system is expected to generate electricity. The Operations team is also responsible to coordinate accordingly with the Maintenance service provider/team.

For more information on monitoring requirements, see [Chapter 10. Data and monitoring requirements](#).

6.3. Performance analysis and improvement

The O&M Contractor makes sure that the performance monitoring is correct.

In general, the data should be analysed down to the following levels:

1. Portfolio level (group of plants) under control of the O&M service provider (minimum requirement)
2. Plant level (minimum requirement)
3. Inverter level (minimum requirement)
4. String level (as a recommendation)

The analysis should furthermore show the required data on the specific levels listed above and for different time aggregation periods from the actual recording interval up to monthly, quarterly (for medium or large-scale) or semi-annual (for small-scale installations) levels.

The analysis should also include the option for having custom alarms based on client specific thresholds such as for example business plan data or real-time deviations between inverters on-site.

In particular, the agreed KPIs should be computed and reported (see [Chapter 11. Key Performance Indicators](#)). Special attention should be paid to the fact that such KPI calculations should take into consideration the contractual parameters between O&M service provider and Asset Owner, in order to provide an accurate and useful calculation for evaluation and eventually liquidated damages or bonuses.

6.4. Optimisation of O&M

An essential part of Operations is the analysis of all the information generated throughout O&M, such as Response Time, and how this correlates to the various classification of events and root causes. Another vital part of Operations is the analysis of costs incurred for various interventions, categorised into materials and labour. Having such information helps to further optimise the asset by reducing production losses and the cost of O&M itself.

6.5. Power plant controls

It should be noted that this task is usually not applicable for small to medium scale installations. However, if applicable, the Operations team is the responsible contact for the grid operator for plant controls. The Operations team will control the plant remotely (if applicable) or instruct the qualified maintenance personnel to operate breakers/controls

on site. The O&M service provider is responsible for the remote plant controls or emergency shutdown of the plant, if applicable and in accordance with the respective grid operator requirements (see also 6.7. *Grid code compliance*) and regulations (see 5.4. *Interface with local energy authorities and regulatory compliance*). The plant control function varies from country to country and in some cases from region to region. The respective document refers to details in PV plant control regulation which are issued by the respective grid operator and (energy market) regulator.

The Power Plant Controller itself is a control system that can manage several parameters such as active and reactive power and ramp control of PV plants. The set points can normally be commanded either remotely or locally from the SCADA. Moreover, the system should be password protected and log all the executed commands. Any executed commands should release real-time notifications to the Operations team.

The following list shows typically controlled parameters in a PV plant:

- Voltage Control
- Reactive Power Control
- Power Factor Control

6.6. Power Generation Forecasting

Like the previous point, this task is usually not applicable for small to medium scale installations. However, if the Asset Owner requires Power Generation Forecasts, the O&M service provider may supply such forecasts (usually for large scale plants). Forecasting services for PV power generation are generally offered by operators of PV monitoring services, however external services can also provide this function. The Solar Monitoring Best Practices Mark (www.solarbestpractices.com) is a useful tool to help stakeholders select suitable Monitoring Systems. When the Asset Owner requires Power Generation Forecasting from the O&M service provider, they could choose a service level agreement with the forecast provider. This kind of activities may have an influence on the contract agreement for electricity dispatching between the Asset Owner and a trading service provider.

The requirements for such forecasts may differ from country to country and also depends on the contract agreement for electricity dispatching between the Asset Owner and a trading service provider. Forecast requirements are characterised by the forecast horizon, the time resolution, and the update frequency, all depending on the purpose. For power system or power market related purposes, forecast horizons are typically below 48 hours and the time resolution is 15 minutes to one hour, in line with the programme time unit of the power system or the market. Common products are day-ahead forecasts, intra-day forecasts and combined forecasts. Day-ahead forecasts are typically delivered in the morning for the next day from 0 to 24 and updated once or twice during that day. Intraday forecasts are delivered and updated several times per day for the rest of the day and should be delivered automatically by the forecast provider.

For long-term planning of unit commitment and maintenance decisions, forecasts with longer time horizons are used, typically one week or more.

PV Power Generation Forecasts rely on numerical weather predictions, satellite data and/or statistical forecasting and filtering methods. Most products combine several of these techniques. Good practice requires numerical weather predictions for day-ahead forecasting and a combination with satellite data for intra-day forecasts. In all cases, good practice requires statistical filtering which in turn requires a near-real-time data feed from the monitoring system to the forecast provider. For best practice, the forecast provider should also be informed about scheduled outages and the expected duration of forced outages.

The most common KPIs for forecast quality are the Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) and the Mean Absolute Error (MAE). They are normalised to peak power and not to energy yield.

In South Africa, in former rounds of REIPPPP scheduled outages had to be announced and forecasts were provided as supplementary information without obligation to accuracy. The upcoming round five is however expected to introduce a new KPI, the FVR (Forecast Variation Ratio in %) that measures the deviation from actual vs forecast applying penalties when the deviation is higher than a threshold negotiated by the parties.

6 Power Plant Operation / continued

6.7. Grid code compliance

The O&M service provider, and in particular the Operations team is responsible to operate the PV plant in accordance with the respective national grid code. The operator of the grid, to which the PV plant is connected (either low voltage grid or medium voltage grid or high voltage grid) provides the requirements for power quality, voltage regulation and management of active and reactive power. The Operations team is responsible for avoiding unintentional islanding in cases of weak grids with frequent load shedding. In some countries (and/or regions) specific grid codes for renewable energy generators and consequently solar PV plants have been issued.

Depending on the voltage level of the grid the plant is connected to, the specificities and quality requirements for the PV plant change. A higher level of the grid usually has more specific and higher quality requirements.

Most of the utility scale PV plants connected to a grid are required to be controllable to meet the grid operator requirements. Such plant controls allow the grid operator to adjust the power output from the PV plant according to the grid capacity and power frequency requirements.

It is expected that the O&M service provider is familiar with all the details of the grid code and grid operator requirements. Depending on the regulations, either the grid operator is steering the PV plant controller themselves (with remote signals) or the Operations team is managing the plant controller per direction of the grid operator.

In South Africa, for utility scale projects, Eskom prescribes the National Grid Code Compliance requirements for each technology of a Renewable Power Plant (RPP). Important control functions for RPPs of Grid Code version 3.0 are summarised in Table 2 and depend on plant size (A3: 0.1-1 MVA; B: 1-20 MVA, C: >20 MVA).

Control functions required for RPPs according to Grid Connection Code version 3.0 for RPPs connected to the electricity transmission system or the distribution system in South Africa.

In addition to this, the RPP Grid Code Compliance Standard Test Guideline assists the operator during the compliance testing.

Similar to some emerging markets around the world, in the African context, a specific challenge facing O&M service providers is the fact that many inverters do not have pre-configurations for the local grid code. In such cases the O&M service provider should turn to authorities to find the best solution.

TABLE 2 CONTROL FUNCTIONS FOR RENEWABLE POWER PLANTS OF DIFFERENT SIZES AS LISTED IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN GRID CODE, VERSION 3

CONTROL FUNCTION	A3	B	C
Frequency control	-	-	X
Absolute production constraint	X	X	X
Delta production constraint	-	-	X
Power gradient constraint	X	X	X
Q control	-	X	X
Power factor control	-	X	X
Voltage control	-	X	X

6.8. Management of change

In the event that the design of a PV power plant needs to be adjusted after the Commercial Operation Date, the O&M service provider should, as a best practice, be involved by the Asset Owner and the EPC service provider and can be a main contributor if not the leader of this change process. Reasons for such changes can be motivated by non-compliance of the PV power plant with the capacity predicted by the EPC service provider, by regulation (introduction of new PV power plant controls regulations), by the unavailability of spare parts or components, or by an interest to upgrade the PV power plant, or by severe safety risks.. These events would cause some new design works for the PV power plant, procurement and installation of equipment and will lead to adjustment of operation and maintenance procedures and/or documentation. It may also impact certain performance commitments or warranties provided by the O&M service provider, which need to be adjusted.

In any such case, the O&M service provider should be involved in such changes to the PV power plant from the beginning. Concepts, design works, and execution need to be coordinated with ongoing O&M activities. Implementation to the plant SCADA and monitoring system is required. For data continuity and long-term analysis, the monitoring system should be able to trace all changes of electrical devices. This should include documentation of inverter replacement date, manufacturer and type, and serial number in a structured way for further analysis (e.g., spare part management, Predictive Maintenance analysis). The monitoring of replaced devices will also facilitate the O&M service provider to verify that the new component is correctly configured and is sending data of good quality. Adjustments to the Site Operating Plan, the Annual Maintenance Plan and the Annual Maintenance Schedule need to be applied and the O&M service provider needs to familiarise the O&M staff with the operating manuals of the new equipment. Such change will have a definite impact on Spare Parts Management and inventory (replacement). Depending on the significance of such changes, the O&M annual fee might need to be adjusted.

It is advisable that the O&M service provider takes the lead in the process of such change. The O&M service provider is the trusted partner of the Asset Owner and should advise the owner in the decision making of

such change processes. In the case of major changes, the owner should also consider informing lenders in the decision process and provide concepts, proposals and calculations.

The fixed O&M fee does not usually cover such services. The Asset Owner and the O&M service provider should manage changes in a rather formalistic way. This procedure might include the following steps: description of proposed change (including time plan, costs, consequences, and alternatives), authorisation of the change by the Asset Owner, realisation of the change, documentation by the O&M service provider and acceptance.

In South Africa, changes of the RPP's installed capacity should be avoided, because otherwise lengthy new approval steps may be necessary.

6.9. Power plant security

It is important that the solar PV plant, or key areas of it, are protected from unauthorised access. This serves the dual purpose of protecting the equipment of the plant and also keeping members of the public safe. Unauthorised access may be accidental, people wandering into the plant without realising the dangers, or it may be deliberate for the purposes of theft or vandalism.

Together with the O&M service provider and the security service provider, the Asset Owner will put in place a Security Protocol in case an intrusion is detected.

In most countries there are strict legal requirements for security service providers. Therefore, PV power plant security should be ensured by specialised security service providers subcontracted by the O&M service provider. The security service provider will be responsible for the correct functioning of all the security equipment including intrusion and surveillance systems as well as processing alarms arriving from the security system by following the Security Protocol and the use of the surveillance systems installed on site. The security system provider will be also responsible for any site patrolling or other relevant services. The security service provider should also assume liability for the security services provided. The O&M service provider will coordinate with the security service provider and can optionally act as an interface between the Asset Owner and the security service provider.

6 Power Plant Operation / continued

The level of the adequate security measures depends on various actors, including local legal requirements, risk levels and the size of the power plant. For different power plant size categories, see the Introduction. A security system may be formed of simple fencing (in South Africa often electrified fencing in the case of utility-scale power plants) or barriers but may also include intrusion detection and alerting systems and remote closed-circuit television (CCTV) video monitoring. An access protocol shall ensure that only authorised access is possible. This can be done by way of phone with passwords or security pass codes, both of which should be changed periodically.

For additional security and in high-risk areas it is advised that there is a backup communication line installed (the first thing that gets damaged in case of vandalism is the communication with the surveillance station) as well as an infrastructure for monitoring connectivity and communication with the security system. As well as any remote monitoring, it is likely that provision for onsite attendance is required when significant events occur. Processes for liaison with local emergency services, for example police, should be considered.

Within the solar plant, there may also be additional areas with restricted access, for example locations containing High Voltage equipment. When authorising access to the plant it is important that all workers or visitors are appropriately informed of the specific access and security arrangements and where they should or should not be. Warning signs and notices can form an important part of this and may be mandated depending on local regulations.

Particular attention should be paid to periods of construction or maintenance when usual access arrangements may be different. It is important that security is maintained at all times, particularly when there are activities that may be of more interest to members of the public, children or thieves.

The Asset Owner will likely have insurance policies in place directly or indirectly and these will be dependent on certain levels of security and response being maintained. Failure to meet these may have important consequences in the case of an accident or crime.

7

Power Plant Maintenance

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This chapter is about the various responsibilities and tasks related to Maintenance. As outlined in the Introduction, in the South African context, especially in the C&I and residential segments, all aspects of O&M are assumed by the installer – including Power Plant Maintenance.

Maintenance is usually carried out on site by specialised technicians, or, in certain cases, subcontractors, in close coordination with the analyses prepared by the experts in charge of Power Plant Operation.

Figure 6 on the following page provides an overview of the four main types of power plant maintenance and additional services.

7.1. Preventive maintenance

Preventive Maintenance (also called Scheduled Maintenance) activities are the core element of the maintenance services to a PV plant. It comprises regular visual and physical inspections, as well as verification activities conducted with specific frequencies of all key components which are necessary to comply with the operating manuals and recommendations issued by the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) or correspond to the experience of maintenance personnel. It must also maintain the equipment and component warranties in place and reduce the probability of failure or degradation. The activities should comply with respective legal issues for example, national standards for periodic inspection of certain electrical components. Technical experience and relevant track

records will optimise the activities further. The O&M contract should include this scope of services and the frequency of each task.

This maintenance is carried out at predetermined intervals or according to prescribed OEM and O&M manuals. These are included in a detailed Annual Maintenance Plan which provides an established time schedule with a specific number of iterations for carrying out the maintenance.

It is under the responsibility of the O&M service provider to prepare the maintenance plan, including the frequencies contracted. These activities should be reported to the Client (Asset Owner or Asset Manager).

The “Annual Maintenance Plan” (see *Annex e* or download it from www.solarpowereurope.org) developed as an attachment of this report includes a list of regular inspections per equipment (e.g., module, inverter etc) and per unit of equipment (e.g., sensors, fuses etc).

An example of Preventive Maintenance is thermographic inspection aiming to identify defective panels or electric connections on a PV plant. Several categories of anomalies (hot spots, hot strips, moisture ingress, soiling, loose connections etc.) that can occur can significantly reduce power plant performance. Thermographic inspection procedures are performed either by operators with handheld Infrared (IR) cameras or by using remotely piloted drones or piloted aircraft equipped with dedicated thermal and optical payloads. It is noteworthy that aerial thermography as an innovative technology (see section *13.1.1 Advanced aerial thermography*), can

FIGURE 6 OVERVIEW OF THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF POWER PLANT MAINTENANCE



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significantly benefit power plant maintenance procedures as it can lead to time and cost savings as well as safety improvements. This is typically applied to the PV arrays.

Preventive Maintenance also includes ad-hoc replacement of parts of inverters or sensors (Predictive Maintenance). In general, outside of the equipment warranty terms or after its expiration it is important to follow detailed Preventive Maintenance procedures, which are agreed upon in the Annual Maintenance Plan.

The O&M service provider should include in the plant production schedule, planned downtime for Preventative Maintenance. For C&I and utility installations, in cases where downtime is necessary to perform Preventive Maintenance, its execution during the night or low irradiance periods would be considered best practice as the losses are minimised. For small scale and standalone installations, this is only a recommendation.

7.2. Corrective maintenance

Corrective Maintenance covers the activities performed by the Maintenance team in order to restore a PV plant system, equipment or component to a status where it can perform the required function. The Corrective Maintenance takes place after a failure detection either by remote monitoring and supervision or during regular inspections and specific measurement activities (see *Annex e*).

Corrective Maintenance includes three activities:

1. **Fault Diagnosis**, also called troubleshooting to identify the cause and location of a fault.
2. **Temporary Repair**, (workarounds), to restore the required function of a faulty item quickly for a limited time, until a Repair is carried out.
3. **Repair**, to restore the required function permanently.

Corrective Maintenance includes two activities:

1. **Scheduled Corrective Maintenance**, repair actions that are required but are deferred to a later date e.g., due to budget, time etc.
2. **Improvement**, minor modifications required to prevent the same kind of failure from recurring.

In cases where the PV plant or segments need to be taken offline, the execution of scheduled Corrective Maintenance during night or low irradiance hours would be considered best practice as the overall power generation is barely/not affected.

Corrective Maintenance can be divided into three levels of intervention:

- **1st level:** Intervention to restore the functionality of a device without the need for substituting a component. In general, this kind of Corrective Maintenance includes only labour activity carried out by a specialised technician (that could belong to the O&M maintenance team or be subcontracted). This activity could be included in the O&M agreement or billed separately on hourly rates on top of the O&M contract, depending on the specific scope of work agreed between the parties. For example, it could consist of repairing a device that stopped due to a failure.
- **2nd level:** Intervention to restore the functionality of a device that requires substitution of a component. In general, this kind of Corrective Maintenance involves labour activity carried out by a specialised technician (that could belong to the O&M maintenance team or be subcontracted) plus the physical intervention on the device in order to substitute a part of it. An example would be an inverter fan failure where the maintenance team intervenes to substitute the fan in order to restore inverter functionality.
- **3rd level:** Intervention to restore device functionality with a necessity to intervene on the software of the device. In general, this kind of Corrective Maintenance includes both labour activity carried out by specialised technician (that could belong to the O&M maintenance team or be subcontracted) and, often, also an intervention on behalf of the device manufacturer's maintenance team or of other external companies that have been licensed by the device manufacturer to intervene and restore device functionality. This activity could be included in the O&M agreement or billed separately, depending on the specific scope of work agreed between the parties. Generally, this intervention is excluded by the O&M contractual scope of work especially when the component manufacturers' maintenance team or third-party licensed company needs to intervene. By way of an example a 3rd level Corrective

Maintenance could involve a device fault without apparent reason or specific broken component that could be restored only through reconfiguration or software update by the manufacturer.

The scope of Corrective Maintenance activities and its "border" or definition with respect to Preventive Maintenance requires specific attention and it should be properly defined in the Maintenance contract. For an easier comprehension, an example is presented below:

- A cable termination tightening activity using a torque device for the correct fixation should be under the Preventive Maintenance scope of works, but depending on the quantity and/or frequency, it could be considered a Corrective Maintenance activity.

Usually, the Corrective Maintenance is contractually obliged to comply with contractually agreed minimum Response Times (see 11.3.3. *Response Time* and 12.3.2. *Response Time guarantee*).

Contractual agreements can include that Corrective Maintenance will be capped on a yearly basis, depending on the type and risk profile of the Asset Owner. A pure financial investor might have a different requirement to an energy producer (e.g., utility or IPP) with regards to coverage under the Corrective Maintenance.

Interventions for reconditioning, renewal and technical updating, save for the cases where those actions are directly included in the scope of the contract, should be excluded from Corrective Maintenance and included in the Extraordinary Maintenance (see 7.4. *Extraordinary Maintenance*).

A key aspect of corrective maintenance is to be able to track failures to their root cause, which is most often problematic. OEM provided fault codes are generally used to assist with root cause identification. For example, Manufacturer's fault codes may identify installation errors or unfavourable environmental conditions such as high temperatures inside enclosures. But fault codes are not always available (for example in the case of low performance of modules).

With each maintenance activity it is important to track the effectiveness of responses to problems in order to build best practice knowledge.

7.3. Predictive maintenance

Predictive Maintenance is a special service provided by O&M service providers who follow best practices principles. It is defined as a condition-based maintenance carried out following a forecast derived from the analysis and evaluation of the significant parameters of the degradation of the item (according to EN 13306). A prerequisite for a good Predictive Maintenance is that the devices on-site can provide information about their state, in such a way that the O&M service provider can evaluate trends or events that signal deteriorations of the device. As a best practice, the device manufacturer should provide the complete list of status and error codes produced by the device together with the detailed description of their meaning and possible impact on the function of the device. Additionally, a standardisation of status and error codes through inverters and dataloggers within a same brand should be followed and, in the future, this standardisation should be common to all manufacturers.

The Asset Owner or interested party that wants to benefit from Predictive Maintenance should, as a best practice, select "intelligent" equipment with sufficient sensors, and opt for an appropriate monitoring software system which should be able to provide basic trending and comparison (timewise or between components and even between PV sites) functionality (minimum requirement).

The Operations team of the O&M service provider does Predictive Maintenance through condition monitoring which includes continuous or regular monitoring, supervision, forecast and performance data analysis (e.g., historical performance and anomalies) of the PV plant (at the DC array, transformer, inverter, combiner box or/and string level). This can identify subtle trends that would otherwise go unnoticed until the next circuit testing or thermal imaging inspection. Condition monitoring indicates upcoming component or system failures or underperformance (e.g., at the level of PV modules, inverters, combiner boxes, trackers etc.).

Before deciding which Predictive Maintenance actions to recommend, the Operations team should implement and develop procedures to effectively analyse historical data and faster identify behaviour changes that might jeopardise systems performance. These changes of behaviour are usually related to the pre-determined or unpredicted equipment

degradation process. For this reason, it is important to define and to monitor all significant parameters of wear-out status, based on the sensors installed, algorithms implemented into the supervision system and other techniques.

Following such analysis, the Maintenance team can implement Predictive Maintenance activities to prevent any possible failures which can cause safety issues and energy generation loss.

For an efficient Predictive Maintenance, a certain level of maturity and experience is required, which is at best a combination of knowledge of the respective system's performance, related equipment design, operation behaviour and relevant accumulated experience and track record from the service provider. Normally it is a process that starts after the implementation of an appropriate monitoring system and the establishment of a baseline. Such baseline will then represent the entire PV system operation as well as how equipment interacts with each other and how this system reacts to "environmental" changes.

Predictive Maintenance has several advantages, including:

- Optimise the safety management of equipment and systems during their entire lifetime.
- Anticipate maintenance activities (both corrective and preventive).
- Delay, eliminate and optimise some maintenance activities.
- Reduce time to repair and optimise maintenance and Spare Parts Management costs.
- Reduce spare parts replacement costs.
- Increase availability, plant performance ratio, energy production and performance of equipment and systems.
- Reduce emergency and non-planned work.
- Improve predictability.

The following four specific examples show how Predictive Maintenance might be implemented.

Example 1

An O&M service provider signs a new contract for a PV plant equipped with central inverters. Analysing its backlog of maintenance, the O&M service provider

knows that these inverters showed several times in the past signs of power loss due to overheating. This might be related to problems in the air flow, filter obstructions, fans or environmental changes (high temperature during summer). It was decided to monitor the temperature of IGBTs (Insulated-Gate Bipolar Transistors). Before any emergency action might be needed, in case these components have some variations in their behaviour, an "air flow inspection" is performed to detect if this change is related to the air flow. This type of activity is a condition-based inspection performed after the detection of a change in a significant parameter. It is also considered as a type of Predictive Maintenance. The final purpose is to identify if, for example, the ventilation systems will need some upgrade, replacement or if there is any type of air flow obstruction or even if it is required to anticipate replacing or cleaning the filters.

Example 2

The Operations team detects a possible underperformance of one of the sections inside the PV plant. This could be the power transformer, the inverter or a particular PV generator area that presents a lower performance when compared with others in the same conditions (or past behaviours evidence of loss of production). After the anomaly detection or recognition, an incident is created and immediately sent to the Maintenance team. Before anything happens that might jeopardise contractual guarantees and might need urgent interventions, the O&M service provider decides to do a "General Infrared Inspection" in the PV field taking general pictures with drones, also known as unmanned aircraft. The main purpose of this inspection is to identify possible problems related to PV modules that might justify the loss of performance. This is considered as a type of Predictive Maintenance.

Example 3

The Operations team or the inverter provider monitors all critical parameters of the inverter and can provide information related to the health and performance of each individual inverter as an absolute value or as a relative comparison of different inverters at one PV site or compare batch of inverters between different PV sites. This type of information can help O&M service providers to operate PV sites more cost effectively without compromising the equipment

health. On the other side, Asset Manager (or Owner) can also compare how inverters are aging at various sites managed by different O&M service providers and evaluate how well their investment is being managed. For instance, one O&M service provider perceived as more expensive might be providing more regular care to the inverters compared to another; as a result, the inverters are operating in better condition and are not ageing as fast, resulting in less stress and lower expected failure.

Example 4

Predictive maintenance for optimised hardware replacement cycle relying on big data analytics or artificial intelligence. For more information on this innovation, see section [13.1.3. Predictive maintenance for optimised hardware replacement](#).

7.4. Extraordinary maintenance

Extraordinary Maintenance actions are necessary when major unpredictable events take place in the plant that require substantial activities and works to restore the previous plant conditions, or any maintenance activity generally not covered or excluded from the O&M Contract. "Force Majeure" events affecting PV plants include high winds, flooding, hurricanes, tornados, hail, lightning and any number of other severe weather events. Extraordinary maintenance associated with severe weather include Safety Shutdown; Inspection; Electrical Testing (integrity of circuits and grounding); Remove/repair/replace decisions. After repairs are completed, recommissioning tests will confirm proper operation and changes made are documented.

Generally, these activities are billed separately in the O&M contract and are managed under a separate order. It is advisable that the O&M contract includes the rules agreed among the parties to prepare the quotation and to execute the works. Both a "lump sum turn-key" or a "cost-plus" method can be used for such purposes.

Extraordinary Maintenance interventions are required for:

- Damages that are a consequence of a Force Majeure event.
- Damages as a consequence of a theft or fire.

- Serial defects or endemic failures⁴ on equipment, occurring suddenly and after months or years from plant start-up.
- Modifications required by regulatory changes.
- Modifications to improve equipment performance or to reduce the equipment failure rate.

In cases where the O&M and EPC service providers of the plant are two separate entities, the following occurrence can also be considered Extraordinary Maintenance:

- Major issues of which O&M service provider becomes aware during its ordinary activity i.e. defects or other problems that are not a consequence of equipment wear or deterioration and that are not of the O&M service provider's responsibility because they can be reasonably considered to have been caused by design flaws identified from individual components, equipment, or electrical, mechanical or civil balance of plant in the PV plant (e.g., "hidden" or "latent" defects that require re-engineering).

Although not necessarily maintenance interventions, revamping and repowering can also be included in the Extraordinary Maintenance list in the O&M agreement, or at least be managed under the same rules. For more information on this, see [Chapter 8. Revamping and repowering](#).

After the approval by the Asset Owner of the O&M service provider's proposal, activities may commence, subject to availability of the required equipment, components and special machinery (if required).

The potential loss of energy between the event occurrence and full repair generally cannot be considered in the SPV financial model, but it has to be considered that many of the above events are reimbursed to the Asset Owner by the insurance company under the "All Risk Insurance" for the extraordinary maintenance cost and under the "Business Interruption Insurance" for the loss of generation.

Best Practices of O&M agreements regarding Extraordinary Maintenance activities include:

- General rules to quantify price and to elaborate a schedule to perform repair activities, and the right

⁴ For a definition of endemic failures and its repercussions in terms of warranty, see section [5.3. Warranty management](#).

of the Asset Owner to ask for third party quotations to compare to the quotation of the O&M service provider; in this case a “right-to-match” option can be granted to the O&M service provider.

- The obligation for the Asset Owner to have in place a consistent “All Risk” and “Business Interruption” Insurance in place.

7.5. Additional services

The O&M agreement can foresee services other than those pertaining to electrical and mechanical plant maintenance as per the above sections. Some of these additional services are generally included in the scope of work and the O&M annual fixed fee and some are not.

Additional services not included in the O&M contract scope of work can be requested on demand and can either be priced per service action or based on hourly rates applicable to the level of qualification of staff required to perform the work. These hourly rates usually escalate at the same rate as the O&M Service fee. In some cases, a binding price list for the delivery of some of these additional services can be included in the O&M contract as well.

For example, regular module cleaning is an important part of solar maintenance and the problems associated with soiled modules is often underestimated. By way of example, just the effect of soiling resulting from regular wind induced dust can result in a performance loss of 10%+ within 2 weeks, and of 30%+ within a matter of 6 weeks. Prolonged periods of time between cleans can result in bird droppings etching modules and lichen growth, both of which can be extremely difficult to remove. Module cleaning methods vary from manual, robotic, or by specialised vehicles. Each have their own advantages and disadvantages. Cleaning frequencies vary greatly on ground, rooftop and floating solar arrays. The frequency of cleaning should be decided on a site-by-site basis, and it may be that certain parts of a site will need cleaning more often than other parts of the same site.

The amount of water required for cleaning depends mostly on the requirements of the solar modules (type and abundance of soiling), cleaning method, specific module surface, and temperature of modules, when they are cleaned. It is best practice not to clean modules, when they are very hot, because water

evaporates before it can transport the dirt away, if water pressure is not sufficient. Furthermore, user guides of module manufacturers often advise against cleaning modules that are too hot. In most cases, water extracted from boreholes in South Africa can have a very high mineral content. This water will not be suitable for module washing because of the high calcium levels that will stain the glass. Treatment by reverse osmosis plants or ion exchange resin must be considered before making the final decision on which method to offer a client.

When choosing a module cleaning company, asset owners and O&M service providers should check the following:

- The suggested method of cleaning is fully in-line with the module manufacturer's warranty. Pressure washing modules is not an acceptable cleaning method.
- The modules should be cleaned with high quality, ultra-pure water as best practice. Tap, mains or borehole water with high mineral content may leave deposits on the module's glass surface. However, this might not be a possibility for every plant size or location. Rainwater is suitable for module cleaning: hence, rainwater harvesting could be an economical option in the long run.
- Health and safety considerations should be made in regard to keeping their staff safe on site. This should include some form of health and safety accreditation and specific training for solar module cleaning, including working at height, if cleaning roof mounted modules.
- Cleaning cycles may be based on the results of a soiling study that adjusts the cleaning needs to each season. To assist with the accuracy of these soiling studies, Soiling Measurement Systems can be installed in the Solar plant. These systems track and monitor the soiling rate of the PV modules to help optimize the washing cycles and they also monitor soiling losses to enable detection of other system-level losses.
- Module manufacturer shall approve cleaning methodology (brush, waterless, etc.) in combination with a third party laboratory regarding the effect of the cleaning strategy on the anti-reflective coating (ARC) or glass.

7 Power Plant Maintenance / continued

For more information about the social implications of water use in arid regions, see section [3.1. Environmental Responsibilities](#). For innovations relevant for module cleaning, see section [13.3. Waterless cleaning of PV modules](#).

Table 3 presents a non-exhaustive list of Additional services. For more information on general market trends as regards to whether these additional services are generally included in the O&M agreement or not, see section [12.1. Scope of the O&M contract](#).

Note that some of these items can be considered as a part of Preventive Maintenance. This depends on the agreement between the Asset Owner and the O&M service provider.

From a technological point of view, the usage of aerial inspections is beneficial to efficiently (time and costs) obtain a context awareness needed to perform better planning of site maintenance activities as well as execution of on-site measurements (specifically thermal inspections).

TABLE 3 EXAMPLES FOR ADDITIONAL MAINTENANCE SERVICES

	ADDITIONAL SERVICES
PV site maintenance	Module cleaning
	Vegetation management (include the fire barrier along the perimeter of the plant)
	Snow, sand or dust removal
General site maintenance	Pest control
	Waste disposal
	Road management
	Perimeter fencing repair
	Maintenance of buildings
	Maintenance of Security Equipment
On-site measurement and other activities	Weekly/monthly meter readings
	Data entry on fiscal registers or in authority web portals for FIT tariff or other support scheme assessment (where applicable)
	String measurements – to the extent exceeding the agreed level of Preventive Maintenance
	Thermal inspections, I-V curve tracing, electroluminescence imaging string monitoring, PD test (for more information, see the section 10.10. Data collected by specialised PV module field inspections) – to the extent exceeding the agreed level of Preventive Maintenance

8

Revamping and Repowering

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Revamping and repowering are usually considered to be part of extraordinary maintenance from a contractual point of view – however due to their increasing significance in the solar O&M market, these Guidelines are addressing them in a standalone chapter.

8.1. Definition and rationale of revamping and repowering

Revamping and repowering are defined as the replacement of old, power production related components of a power plant by new components to enhance its overall performance. Revamping involves component replacement, but without substantially changing the plant's nominal power, whereas repowering involves increasing it. The differentiation to ordinary replacement lies in the aim to increase the performance by exchanging all components within a functional area or a significant ratio of them. The aspects and consideration in the following sections focus on repowering but apply in most cases also for revamping and even repair and extraordinary maintenance.

There are several reasons, why repowering of solar PV plants can be a necessary and/or beneficial investment. For an overview, see Figure 7 on the following page.

In the South African context, Revamping and Repowering are not a major trend yet due to the relatively young age of solar PV installations. However, Revamping and Repowering are expected to become increasingly important as installations age. Some of the factors presented in Figure 7 are increasingly relevant for the South African market – such as the

availability of spare parts, when equipment suppliers are not adequately represented in certain markets. It is recommended for asset owners and O&M service providers to prepare for Revamping and Repowering projects in the coming years.

In certain legislations, the regulatory framework may not enable Repowering yet, however Revamping may have a strong role in South African markets: for example, retrofitting installations with batteries or replacing old batteries with better ones will not involve any increase in the nominal power of the installation, however it may significantly increase its value for local communities.

If repowering is absolutely necessary then a thorough repowering analysis, that takes into consideration the terms in the PPA, should be done to ensure a proper strategy is devised. In South Africa, changes to the RPP's installed capacity should be avoided, because otherwise lengthy new approval steps may be necessary.

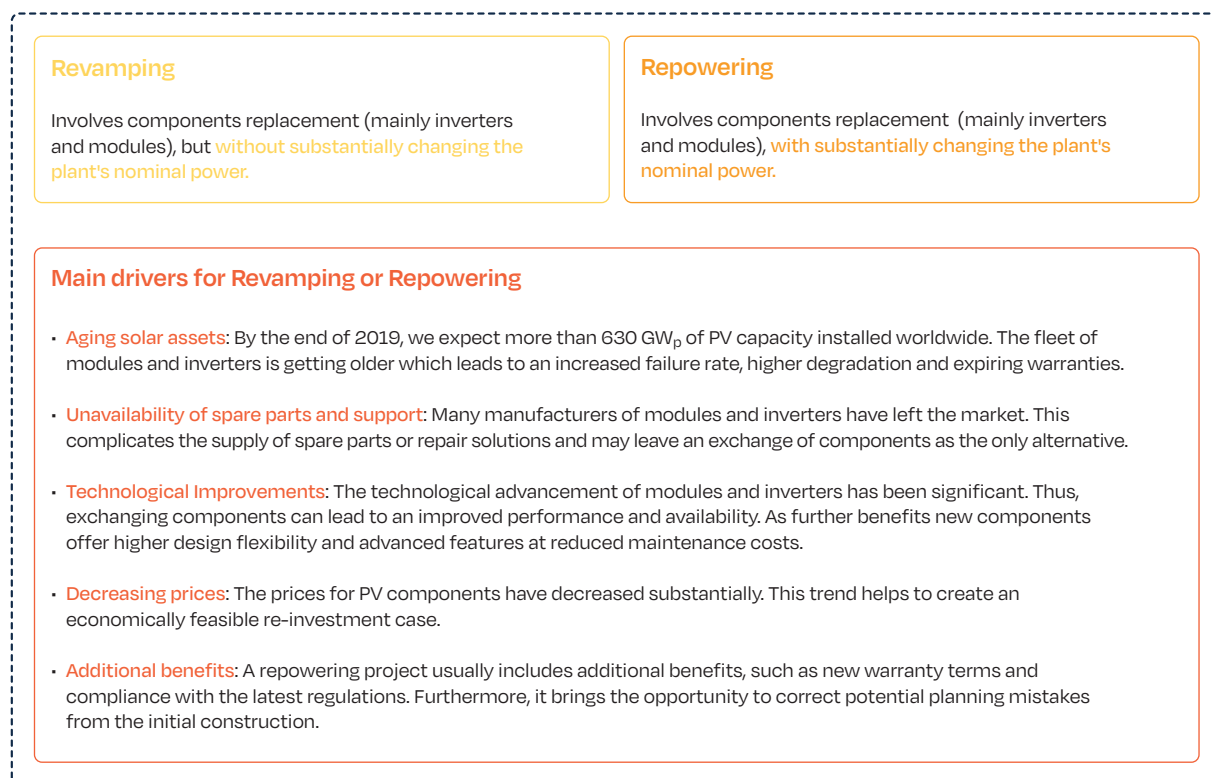
There are numerous ways of repowering a PV plant. In the following we will concentrate on the two most important opportunities of module and inverter repowering.

8.2. Module repowering

Natural or increased degradation, underperformance or simple defects of modules which are not repairable or available for direct replacement on the market may force the investor to consider a module repowering. This can be carried out for the entire PV plant or for specific parts. When the repowering is focused on a partial module replacement, it is recommended to exchange some more modules than technically required, to keep some intact old modules as spare parts for the future.

8 Revamping and Repowering / continued

FIGURE 7 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REVAMPING AND REPOWERING AND THEIR MAIN DRIVERS



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Due to the fast development of PV technology, it is not very likely that the same components are still available on the market in the required quantity or at a competitive price. Certainly, exchanging the identical modules would make a repowering very simple, but this would also reduce the utilisation of the repowering opportunities in lower price and higher efficiency. In case different modules are to be used for the repowering project, the following aspects need to be considered during planning and execution:

Mechanical installation

- If the modules have different dimensions in height, length and width, the compatibility with the mounting system needs to be considered. Often adaptive challenges can be solved by applying new module clamps but in extreme cases (e.g., changing from thin film to crystalline modules) a new mounting structure needs to be installed.

- In case of higher weight and larger surface of the new module area the structural impacts on the mounting system or the building need to be checked and aligned.
- The new modules need to be integrated into the grounding system as before.

Electrical installation

- Depending on the rated power and the electrical characteristics of the new module type a new string design can be inevitable. The maximum DC power, voltage and current need to be in line with the inverter requirements.
- A mix of different electrical characteristics at one inverter or at least one MPP tracker should be avoided. Alternatively, bypass diodes can be integrated as protection in case of failures such as reverse current.

- Most likely, the new module type will have different connectors. Therefore, the string cable connector needs to be replaced accordingly.
- The dimensioning of existing cables and fuses needs to be checked and verified to be suitable for the new DC-layout.

Further considerations

- A module repowering might underlie regulatory aspects, which will vary from country to country. The regulatory body should be contacted well in advance in order to clarify aspects such as:
 - Maximum power to be installed
 - Requirements for proving the faults of modules
 - Registration of new modules
 - Disposal of old modules
- Module repowering should be considered as a relevant interference into the electrical system. All affected strings should be tested and documented according to IEC 60364-7-712:2017, IEC 60364-6:2016 and IEC 62446-1:2016 after the repowering project.
- The new string layout could be optimised for shading or DC / AC ratio. Furthermore, an in-depth check of the mounting structures, cables and connectors could be performed.
- If it is not planned to replace all modules, power measurements of the remaining modules might be necessary. Then they should be concentrated on certain MPP trackers in order to avoid a mixed installation with mismatching losses.
- Depending on the status of the old, removed modules (and the regulatory requirements), they can be either sold to the secondary market or should be disposed or recycled by a professional provider.

8.3. Inverter repowering

As all electronic devices, inverters have a limited lifetime. With increasing age and wear, the likelihood of failures and breakdowns increases. If the warranty of the device has expired, a technically and economically suitable solution needs to be identified. Some manufacturers or service providers offer repair and spare parts services. With new components it might even be possible to increase the efficiency of

an older inverter, e.g., with a replacement of an old control board with a new device with better performance characteristics, such as MPP tracking. If an identical replacement inverter, repair services or spare parts are not available, the exchange with a new component is inevitable. There are different strategies for inverter repowering which should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis::

- **Partial or complete exchange:** If not all inverters are affected, a partial exchange of the inverter fleet of the PV system can be an option. This potentially reduces the overall costs but can also increase complexity regarding the electrical design or the implementation of two different inverter types into one communication concept on site. If the repowering does not affect all inverters, it is advisable to store the old devices as potential spare parts. Additionally, it can be practical to exchange more inverters than technically required to store those as potential exchange devices for future defects of the old inverter type.
- **Exchange of same or different power class:** Exchanging inverters with the same power class is easier for the DC and AC integration. However, replacing multiple devices through one with a larger power class can increase the system efficiency and reduce the component costs as well as future maintenance costs.
- **Exchange of inverter type:** Exchanging inverters from central inverters to string inverters or vice versa, depending on the needs and objectives of the solar plant and the benefits that each inverter type could bring about.

When an inverter repowering is planned, several factors need to be considered:

Mechanical installation

- If the new inverters have different dimensions or weight, a suitable solution for the installation or mounting of the inverter needs to be prepared. The same accounts for cabling, if DC or AC connections are changed.
- The manufacturer of the new device might have different requirements for the mounting with regards to fixings, distance to other components or to the roof, ventilation, etc. All requirements need to be checked and implemented.

8 Revamping and Repowering / continued

- The new inverters need to be integrated into the grounding system according to the standards and the manufacturer's specifications.

Electrical installation

- The integration of the DC side to the new inverters needs to follow the DC input requirements of the new inverter. Eventually, the string length and the number of connected strings need to be adjusted to suit the technical parameters of maximum current and voltage as well as ideal operational conditions. In case larger inverters will be installed, additional DC combiner boxes might be required, and different or additional fuses are to be integrated.
- If different inverter sizes are installed, the integration to the AC side needs to be re-engineered. This includes the cable diameters, protection devices (fuses) and connectors. Also, characteristics of the connection to the transformer need to be checked.
- In any case the applicable electrotechnical rules and regulations need to be followed.

Communication system

- Before choosing an adequate inverter, the compatibility with the physical communication cables should be checked.
- The installed data logger needs to support the new inverter's data protocol. Otherwise, an update or the exchange of the data logger will be required.
- If different inverter types are installed, it can be an option to integrate the different component types on different phases of one communication cable or integrate them into one network. The compatibility of the datalogger and the monitoring platform to work with different inverter types at one PV system needs to be validated.

Further considerations

- An inverter repowering might underlie regulatory aspects, which will vary from country to country. The responsible regulatory institution should be consulted well in advance to clarify aspects such as:
 - Maximum power to be installed
 - Compatibility to grid code and plant certificate

- Inverter repowering should be considered as a relevant interference into the electrical system. All affected cables and connectors should be tested and documented according to IEC 60364-7-712:2017, IEC 60364-6:2016 and IEC 62446-1:2016 during the repowering project.

- Additional benefits may arise: the new inverters could be optimised regarding shading or DC / AC ratio. When the new inverter has advanced features in comparison with the old inverter, e.g., multiple MPP tracker, this could be an additional advantage for the repowering project.
- The noise levels of the inverters may vary, and it should be adequately checked against the permitting and the neighbouring activities.
- Depending on the status of the old inverters, they can be either kept as potential spare parts or be sold to the secondary market. If both options are not practical, the devices should be disposed or recycled by a professional service provider.
- New or different maintenance scope and intervals need to be included into the preventative maintenance schedule.
- All involved people should be informed about the changes and accordingly trained regarding preventative and reactive maintenance.

In some cases, inverter repowering is even profitable if the old inverter still operates with full availability, but a new inverter produces more energy due to higher efficiency or better operating conditions.

8.4. General repowering considerations

Although a repowering project is mainly technically driven, for the owner of the PV system it is a commercial re-investment case. Therefore, it is of great importance to calculate a detailed and solid business case before the project and review it during the project stages. All technical and commercial data, such as historical performance, future performance, revenues, costs, losses because of downtimes during repowering, extended life span and changed maintenance requirements need to be considered to come up with a prognosis of the future income streams. With this, a classical return on investment or break-even calculation can be performed and presented to the investor as a decision basis.

As an additional consideration, it is recommended to calculate the sensitivities of the most important factors. This will provide a better understanding of the influence of changing conditions, e.g., if the costs for the project will change or the projected performance will be different to the projected assumptions.

Each repowering activity should be approached as an individual project, which can be structured as follows:

Performance analysis

- Historical yield assessment & identification of performance issues
- Verification of issues on site with additional inspections or testing
- Determination of root causes and areas for improvement

Potential assessment

- Technical feasibility study of different options
- Commercial analysis, taking investment costs and additional revenues or reduced losses into account
- Analysis of the regulatory requirements and their implications
- Risk assessment for the case if the solution does not meet expectations

Solution Design

- Detailed technical engineering
- Determination of all costs for time and material
- Setting up project plan
- Update commercial analysis with more precise information

Implementation

- Execution of repowering measures and timeline of the process
- Project management
- Constant quality control
- Commissioning and documentation
- Update of maintenance guidelines

Review

- Technical evaluation regarding reliability and performance
- Commercial evaluation regarding costs and return on investment

A rigorous project management and quality control across all project stages will ensure a realisation of the project in time, budget and quality.



It is important to differentiate between Consumables and Spare Parts.

“Consumables” are items which are intended to be depleted or worn out relatively quickly and then replaced. They are necessary for the regular operation of the PV plant. O&M service providers should always have consumables on stock and maintenance crews should carry consumables with them, together with the relevant tools. Consumables include but are not limited to grease, fasteners, corrosion protection, oils and cleaning materials, could be also categorized as small components with cost less than 1,500 USD.

“Spare Parts” are all the items (materials and equipment such as modules or inverters) listed on the “Spare Parts List”, not in use or incorporated in the PV plant, intended to replace similar items in the PV plant.

Spare Parts Management is an inherent and substantial part of O&M that should ensure that spare parts are available in a timely manner for Corrective Maintenance in order to minimise the downtime of (a part of) a solar PV plant. With regards to Spare Parts Management, the following considerations have to be made:

- Ownership and responsibility of insurance
- Failure Rate
- Stock level
- Replacement lead time
- Shelf-life
- Original supplier and alternative supplier
- Location of storage

- a. Proximity to the plant
- b. Security
- c. Environmental conditions

Although it is best practice for the O&M service provider to be responsible for replenishing the spare parts stock, they are not necessarily responsible for the full cost of doing so. Some Asset Owners require O&M service providers to be fully responsible for the cost of all spare parts within the O&M fee (fully wrapped contract), however, the more cost-effective approach is to agree which are “Included Spare Parts” and which are “Excluded Spare Parts”.

O&M fee includes replacement of Included Spare Parts, whereas Asset Owner has to pay for replenishing Excluded Spare Parts. This is a flexible approach allowing the Asset Owner and O&M service provider to agree which spare parts fall into which category. It enables both parties to have a level of cost certainty whilst balancing this with the Asset Owner's appetite for risk.

Ownership of spares is often with the Asset Owner from delivery to site or placement in the spares stock. In the case of excluded spare parts, ownership transfers to the Asset Owner from the date that the O&M service provider receives payment for the same. In case of spare parts being included in the O&M scope, the ownership transfers to the Asset Owner when the spare part is installed in the power plant.

Maintenance, storage and replenishment are the responsibility of the O&M service provider. Besides ownership matters, it is very important to make sure, upon mutual agreement, that one of the parties

undertakes the responsibility of insuring the spares. As a recommendation spare parts stored on-site should be insured by the Asset Owner and spare parts stored off-site should be insured by the O&M service provider.

For a new PV plant, the initial spare parts for two years (or for the agreed duration of the warranty period) from COD are procured by the Asset Owner or the EPC service provider on behalf of the Asset Owner. However, it is best practice for the EPC and O&M service providers to have agreed upon the list of spare parts that must be provided. The O&M service provider should, as a best practice, recommend additional spares that they deem necessary to meet the contractual obligations (e.g., availability guarantees).

Generally, it is not economically feasible to stock spare parts for every possible failure in the plant. Therefore, the O&M service provider together with the Asset Owner should define the stocking level of specific spare parts (Critical Spare Parts List) that make economic sense (Cost-Benefit Analysis). For example, if a specific part in a solar PV plant has a frequency of failure at least of once every year or more and the loss of revenues due to such failure is greater than the spare part cost, it is important to have such a spare part kept available. Some very large O&M service providers will opt to own the spare parts in their different warehouses in replacement or addition of the asset owner spares stock. Since they operate many sites, they limit the shortage of unusual spare part by maintaining a small stock.

Regarding the stocking count, due to the very different configurations and sizes of solar PV plants, it is very difficult to define a number for stocking specific spare parts, however 0.2% of total module quantity is often found in commercial contracts for utility-scale and large installations, and 1% (but at least 1 module) for medium-scale installations. Furthermore, the regional portfolio of the O&M service provider might also influence this and as it was mentioned above, the determination of spare items and quantity is also driven by the O&M service provider's contractual commitments and guarantees.

In the South African context, when deciding on spare parts' stock levels, it needs to be considered that spare parts' availability may be limited due to the absence of local representations of manufacturers or importers. Issues related to logistics, the need for

foreign currency in order to get new spare parts and the requirement to import spare parts from outside of the continent may contribute to the higher stocking levels or to spare parts strategies that favour repair instead of replacement in certain situations. Also, security issues need to be considered.

In an attempt to define the stock levels of spare Parts and consumables, the following parameters should be taken into consideration:

- Frequency of failure
- Impact of failure
- Cost of spare part
- Degradation over time
- Possibility of consignment stock with the manufacturer
- Replacement time
- Lead time for the delivery of new spare parts or consumables to site in case of major failures

However, for any given large C&I or utility scale solar PV system, there are certain spare parts that could be considered as essential to have – no matter the cost.

To optimize the spare part management, it is advisable to adopt the use of computerized systems that properly and efficiently help to control plant spares.

Table 4 on the following page summarises a minimum list. This list is not exhaustive and system requirements and technology developments can lead to this list being updated following discussion with manufacturers, amongst others.

Storage and warehousing should be done in locations where the spare parts cannot be damaged (e.g., by humidity or high temperature variations) and are easily identifiable with regards to ownership, part number, shelf life and LIFO (Last in First Out) sequence. Additionally, the storage sites should have appropriate security measures. The decision of having either an on-site or off-site warehouse facility or just an agreement with the suppliers to provide the spare parts, depends on many factors, including the kind of part, the commercial agreement, and the facilitation of the service provision. If the spare parts owned by the Asset Owner are stored off-site, such spares should be stored separately and be clearly identified

9 Spare Parts Management / continued

TABLE 4 MINIMUM LIST OF SPARE PARTS (NON-EXHAUSTIVE)

NO.	SPARE PART
1	Fuses for all equipment (e.g., inverters, combiner boxes etc) and fuse kits
2	Modules – percentage of total module quantity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.2% for utility scale: >10 MWp • 0.2% for large C&I between 1MWp and 10 MWp • 1% (but at least 1 module) for medium C&I between 100 kWp and 1 MWp • No need for spare parts on stock for (single) small C&I or residential <100 kWp
3	Inverter spares (e.g., power stacks, circuit breakers, contactor, switches, controller board etc)
4	Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS)
5	Voltage terminations (MV)
6	Power plant controller spares
7	SCADA and data communication spares
8	Transformer and switchgear spares
9	Weather station sensors
10	Motors and gearboxes for trackers
11	Harnesses and cables
12	Screws and other supplies and tools
13	Specified module connectors (male and female should be from the same manufacturer)
14	Structures components
15	Security equipment (e.g., cameras)

as the property of the Asset Owner. While proximity to the plant is a parameter that needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, security and environmental conditions are very important as they could lead to a loss of property either through thefts or damage. In

the South African context, high temperature variations need to be considered when storing spare parts. This may result in a more centralised spare parts storage strategy in order to enable air conditioning or heating of warehouses more cost efficiently.

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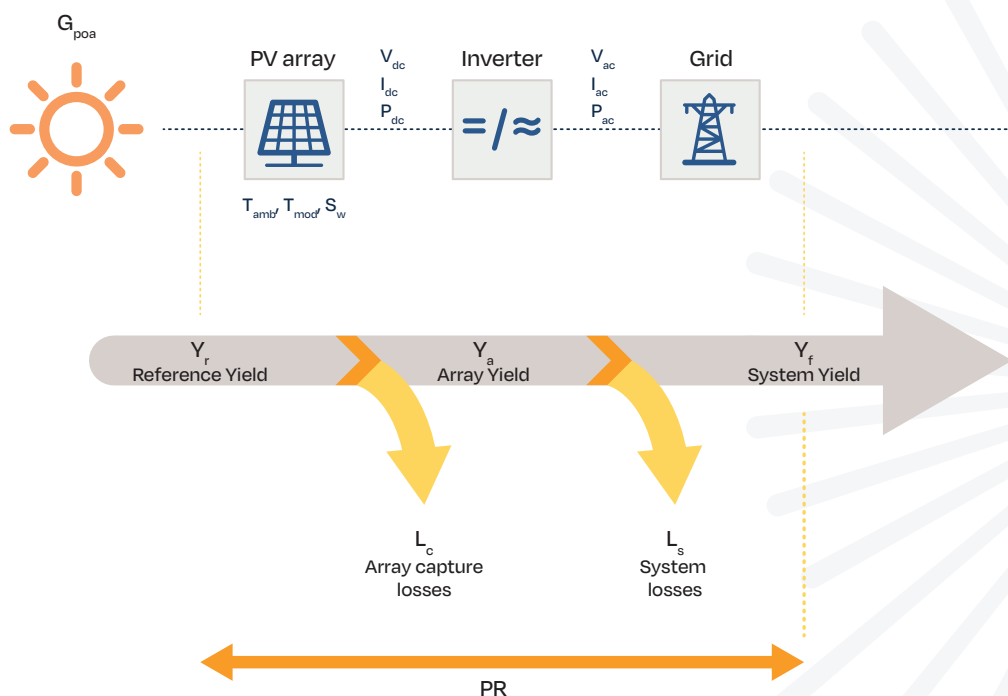
Data & monitoring requirements

In general, the monitoring system should allow follow-up on the energy flows within a solar power plant or portfolio of (small) installations. In principle, it reports on the parameters that determine the energy conversion chain. These parameters, along with the most important energy measures in terms of yields and losses, are illustrated in the following figure. These yields and losses are always normalised to installed PV

power at standard test conditions in kilowatt-peak (kWp) for ease of performance comparison.

All components and different aspects of technical data management and monitoring platforms are described in the following paragraphs. It is also recommended to refer to the Monitoring Checklist of the Solar Best Practices Mark for a synthesis of the most important best practices and recommendation with respect to these points.⁵

FIGURE 8 ENERGY FLOW IN A GRID-CONNECTED PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEM WITH PARAMETERS, YIELDS AND LOSSES⁶



⁵ The best practice checklists of the Solar Best Practices Mark are available at: www.solarbestpractices.com

⁶ The figure is redesigned and based on a figure produced by 3E and published in (Woyte et al. 2014).

10 Data and monitoring requirements / continued

In the South African context, various factors have contributed to the increase in monitoring PV plants installed on commercial and industrial sites. These include but are not limited to:

- A decrease in the price in on-site data loggers.
- Ever-increasing monitoring capabilities of on-site data loggers.
- Legislation around connecting these PV plants to the local utility grid.
- Insurance requirements.
- Greater efficiencies achieved through comparative geo-location monitoring.

The fundamentals pertaining to the smart monitoring of commercial and industrial PV power plants versus the smart monitoring of large-scale PV power plants are exactly the same. Greater deployment of machine learning, artificial intelligence and lower-cost data loggers, together with their ever-increasing capabilities, and decreasing internet prices throughout South Africa has resulted in smaller C&I sites being able to be monitored in a similar manner as large-scale utility PV power plants.

There has been a rapid increase in the number of PV plants on C&I sites in South Africa. It is now common that the same solar project company or developer has deployed PV on multiple C&I sites across the same city. Often similar equipment is used on multiple C&I sites. This phenomenon has created an opportunity to achieve greater efficiencies through a further advance of smart monitoring on these PV power plants.

10.1. Data loggers

The main purposes of a datalogger are:

- Collecting data of relevant components (inverters, meteo data, energy meter, string combiners, status signals) with every device registered separately.
- Basic alarm functionality (e.g., Field Communication issues, time critical events like AC Off).
- Provide a temporary data backup (in case of missing internet connection).
- Support the technicians during commissioning (e.g., checking whether all inverters work and feed-in).

In addition to this, some dataloggers can also provide the following functions:

- Power Plant Controller (Monitoring & Control should be managed by one instance to avoid communication issues regarding concurrent access). The Power Plant Controller can be integrated in the datalogger or can be a separate device using the communication channel of the datalogger or even a separate specific one with preferential bandwidth.
- Solar Energy Trading Interface (control the active power by a third-party instance like energy trader).

As a best practice, dataloggers installed should be selected following a selection process list of criteria by the operating party as listed below. For example, an EPC service provider will choose and install the data logger used to monitor the site. This datalogger should be selected:

- For its compatibility with the inverters and auxiliary equipment present on site. Preference for inverter-agnostic dataloggers.
- For any command functionality that may be needed (this is site type and country specific).
- For its connectivity strength to the internet.
- For its robustness (longevity of life and durability for the environmental conditions it will be kept in).
- For its, and the cloud server it is connected to, cyber security measures, namely the possibility to set up a VPN tunnel at least
- For its capability to store data and interface with site operators during internet communication outages.

The recording interval (also called granularity) of the datalogging should range from 1 minute to 15 minutes. Within one monitoring environment granularity should be uniform for all the different data collected.

As a minimum requirement, data loggers should store at least one month of data. Historical data should be backed up constantly by sending it to external servers and, after every communication failure, the data logger should automatically send all pending information. Moreover, data transmission should be secure and encrypted (see 10.8. Cybersecurity). There should also be a logbook to track configuration changes (especially relevant when acting as Power

Plant Controller). Authority levels should be used to control who can access and make changes to different parts of the system.

As a best practice, the data logger should store a minimum of three months of data locally and a full data backup in the cloud. Moreover, the operation of the data logger itself should be monitored. Such monitoring should be done out of an independent server remotely and should ideally deliver information on the status of operation of the data loggers on Operating System (OS) and hardware level and also provide alerts to the Operations room in case of failures and communication loss.

Best practice is to have dataloggers and routers constantly monitored. In the case of an error the staff on site will be informed and may restart or repair the equipment. Alternatively, a watchdog device could be used.

As a minimum requirement, the entire monitoring installation should be protected by an uninterruptable power supply (UPS). This includes data loggers, network switches, internet modems/routers, measurement devices and signal converters.

For more information, see also IEC 61724-1 Photovoltaic system performance – Part 1: Monitoring.

10.2. Monitoring portal

The main purposes of the Monitoring Portal are:

- Reading any type of raw data coming from any type of datalogger or other PV platforms with no preference on brands and models.
- Long-term archive for all raw data provided by the asset.
- Modelling each PV asset using all available information regarding the actual set up and devices (type of devices, installation/replacement date, modules-string-inverter system layout, modules inclination, orientation, type of installation etc.).
- Visualisation of aggregated data in the highest possible granularity (1 to 15 min is a best practice for most of the indicators).
- Visualisation of data in standard and specific diagrams.

- Computation and visualisation on dashboards and views of Key Performance Indicators. For the list of indicators to be computed, see [Chapter 11](#). Indicators computational inputs might be selectable by the user.
- For the list of indicators to be computed, see [Chapter 11](#). Indicators computational inputs might be selectable by the user.
- Validation of data quality (e.g., through calculation of data availability).
- Detection of malfunctions as well as long term degradations with customisable alarms.
- Handling of alerts from field devices like dataloggers or inverters.
- Calculate typical Key Performance Indicators (such as Performance Ratio and Availability) with the possibility to adapt parameters.
- Provision of consistent and easy to use aggregated KPI for the set-up of customizable reports for single plants as well as for portfolios.
- Making data available via a standardised interface for use in other systems.
- CCTV and security monitoring.

The monitoring portal should fulfil the following minimum requirements:

- Accessibility level of at least 99% across the year.
- Interface and/or apps dedicated to use cases (on-site service, investor etc).
- Customisable user Access Level.
- Graphs of irradiation, energy production, performance and yield.
- Downloadable tables with all the registered figures.
- Alarms register.

As best practice, the following features will also be included in the Monitoring Portal:

- Configurable User Interface to adjust the views depending on the target group (e.g., O&M service provider, EPC service provider, Investor, Asset Manager).
- User configurable alarms.

10 Data and monitoring requirements / continued

- User configurable reports.
- Ticket system to handle alarm messages.
- Plant specific KPIs.
- Integrate Third Party Data (e.g., Solar power forecast, Weather data, Satellite data for irradiance).
- Granularity of data should be adaptable for downloads of figures and tables.

The above lists are not exhaustive. For a comprehensive overview of recommended functionalities, refer to the Monitoring Checklist of the Solar Best Practices Mark.⁷

In the context of monitoring larger portfolios of (small to medium) PV systems – in South Africa –, each C&I site is pinned using a geo-location. The type of PV equipment used on the site is recorded. Data loggers are installed. However, C&I smart monitoring will probably differ from large-scale PV plant monitoring because of the following:

- Multiple weather stations are installed across the city by the same PV developer.
- The PV developer will perform research and use local knowledge to divide the city into zones, taking into account any micro-climatic or geographical factors which can influence the yield of a PV plant on a C&I site. These factors may include but are not limited to mountains, urban-forests and distance from the ocean.
- Individual solar project companies or developers can now perform comparative monitoring of PV plants within these defined zones within a city and compare one PV plant to another.
 - a. In this manner underperformance of specific PV plants can be quickly and efficiently identified.
 - b. Rapid response mechanisms can be put into place whereby faults can be quickly identified and addressed.
 - c. Through this constant monitoring and quicker response to problem solving the yield of the PV plant can be maximised and greater efficiencies achieved.

Over time the comparative analysis can be further developed using algorithms and machine learning to

warn of any performance issues. Furthermore, over time, annual yield comparisons per site can be used to further advance these algorithms and to create predictive yield models.

10.3. Data format

The data format of the recorded data files must respect standards such as IEC 61724 and has to be clearly documented. Data loggers should collect all plant alarms in accordance with original manufacturers format so that all available information is obtained.

10.4. Configuration

The configuration of the monitoring systems and data loggers needs to reflect the actual layout of plant details (hardware brand, model, installation details such as orientation, wiring losses, set up date) in order to perform the better expected performances simulation and obtain consistent insight about plant actual status. Whenever this is not done during the plant construction phase, it should be done at commissioning phase or at plant takeover by a new O&M service provider (recommissioning of the monitoring system).

During commissioning, each single equipment monitored should be checked to make sure it is properly labelled in the Monitoring System, this can be done by temporarily covering insolation sensors or switching off others such as string boxes or inverters.

The best practice is to have a Monitoring System capable to read and record all IDs from all sensors and equipment monitored, which will reduce the possibility of mislabelling elements and to trace equipment and sensor replacement along the life of the facility. Some Monitoring Systems have even an auto-configuration feature (plug-and-play) that reduces start-up time and potential mistakes. This is done by capturing automatically the device ID and configuration information. This also allows for automatic inverter or sensor replacement detection.

10.5. Interoperability

As best practice, the system should ensure open data accessibility (bilateral possibility to receive and send

⁷ The best practice checklists of the Solar Best Practices Mark are available at: www.solarbestpractices.com.

data), in order to enable easy transition and communication between monitoring platforms. Table 5 shows some examples of data integration options. Because of the lack of unifying standards, this is normally not the case, and every Monitoring System provider has its own method to store and retrieve data. Best practice systems have the possibility to retrieve data by using open interfaces such as RESTful, providing interoperability between different systems.

Another important aspect of interoperability is the possibility to aggregate data from different platforms that normally serve different scopes of the PV business, such as administration, accountancy, planning & on-site intervention, stock management specific applications. This way, the information can be exploited by the central monitoring platform without affecting the more specific external applications. For example, an O&M service provider works with several types of ticketing system for different clients. The monitoring platform should be able to collect data

from all of them. On the other side, information of tickets managed from the central monitoring system should be automatically transferred to the dedicated ticketing application.

10.6. Internet connection and Local Area Network

The O&M service provider should make sure to provide the best possible network connectivity. As a minimum requirement, the bandwidth needs to be sufficient to transfer the data in a regular way.

Whenever a fibre connection is available within the PV-site area, this should be the preferred way to connect to the internet, with industrial routers considered as standard. In case a fibre connection is not available, 4G or Wi-Fi communication is preferred. Satellite, 3G or 2G connections are the least preferred, but often the only available communication type. An additional back-up system can be seen as best practice. It should be avoided to transfer data of applications that need

TABLE 5 EXAMPLES OF DATA INTEGRATION OPTIONS

METHOD	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
FTP Push or FTP Pull	Easy to implement No need for additional hardware	Not secure unless: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper VPN is set up. • Using sFTP or FTPs encryption method. • FTP access control methods implemented. Limited control of data flow to the FTP server
Modbus/TCP (with additional logger on site)	Reliable and secure Best control of data flow	Additional cost for additional hardware More time-consuming implementation Relies on the existing monitoring system hardware, hence, two hardware vendors involved
API (or similar) in the cloud	Fast and easy to implement No need for additional hardware Reliable depending on providers' conditions and communication conditions	Small time lag from data collection to final destination (data pull technology requires automated back-filling technology in case of data gaps or communications issues). Relies on the existing monitoring system vendor, double fees for monitoring. (No control over data) API may face data quality issues and limits – data granularity, data depth, availability, correctness, whether it is current, completeness – depending on the provider's terms conditions (SLAs) and technical abilities.

10 Data and monitoring requirements / continued

a large bandwidth via Internet. For example, it should be preferred to monitor CCTV (Closed-Circuit Television) of the security system locally.

For PV plants larger than 1MW it is advised to have a WAN connection and as an alternative an industrial router that allows for mobile or satellite communication back-up in case the WAN connection fails. A system with a reset capability in case of loss of internet connection is recommended. A direct connection to a monitoring server with a service-level agreement (SLA) guarantees continuous data access. If data passes via alternative monitoring servers without SLA, (e.g., monitoring portal of the inverter manufacturer), this

SLA can no longer be guaranteed. The automatic firmware updates of the data logger should be disabled. Firmware updates are subject to change management procedure with the monitoring service.

All communication cables must be shielded. Physical distances between (DC or AC) power cables and communication cables should be ensured, as well as the protection of communication cables from direct sunlight. Furthermore, cables with different polarities must be clearly distinguishable (label or colour) for avoiding polarity connection errors.

Pros and cons of different types of monitoring connections can be seen in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6 PROS AND CONS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF MONITORING CONNECTIONS

MONITORING CONNECTION	PRO	CON	COMMENT
WIFI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadband • Real time monitoring • Easy to set up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modem/Provider dependent • Requires skilled personnel • Can be intermittent • Possible issues when router is replaced 	In residential installations (e.g., social housing) often no Internet available. In some countries there are regional WIFI providers, which provide a connection better than DSL.
LAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free • Broadband • Real time monitoring • Reliable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modem/provider dependent • Requires skilled personnel • Additional cabling needed 	In residential installations (e.g., social housing) often no Internet available.
Cellular 2G/4G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large geographical coverage • Independent from local Internet connection • Remote management • Bi-directional • Plug&play installation • High level of security using VPN • Reliable (depending on the geographical location) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subscription based • Real time monitoring requires higher data volume • Easy to implement 	
LPWAN (NB-IoT, LTE-M etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent from local Internet connection • Remote management • Bi-directional • Good network penetration inside buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subscription based • Limited bandwidth, in some case insufficient for real time monitoring 	Not (yet) all cellular providers offer each of these communication technologies. Monthly fee to be predicted low.
Bluetooth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only local monitoring possible • Requires simple pairing protocol 	
LPWAN (LoRa, Sigfox etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent from local Internet connection • Remote management • Good network penetration inside buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subscription based with in some case proprietary communication protocols • Limited bandwidth in some case insufficient for real time monitoring • Limited bi-directional communication 	

10.7. Data ownership and privacy

The data from the monitoring system and data loggers, even if hosted in the cloud, should always be owned by and accessible to the Asset Owner (or SPV). Stakeholders such as the O&M service provider, the Asset Manager or auditors during due diligence phases that need the data to perform their duties should be granted access. It is also important to have at least two access levels (read-only, full access).

The monitoring system hardware can be provided by the O&M service provider or a third-party monitoring service provider (but the monitoring system hardware remains the property of the Asset Owner as part of the installation):

- If the O&M service provider is the monitoring service provider, the O&M service provider has full responsibility for protecting and maintaining the data and the proper functioning of the monitoring system.
- In case of a third-party monitoring service provider, the responsibility for protecting and maintaining the data resides with the third-party monitoring service provider. The O&M service provider should use their best endeavours to make sure the performance monitoring is correct, to the extent possible, considering best practices as mentioned in previous paragraphs. The O&M service provider's ability to properly maintain and use the monitoring system should be evaluated. If necessary, the O&M service provider should be appropriately trained to use the monitoring system. Data use by third party monitoring providers should be extremely limited, i.e., for the sole purpose of correcting bugs and developing additional functions to their systems.

10.8. Cybersecurity

Since PV plants will at least include inverters and power plant controllers (and monitoring systems) and these are expected to be accessible from (i.e., connected to) the internet to enable surveillance and remote instructions by operators, they have significant exposure to cybersecurity risks. Large utility scale projects will include an electrical substation and SCADA system.

Do not neglect the negative safety impact that a cyber-attack may have on people and equipment. There have been several attacks in the wild and in research which

target embedded devices like PLCs, RTUs, and IEDs. These devices control and operate real physical equipment which can harm people and equipment.

Cybersecurity comprises technologies, processes and controls that are designed to protect systems, networks and data from cyber-attacks. Effective cyber security reduces the risk of cyber-attacks and protects organisations and individuals from the unauthorised exploitation of systems, networks and technologies.⁸

Cybersecurity is a vast area and multiple measures are imaginable. The following hints may help as a starting point:

- Keep it simple: If possible, reduce the type of network devices to a minimum.
- As a recommendation, traffic of the network devices may be monitored in order to detect abnormally high use of bandwidth.
- Secure physical access to the network devices and implement a secure password policy. Avoid the use of standard passwords especially, and change all factory setting passwords.
- Control access from Internet via strict firewall rules:
 - Port forwarding should not be used because this is a big security gap. Only router ports that are necessary should be opened and should only be reachable from within the VPN.
 - Reduce remote access to the necessary use cases.
 - The use of VPNs (Virtual Private Networks – a secure connection built up from the inside of the private network) is necessary.
 - VPN access to the site is a minimum requirement.
 - A VPN server or VPN service which works without requiring a public IP on-site should be preferred.
 - Each PV plant should have different passwords.
 - Do not allow plants to communicate with each other.
 - Keep your documentation up to date to be sure that no device was forgotten.
 - Use different roles to the extent possible (e.g., read only user, administration access).

⁸ Definition: <https://www.itgovernance.co.uk/what-is-cybersecurity>.

10 Data and monitoring requirements / continued

- Use professional (industrial grade) hardware; only this hardware provides the security and administration functions your plant needs to be secure.
- Control access to Internet via strict firewall rules:
 - No mission critical equipment must be allowed to connect to the Internet.
 - Software and firmware updates must be manually downloaded and verified by the responsible engineer before installation.
- All access to/from third party systems must either be through a firewall, or VPN.
- Systems with different functions should be segregated for example CCTV should have a separate network from the monitoring apparatus.
- Under no circumstance may a corporate system be permitted to communicate directly with the plant network.
- Implement vulnerability management (i.e., identifying and remediating or mitigating vulnerabilities, especially in software and firmware):
 - Improve insecure software configurations.
 - The firmware and software of devices should be kept up to date.
 - Use anti-virus software if possible and keep it up to date.
 - Avoid wireless access if it is not necessary.
 - Audit your network with the help of external experts (penetration tests).
- Keep your company safe:
 - Do not store passwords in plain text format, use password manager (e.g., 1Password, KeePass etc.)
 - Train your employees on IT security awareness.
 - Do not share access from all plants to all employees. Give access only to those who need it. This way damage can be prevented in case one employee is hacked.
 - Management of leaving and moving employees; change passwords of plants which are overseen by an employee who has left the company or moved to another department.
- Systems must be “hardened” to the extent possible in hardware and software:
 - Unused network, USB, and other ports must be prevented from unauthorised access. Primitive measures include filling the port with epoxy, while modern measures usually rely on system configuration and settings.
 - Unused software must be removed, and software installations must be authorised.
- Where a large number of plants are to be managed by the same organisation:
 - Manage user credentials and privilege centrally. In a Windows environment this is best achieved using Microsoft Domain Controllers.
 - Implement a central patch management system which has a private repository. Using a private repository avoids unwanted use of Internet at plant level and prevents systems from applying patches automatically which may break a running system.
 - Implement a central anti-virus update system which has a private repository.
- If cyber-security measures fail it may be necessary to restore systems from scratch:
 - Systems must be regularly backed up and the backups must be periodically tested.
 - Backups must be kept off-site.
 - For mission critical systems try to reduce restoration time to a minimum.

It is a best practice that installations undertake a cyber security analysis, starting from a risk assessment (including analysis at the level of the system architecture) and implement a cybersecurity management system (CSMS) that incorporates a plan-do-check-act cycle. The CSMS should start from a cybersecurity policy, and definition of formal cybersecurity roles and responsibilities, and proceed to map this onto the system architecture in terms of detailed countermeasures applied at identified points (e.g., via analysis of the system in terms of zones and conduits). These detailed countermeasures will include the use of technical countermeasures such as firewalls, encrypted interfaces, authorisation and access controls, and audit/detection tools. But they

will also include physical and procedural controls, for example, to restrict access to system components and to maintain awareness of new vulnerabilities affecting the system components.

As minimum requirements, loggers should not be accessible directly from the internet or should at least be protected via a firewall. Secure and restrictive connection to the data server is also important.

The manufacturer of the datalogger and the monitoring platform should provide information on penetration tests for their servers, any command protocol activation channels and security audits for their products. Command functions should be sent using a secure VPN connection to the control device (best practice). Double authentication would be an even more secure option.

For further information, beyond the scope of this document, please look at the EU Cybersecurity Act (EC, 2019) and the European Parliament's study "Cyber Security Strategy for the Energy Sector" (EP, 2016).

10.9. Types of data collected through the monitoring system

10.9.1 Irradiance measurements

Irradiance Sensors

For solar PV installations larger than 200kWp, it is best practice to measure solar irradiance in the plane of the PV array (POA) on-site by means of at least one irradiance measurement device according to Class A quality classification and ISO 9060:2018 (ISO 9060 2018). The higher the quality of the pyranometer, the lower the uncertainty will be.

Pyranometers class A are preferred over silicon reference cells because they allow a direct comparison of the measured performance of the PV plant with the performance figures estimated in the energy yield assessment.

Irradiance sensors must be placed at the least shaded location. They must be mounted and wired in accordance with manufacturers' guidelines. Preventive Maintenance and calibration of the sensors must follow the manufacturers' guidelines.

The irradiance should be recorded with a granularity of up to 15 minutes (minimum requirement).

Further information on the categorisation of plant sizes and the use of appropriate measuring technology is provided in IEC 61724-1.

Satellite-based Irradiance Measurements

If ground-based irradiance sensors are not available, irradiance data from a high-quality satellite-based data service can be acquired as a minimum requirement in order to allow at least regular plant performance verifications. This is also useful, if there is low confidence on the data measured onsite by the Monitoring System. In particular, high-quality satellite-based data should be used for irradiation sensor data quality assessment. The longer the period considered the lower the error will be for satellite-based irradiation data.

When satellite-based irradiance data is used, hourly granularity or less (15 minutes if possible) is recommended. The data must be retrieved once per day at least.

10.9.2. Module temperature measurements

Module temperature can be measured for performance analysis in KPIs such as the temperature-corrected PR (see 11.2.4. *Temperature-corrected Performance Ratio*).

The accuracy of the temperature sensor, including signal conditioning and acquisition done by the monitoring system hardware, should be $< \pm 1^\circ\text{C}$.

The temperature sensor should be stuck with appropriate and stable thermally conductive glue to the middle of the backside of the module in the middle of the array table, positioned in the centre of a cell, away from the junction box of the module (Woyte et al. 2013). The installation should be in accordance with manufacturer guidelines (e.g., respecting cabling instructions towards the datalogger).

PV module temperature is not supposed to be identical for all modules in a plant mainly due to different wind exposure. Therefore, in large plants more sensors will be required across the site because module temperature should be measured at different representative positions, for example for modules in the centre of the plant and for modules at edge locations where temperature variation is expected.

The granularity of module temperature data should be at least 15 minutes to perform a correct PR calculation.

10 Data and monitoring requirements / continued

10.9.3. Local meteorological data

It is best practice to measure ambient temperature, wind speed, rain fall and other site relevant meteorological measurement with the installation of a local meteorological station in accordance with the manufacturers' guidelines. Ambient temperature is measured with a shielded thermometer, of the PT100 type, for example. The shield protects the sensor from radiative heat transfer. Wind speed is measured with an anemometer, at 10 m height above ground level.

Wind and ambient temperature data are normally not required for calculating PR unless this is a contractual requirement/agreement (e.g., according to specific recommendations such as from NREL). However, they are required when the PV plant is to be modelled in operation or in retrospect.

Additionally, whenever the module temperature measurements are not available or not suitable, wind speed and ambient temperature coupled with installation specifications can be used to retrieve a good estimation of module temperature. In this case, 15 minutes granularity of measurement is still the best practice.

For plants larger than 10 MWp, it is recommended to have automated data collection of independent hourly meteorological data (ambient temperature, wind speed, snow coverage, rainfall) from an independent meteorological source. The reason for this is that on-site meteorological stations are subject to local phenomena and installation-specific results. Data from an independent meteorological station is less subject to this while being also more stable and robust with respect to long-term drift. They can therefore be used to evaluate the quality, and eventually replace, the on-site measurement.

Therefore, for both performance assessment and detailed analysis purposes, it is recommended to enable automated data collection from a nearby independent meteorological reference. However, for performance assessment the most important measurement remains the in-plane irradiation (see 11. *Key Performance Indicators*).

Solar resource data derived from satellite image processing is available from several services at a nominal per-site and per time-segment (such as one week). The measurement error in satellite data might be greater than that of an on-site instrument but is

often more reliable than a mis-aligned, low class or dirty on-site pyranometer and less susceptible to soiling or tampering.

10.9.4. String measurements

Individual string current measurements may be deployed when not supported by the inverters. String level monitoring, as compared with inverter level, allows for more precise trouble-shooting procedures. Depending on module technology used in the plant, strings can be combined (in harnesses) which can help reducing operation costs.

In order to detect problems quickly and to increase the plant uptime, it is good to install string monitoring equipment (as a recommendation). This will constantly measure the current of every string and register those measurements every up to 15 minutes. To reduce costs, the current sensor can potentially measure more than one string, but it is not recommended to parallel more than two of them.

10.9.5. Inverter measurements

Inverters' hardware continuously measures and records a large number of data points that can be interrogated from the monitoring system. The data sent from the inverter to the monitoring system should, as a recommendation, be cumulative values to allow the monitoring of the overall electricity generation of the inverter even in case of outages of the monitoring system.

Recommended variables to be monitored are:

- Cumulative Energy generated (kWh)
- Instant Active Power injected (kW)
- Instant Reactive Power injected (kVAr)
- Instant Apparent Power injected (kVA)
- AC Voltage per each phase (V)
- AC Current per each phase (A)
- Power Factor / Cos Phi
- Frequency for each phase (Hz)
- Instant DC Power for each MPPT (kW)
- Instant DC Current for each MPPT (A)

- Instant DC Voltage for each MPPT (V)
- Total instant DC Power for all MPPTs (kW)
- Total instant DC Current for all MPPTs (A)
- Average instant DC Voltage for all MPPTs (V)
- Internal temperature (°C)
- Conversion components temperature (°C)
- Inverter failure signals

It should be noted that the precision of inverter-integrated measurements is not always documented by the manufacturers and can be imprecise. For example, energy or AC power measurements taken by inverters may differ significantly from the values recorded by the site revenue meter. Monitoring systems and reporting should specify and be transparent about the devices used to acquire each measurement.

It is also very useful to have the Monitoring System collecting all inverter alarms as they are a valuable source of information for fault detection. Also, low importance alarms or warnings can be used for the organisation of maintenance activities and even setting up Preventive Maintenance actions.

In certain cases, the grid connection has limits that must be always respected, such as the maximum AC power that can be injected. For these cases there are two possibilities, one is to set limits using inverter parameters, the second one is to install Power Plant Controller that will change inverter parameters dynamically. In both cases it could be useful to monitor inverter parameters and to program alarms so that the O&M service provider is notified when there is a parameter that has been changed wrongly and does not respect certain limit.

Best practice for the measurement of inverter-based variables is a 15-minute sampling and a granularity of up to 1 minute. For ad-hoc performance analysis purposes for example, to allow the analysis of PV array performance, root cause analysis or possible MPP-tracking problems, the input DC voltage and current need to be measured and stored separately.

In general, and as best practice, all common inverter parameters should be logged by the data loggers, since there are a lot of additional important parameters such as internal temperature, isolation level etc that could be useful for O&M services.

Inverters should detect overheating of its conversion components to protect themselves under extreme or abnormal operating conditions. Therefore, it is advisable to record the temperature as provided by the inverter so that ventilation performance can be assessed.

10.9.6. Energy meter

One of the most important features of a Monitoring System is the automated collection of energy (or revenue) meter data with a granularity of up to 15 minutes. Gathering energy meter data is required for invoicing purposes but it is also the best reference for measuring energy and calculating plant PR and Yield and is much more accurate than using inverter data.

A high accuracy energy meter to measure energy produced and consumed by the plant is normally required by the utility. When this is not the case it is a best practice to install a meter with a maximum uncertainty of $\pm 1.0\%$, especially for plants $> 100 \text{ kW}_p$.

To allow data acquisition via the Monitoring System, it is recommended to have a meter with two communication bus ports as well as Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) service from the Utility or Meter Operator.

10.9.7. Control settings

It is important to monitor all control settings of the plant at inverter level as well as grid injection level if available. Many plants apply control settings for local grid regulation (injection management) or optimisation of the market value of the PV generation portfolio (remote control). These settings need to be monitored for reasons of contractual reporting or performance assessment.

10.9.8. Alarms

As a minimum requirement, the monitoring system will have the possibility of generating the following alarms and, at the user's discretion, to have them sent by email:

- Loss of communication
- Plant stops
- Inverter stops
- Plant with Low Performance
- Inverter with Low Performance (e.g., due to overheating)

10 Data and monitoring requirements / continued

As best practice, the following alarms will also be sent by the monitoring system:

- String without current
- Plant under operation
- Discretion Alarm
- Alarm Aggregation

As a best practice, the following alarms should also be followed by the O&M service provider, but these alarms are sent by separate systems other than the monitoring system:

- Intrusion detection
- Fire alarm detection

The above lists are not exhaustive. For a comprehensive overview of recommended functionalities, refer to the Monitoring Checklist of the Solar Best Practices Mark.⁹

10.9.9. AC circuit / Protection relay

It is recommended to monitor the status of MV switch gear and important LV switches through digital inputs. Whenever possible, it can also be useful to read and register the alarms generated by the protection relay control unit via communication bus.

10.10. Data collected by specialised PV module field inspections

Not all types of data are collected automatically through the monitoring system. Certain data are collected via on-site measurements and field inspections manually or with aerial inspections.

PV modules are engineered to produce electricity for 25–30 years and nowadays are being deployed in ever more and ever bigger large-scale PV plants. Quality assurance is the cornerstone for long-term reliability in order to maximise financial and energy returns and therefore, the need for tracking down the source of failures once the modules are installed becomes vital. For that reason, field technical inspections, such as infrared (IR) thermography, electroluminescence (EL) imaging and I-V curve tracing, are being put into practice in order to assess the quality and performance of PV modules on-site.

Such field inspections can be part of contractual preventive maintenance tasks or could be offered as additional services triggered by the O&M service provider in cases where, for example, plant underperformance is not clearly understood just by looking at the monitoring data.

10.10.1. Infrared thermography (IR)

Infrared (IR) thermographic data provides clear and concise indications about the status of PV modules and arrays and are used in both predictive and corrective maintenance.

Depending on its temperature, every object (e.g., a PV module) emits varying intensities of thermal radiation. As explained by Max Planck's theories, this radiation measurement can be exploited for the determination of the actual temperature of objects. Thermal radiation – invisible to the human eye – can be measured using an infrared camera and is presented in the form of a thermal image. If abnormalities in PV modules occur, this typically leads to higher electrical resistance and thus a change in temperature of the affected module or cell. Based on the visual form and quantifiable temperature differences over the thermal image of a PV module, abnormalities such as hotspots, inactive substrings or inactive modules can be identified.

In order for the thermographic data to be usable, a number of minimum requirements have to be met. Irradiance shall equal a minimum of 600 W/m² and shall be continuously measured on-site, ideally orthogonally to the module surface. Infrared cameras need to possess a thermal resolution of at least 320 x 240 pixels and a thermal sensitivity of at least 0.1 K. Measurements shall be taken at a distance which ensures that the resolution of the infrared image equals 5 x 5 pixels per 6" PV cell. Further requirements are to be found in IEC TS 62446-3 Part 3: Photovoltaic modules and plants – outdoor infrared thermography.

Besides PV modules, IR thermography can also be used to inspect other important electrical components of a PV plant, such as cables, contacts, fuses, switches, inverters and batteries. For more information, see IEC TS 62446-3 Part 3: Photovoltaic modules and plants – outdoor infrared thermography and IEA-PVPS T13-10:2018 report: review on infrared and Electroluminescence imaging for PV Field applications.

⁹ The best practice checklists of the Solar Best Practices Mark are available at: www.solarbestpractices.com.

The utilisation of IR thermography alone is sometimes not enough to reach a conclusive diagnosis on the cause and the impact of certain PV module failures. Therefore, it is usually combined with the following complementary field tests.

10.10.2. I-V curve tracing on-site

Measurements of the I-V curve characteristic determine the power, short-circuit current, open-circuit voltage and other relevant electric parameters (shunt and series resistance, fill factor) of single PV modules or strings. The shape of the curve provides valuable information to identify failures and it also provides with a quantitative calculation of power losses. A typical outdoors I-V curve measurement setup consists of a portable I-V curve tracer, which in combination with an irradiance sensor (a reference cell usually) and a thermometer is used to measure the PV modules electrical behaviour. Because on-site ambient conditions differ greatly from standardised lab values, the measured results should be translated into STC.

10.10.3. Electroluminescence (EL) imaging on-site

Another technology being deployed on-site for PV module quality control is EL imaging, which allows the identification with great detail of failures such as cell cracks and microcracks, which are invisible to the human eye and usually not conclusively identified by IR.

During the electroluminescence (EL) phenomenon a material emits light in response to the passage of an electric current. This is applied in order to check integrity of PV modules: here a current flows through the PV-active material, and as a result, electrons and holes in the semiconductor recombine. In this process the excited electrons release their energy as light. EL imaging detects the near infrared radiation (NIR), i.e., wavelengths between 0,75 and 1,4 μm . The EL is induced by stimulating single PV modules or strings with a DC current supplied by an external portable power source. The NIR emissions then are detected by a silicon charged-coupled device (CCD) camera. This is usually done in a dark environment because the amount of NIR emitted by the PV modules is low compared to the radiation emitted by the background light and from the sun. This means that EL imaging on-

site has to be done usually during the night or while covering the PV modules with a tent. A typical setup consists of a modified single-lens reflex (SLR) camera, a tripod, a portable DC power supply and extension cables. Additionally, a high pass edge filter at 0.85 μm may be used to reduce interfering light from other sources. The resolution of the camera should be at least high enough so that the fingers of the solar cells in the module can be clearly identified. The noise of the camera output has to be as low as possible (lowest ISO number possible) and the camera should be as steady as possible in order to avoid blurry images. Exposure times of 15 seconds are common.

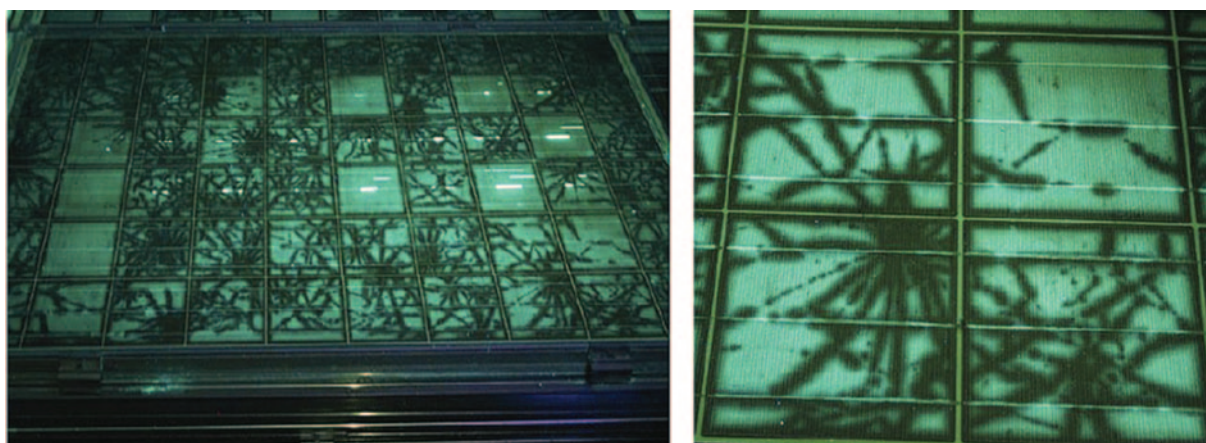
10.10.4. Fluorescence imaging

UV-Fluorescence imaging is a non-destructive imaging technique for failure analysis of PV-modules. The development of the technique started around 2010 with first publications in 2012 (Köngtes et al, 2012; Schlothauer et al, 2012; Eder et al, 2017; Muehleisen et al, 2018). UV-Fluorescence measurements are performed in dark environment (typically at night) by illumination of the PV-modules with UV-light (<400nm). Most encapsulants show fluorescence in the visible region and thus the material's response can be captured with a photographic camera. No disconnecting nor powering of modules is required.

The observed fluorescence of the encapsulation above the cells with respect to (i) spatial distribution, (ii) intensity and (iii) spectral shift of the fluorescent light is dependent on operation time in the field, climatic conditions as well as type of encapsulant and back sheet used. The fluorescence signal furthermore depends on type of defect like micro cracks in c-Si cells, hotspots or glass breakage.

Imaging of PV modules typically takes less than 60 seconds. An example of UV-fluorescence is given in figure 9 on the following page. The advantages of the technique are that no modifications are necessary to the PV systems and in combination with Electro-Luminescence (EL) also there is potentially an evaluation of timelines possible as the fluorescence signal is a function of time. New cracks for instance are only visible in EL because there was no time to "bleach" the fluorescence signal.

FIGURE 9 EXAMPLE UV-FLUORESCENCE IMAGES AFTER A SEVERE HAILSTORM



SOURCE: Taken from W. Muehleisen (2018).

10.10.5. Magnetic Field Imaging (MFI)

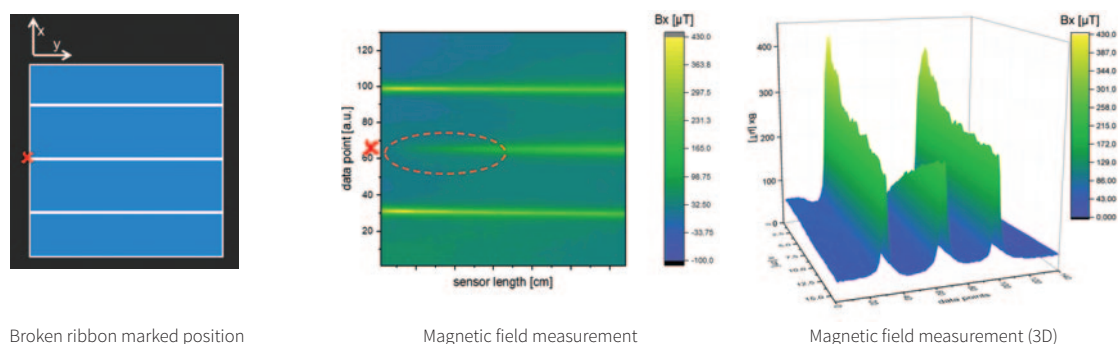
Magnetic field imaging (MFI) is a new and innovative method that allows to analyze flowing electric currents non-destructively, contactless and quantitatively.

The underlying physics are very simple: every electric current generates a magnetic field. A magnetic field sensor images this by simply being moved over the current-carrying component. Strength and direction of the electric current can be inferred.

Current-carrying components such as solar cells, modules or batteries have a characteristic current distribution. If components have defects that influence the electrical current distribution significantly, the resulting magnetic field also changes in specific ways. These changes can be detected by MFI and thus traced back to the defects.

The fields of application are manifold. In PV, defects relevant for the operation of solar modules can be detected reliably (Lauch et al, 2018; Patzold et al, 2019). These are, for example, broken connectors or ribbons (see figure 10 below), missing solder joints or defective bypass diodes in the junction boxes of the modules.

FIGURE 10 EXAMPLES OF MAGNETIC FIELD IMAGING (MFI)



SOURCE: Lauch et al, 2018; Patzold et al, 2019.

NOTE: Left: Schematic of 3 BB solar cell, „x“ indicates the position of broken ribbon; centre: Bx magnetic field in 2D representation and more visual 3D on the right side.

The advantages of the measurement technique that it is non-destructive, fast and quantitative (the measurement signal is proportional to the underlying electric current). A disadvantage of using magnetic fields is that the distance to the sample must be low, in the millimeter range, to result in high quality imaging results. The measurement cannot resolve microscopic structures ($< 100 \mu\text{m}$), yet.

10.10.6. Soiling measurements

The operational efficiency of modules is affected by soiling accumulation. Soiling limits the effective irradiance and, therefore, the output of the PV module. It is recommended to measure soiling in order to optimise cleaning schedules and thus revenues.

Several methodologies exist for soiling monitoring, the most basic being human inspections. A widely used soiling measurement method is using ground-based soiling reference modules consisting of a module that remains soiled, a cleaned reference cell, an automatic washing station and measurement electronics. There are several variations employing different principles to measure the effect of soiling. Upcoming digital solutions for soiling monitoring include the analysis of satellite imagery with remote sensing techniques, machine intelligence algorithms and statistical methods. Possible soiling analyses include taking a swab of the soil to an analytical laboratory to determine its nature (diesel soot; pollen; organic soil; inorganic dust) and the appropriate cleaning solution.



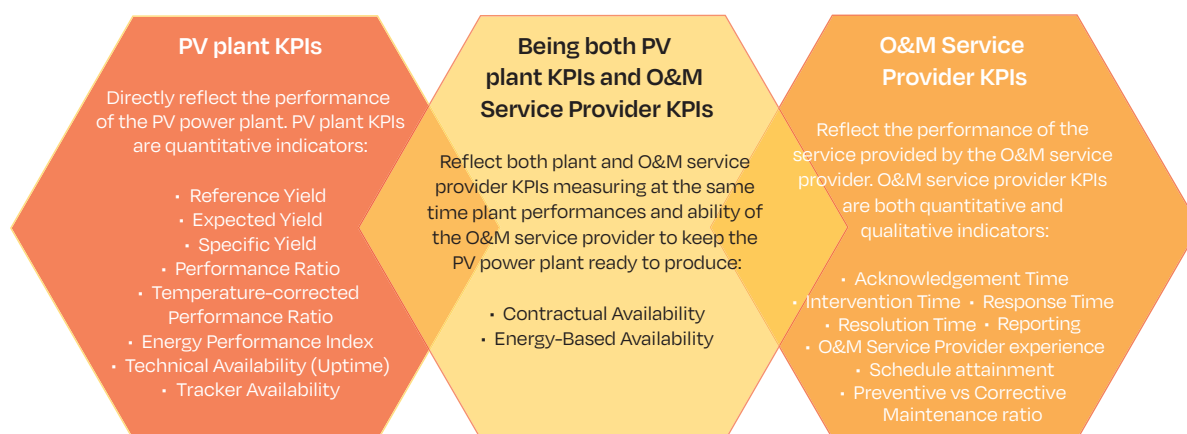
This section deals with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which provide the Asset Owner with a quick reference on the performance of the PV power plant. The KPIs are divided into the following categories:

- **PV plant KPIs**, which directly reflect the performance of the PV power plant. PV plant KPIs are quantitative indicators.
- **O&M service provider KPIs**, which reflect the performance of the service provided by the O&M service provider. O&M service provider KPIs are both quantitative and qualitative indicators.
- **PV plant/O&M service provider KPIs**, which reflect PV power plant performance and O&M service quality at the same time.

The O&M service provider is generally responsible for the calculation of the KPIs and reporting to the Asset Owner, see 5.1. *Technical reporting*.

It is important to underline that the O&M service provider cannot and is thus not responsible for providing contractual guarantees for all the KPIs listed in this chapter. For more information on suggested contractually guaranteed KPIs, see 12.3. *Contractual guarantees*. When there are warranties in place it is strongly advised that the party liable for the warranties is not the only one to calculate the KPIs.

FIGURE 11 OVERVIEW OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF KPIs



11.1. PV power plant data

PV power plant data can be split into two groups:

1. Raw data measurements: data obtained directly from the PV plant and used for performance calculation.
2. PV power plant KPIs using the raw data from the PV plant to give a more balanced overview of the operation of the PV plant.

11.1.1. Raw data measurements for performance calculation

The following is a list of raw data measurements that can be used to calculate KPIs:

- AC Apparent Power produced (kVA)
- AC Active Power (kW)
- AC Energy produced (kWh)
- AC Energy metered (kWh)
- Irradiance¹⁰ (Reference for the plant or the sub-plants) (W/m²)
- Air and module temperature (Celsius degrees)
- Alarm, status code and duration
- Outages, unavailability events

This is a basic list, and it is non-exhaustive.

11.2. PV power plant KPIs

Calculated KPIs give a more balanced view of the operation of a PV plant as they take into account the different operating conditions for each plant. Suggestions for calculated KPIs along with relevant formula can be found below. These KPIs can be calculated over different time periods, but often they are computed on an annual basis. When comparing different KPIs or different PV power plants' KPIs, it is important to keep consistency in the time period used in computation.

11.2.1. Reference Yield

The Reference Yield Y_r represents the energy obtainable under standard conditions, with no losses, over a certain period of time. It is useful to compare the Reference Yield with the final system yield (see 11.1.2.3. *Performance Ratio*).

The Reference Yield is defined as:

$$Y_r(i) = \frac{H_{POA(i)}}{G_{STC}}$$

Where:

$Y_r(i)$ = Reference Yield for the time period i expressed in peak sun hours (h) or (kWh/kW)

$H_{POA(i)}$ = Is the measured irradiation on plane of the PV array (POA) for the time period i (kWh/m²)

G_{STC} = The reference irradiance at standard test conditions (STC) (1,000 W/m²).

11.2.2. Specific Yield

Specific Yield, also called final yield, Y_f is the measure of the total energy generated, normalised per kW_p installed over a certain period of time i .

It is generally calculated at a plant's AC meter.

Specific Yield is calculated as follows:

$$Y_f(i) = \frac{E(i)}{P_o}$$

Where:

$Y_f(i)$ = Plant Specific Yield for the time period i , expressed in (kWh/kW_p) or peak sun hours (h)

$E(i)$ = Plant energy production or Plant energy metered for the time period i (kWh)

P_o = Plant Peak DC power (nominal power) (kW_p)

¹⁰ Although irradiance and irradiation are often used as synonyms, they do not express the same physical quantities and should not be used interchangeably (see IEC 61724-1:2017):

- Irradiance is the power of the sunlight at a specific moment per unit of area, usually expressed in Watt per square meter (W/m²).
- Irradiation is the power of the sunlight integrated over a period of time, e.g., an hour, a day or a year. In other words, irradiation is the energy per unit of area calculated as the sum of irradiances over a period of time. It is commonly expressed in kilowatt-hour per square meter (kWh/m²).

11 Key Performance Indicators / continued

This measurement integrates plant output over a chosen time frame and since it normalises to nominal power, comparison of the production of plants with different nominal power or even different technologies (e.g., PV, wind, biomass etc) is possible. For example, the Specific Yield of a PV Plant can be compared against the Specific Yield of a wind plant for investment decision taking or the Specific Yield of a 5 MW_p ground mounted PV plant can be compared directly to a 1 MW_p double tracker PV plant's Specific Yield.

Calculating Specific Yield on the inverter level also allows a direct comparison between inverters that may have different AC/DC conversion rates or different nominal powers. Moreover, by checking inverter level Specific Yield within a plant, it is possible to detect whether an inverter is performing worse than others.

11.2.3. Performance ratio

The Performance Ratio (PR) is a quality indicator of the PV plant. As the ratio between the actual Specific Yield and the theoretically possible Reference Yield, PR captures the overall effect of losses of the PV system when converting from nameplate DC rating to AC output. Typically, losses result from factors such as module degradation, temperature, soiling, inverter losses, transformer losses, and system and network downtime. The higher the PR is, the more energy efficient the plant is.

PR, as defined in this section, is usually used to report on longer periods of time according to the O&M contract, such as month or year. Based on PR, the O&M service provider can provide recommendations to the plant owners on possible investments or interventions.

Performance Ratio is defined as:

$$PR = \frac{Y_f}{Y_r} \times 100$$

Where:

PR = Performance Ratio over a year (%)

Y_f = Specific Yield over a year (also called final yield) expressed in (kWh/kW_p) or peak sun hours (h)

Y_r = Reference Yield over a year expressed in (kWh/kW_p) or peak sun hours (h)

These definitions are based on (Woyte et al. 2014) in line with the IEC 61724-1:2017 and are common practice.

PR is measured for available times (see 11.4.1. *Contractual Availability*) at the inverter or plant level.

Note that special attention is needed when assessing the PR of overrated plants, where the output of the plant is limited by the inverter maximum AC output. In such situations and for the period that overrating takes place, PR will calculate lower than normal although there is no technical problem with the plant. Stakeholders should be careful assessing PR values for overrated plants, although the amount of overrating is normally statistically constant or with negligible differences on a yearly basis.

11.2.4. Temperature-corrected performance ratio

In some situations, such as a commissioning test or PV power plant handover from one O&M service provider to another, PR needs to be measured over a shorter time period, such as two weeks or a month. In such situations, it is recommended to use a PR formula corrected with temperature factor in order to neutralise short-term PR fluctuation due to temperature variations from STC (25°C). As a best practice, temperature should be registered with a granularity of up to 15 minutes (referred to as time period j below) and the average temperature for the time period i should be calculated by weighting the mean temperatures of the time periods j according to Specific Yield of this time period.¹¹

Temperature-corrected PR can be defined as follows:

$$PR_{TO(i)} = \frac{Y_f(i)}{Y_r(i) \times \left[1 - \frac{\beta}{100} \times (T_{MOD(i)} - 25^\circ\text{C})\right]} \times 100$$

Where:

$PR_{TO(i)}$ = Temperature-corrected Performance Ratio for the time period i (%)

$Y_f(i)$ = Plant Specific Yield for the time period i , expressed in (kWh/kW_p) or peak sun hours (h)

$Y_r(i)$ = Reference Yield for the time period i , expressed in (kWh/kW_p) or peak sun hours (h)

β = Temperature coefficient for P_o that corresponds to the installed modules (%/°C)

P_o = Plant Peak DC power (nominal power) (kW_p)

$T_{MOD(i)}$ = Average module temperature for the period i , weighted according to Specific Yield $Y_f(j)$ (°C) – see formula below.

$$T_{MOD(i)} = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^i Y_f(j) \times T_{MOD(j)}}{\sum_{j=1}^i (Y_f(j))}$$

$T_{MOD(i)}$ = See above

$Y_f(j)$ = Plant Specific Yield for the time period j , expressed in (kWh/kW_p) or peak sun hours (h)

$T_{MOD(j)}$ = Module temperature for the time period j (°C)

BOX 3

Interpreting Performance Ratio

Careful attention needs to be paid when interpreting PR, because there are several cases where it can provide misleading information about the status of the PV plant:

Seasonal variation of PR (*lower PR in the hot months, higher in colder months*)

The calculation of PR presented in this section neglects the effect of PV module temperature on its power. Therefore, the performance ratio usually decreases with increasing irradiation during a reporting period, even though energy production increases. This is due to an increasing PV module temperature that results in lower efficiency. This gives a seasonal variation, with higher PR values in the cold months and lower values in the hot months. It may also give geographic variations between systems installed in different climates.

This seasonal variation of PR can be significantly reduced by calculating a *temperature-corrected PR to STC*, which adjusts the power rating of the plant at each recording interval to compensate for differences between the actual PV module temperature and the STC reference temperature of 25 °C (taking into account the temperature coefficient of the modules, given as % of power loss per °C).

Interpretation of PR for overrated plants (*misleading lower PR*)

Special attention is needed when assessing the PR of overrated plants: in these plants installed DC power is higher than inverter AC power (DC/AC ratio higher than

1), and in consequence during sunny periods the output of the plant may be limited by inverter maximum AC output. In such situations, when derating takes place, PR will be lower than normal although there is no technical problem with the plant – lower PR in high-production periods is in fact the consequence of a design decision. Stakeholders should be careful assessing PR values for overrated plants, although the amount of derating is normally statistically constant or with negligible differences on a yearly basis.

Calculation of PR using GHI instead of POA (*misleading higher PR*)

Calculation of the PR using the Global Horizontal Irradiance (GHI) instead of in-plane (POA) irradiance is an alternative in situations where GHI measurements are available, but POA measurements are not. The PR calculated with GHI would typically show higher values which may even exceed unity. These values cannot necessarily be used to compare one system to another but can be useful for tracking performance of a system over time and could also be applied to compare a system's measured, expected, and predicted performance using a performance model that is based only on GHI.

Soiled irradiance sensors (*misleading higher PR*)

Special attention is needed when assessing the PR using data from soiled irradiance sensors. In this case, PR will present higher values and will give the false impression that the PV plant is performing better than expected and even some underperformance issues could remain hidden.

- 11 The temperature-corrected PR calculation is not consistently applied. Therefore, this note clarifies in brief the best practice for calculating PR using the formulas provided above. There are 2 methods to apply the formula:

- In the *time-weighted* method, PR is weighted over a period by the time interval. An example would be if the SCADA system provides data in 1 min / 5min / 10 min average values. PR is then calculated for that 1 min / 5min / 10 min period and the resulting PR values are then averaged. This method will generally yield higher PR values in the morning, while production is low and lower PR values mid-day, but with high energy production. Therefore, low PR value are given

the same with as the high PR values and the use of an average value of the PR does not take into account the different weight that PR may have over the day. This can artificially increase the PR by up to a couple of percentage points.

- In the *irradiance-weighted* method, irradiance as a sum counts higher irradiance values as more impactful on the total PR for any given period. This eliminates the weighting effect and provides a more accurate PR. Therefore, all relevant measured parameters should be summed above and below the line over the calculation period before any division and calculation of PR is performed.

11 Key Performance Indicators / continued

11.2.5. Expected yield

Expected Yield $Y_{exp}(i)$ is the Reference Yield $Y_r(i)$ multiplied by the expected PR and thus expresses what should have been produced over a certain period of time i .

Note that Expected Yield is based on past values of irradiation data. Predicted Yield is based on forecasted data, from day ahead and hour ahead weather reports.

Expected Yield can be defined as:

$$Y_{exp}(i) = PR_{exp}(i) \times Y_r(i)$$

Where:

$Y_{exp}(i)$ = Expected Yield for the time period i , expressed in (kWh/kW_p) or peak sun hours (h)

$PR_{exp}(i)$ = Average Expected Performance Ratio of the plant over the period i , based on simulation with given actual temperature and irradiation and plant characteristics. (PR_{exp} simulation is beyond the scope of the present document but for more information on this, see Brabandere et al (2014), Klise and Stein (2009), NREL (2017), PVsyst (2017) and SANDIA (2017).)

$Y_r(i)$ = Reference Yield for the time period i (based on past irradiation data) expressed in (kWh/kW_p) or peak sun hours (h)

11.2.6. Energy Performance Index

The Energy Performance Index (EPI) is defined as the ratio between the Specific Yield Y_i and the Expected Yield $Y_{exp}(i)$ as determined by a PV model. The EPI is regularly recalculated for the respective assessment period (typically day/month/year) using the actual weather data as input to the model each time it is calculated. This concept was proposed, e.g., in (Honda et al. 2012).

The Energy Performance Index (EPI) is defined as:

$$EPI(i) = \frac{Y_f(i)}{Y_{exp}(i)}$$

Where:

$EPI(i)$ = Energy Performance Index for the time period i (%)

$Y_f(i)$ = Specific Yield for the time period i (kWh/kW_p) or (h)

$Y_{exp}(i)$ = Expected Yield for the time period i (kWh/kW_p) or (h)

The advantage of using the EPI is that its expected value is 100% at project start-up and is independent of climate or weather. This indicator relies on the accuracy of the model. Unfortunately, there are more than one established model for the Expected Yield of PV systems in operation and not all of them are transparent. Therefore, the use of EPIs is recommended mainly for the identification of performance flaws and comparison of plants. On the other side, the Energy Performance Index is a useful and simple KPI especially for small-scale systems.

11.2.7. Technical availability or uptime

Technical Availability (or Uptime), Contractual Availability and Energy-based Availability are three closely related indicators to measure whether or not the PV power plant is generating electricity. The latter two KPIs are explained in section 11.4. *PV power plant/O&M service provider KPIs*.

Technical Availability is the parameter that represents the time during which the plant is operating over the total possible time it is able to operate, *without taking any exclusion factors into account*. The total possible time is considered the time when the plant is exposed to irradiation levels above the generator's Minimum Irradiance Threshold (MIT). Technical Availability is covered extensively in IEC TS 63019:2019.

Technical Availability is then defined and calculated as:

$$A_t = \frac{T_{useful} - T_{down}}{T_{useful}} \times 100$$

Where:

A_t = Technical Availability (Uptime) (%)

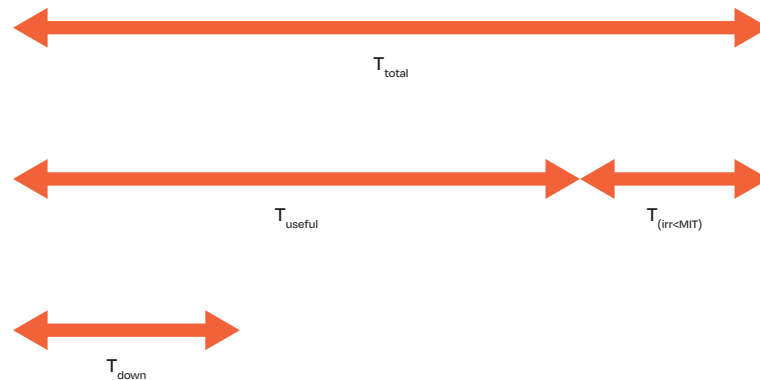
T_{useful} = Period of time with in plane irradiance above MIT (h)

T_{down} = Period of T_{useful} when the system is down (no production) (h)

Figure 12 on the following page illustrates the various periods in time mentioned above.

Normally, only the time where irradiance is above the MIT is considered and this is noted above as T_{useful} where $T_{useful} = T_{total} - T_{irr < MIT}$. Typical MIT values are 50 or 70 W/m². MIT should be defined according to site and plant characteristics (e.g., type of inverter, DC/AC ratio etc).

FIGURE 12 VARIOUS PERIODS OF TIME FOR THE CALCULATION OF THE TECHNICAL AVAILABILITY



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Technical Availability should be measured also at inverter level. Individual inverters' Technical Availability $A_{t,k}$ should be weighted according to their respective installed DC power P_k . In this case, the Technical Availability of the total PV power plant $A_{t,total}$ with an installed total DC power of P_0 can be defined as follows:

Technical Availability weighted by individual inverters' installed DC power:

$$A_{t,total} = 100 \times \sum \left(A_{t,k} \times \frac{P_k}{P_0} \right)$$

Where:

- $A_{t,total}$ = Technical Availability of the plant (%)
- $A_{t,k}$ = Technical Availability of the inverter k
- P_k = Installed DC power of the inverter k
- P_0 = Plant Peak DC power (nominal power) (kW_p)

For the calculation of Technical Availability, typically up to 15 minutes of irradiation and power production data should be taken as basis, if granularity of components remains at the level of inverter or higher. Anything below the level of inverter is then captured with the Performance Ratio calculation presented above.

11.2.8. Technical tracker availability or tracker uptime

Similar to Technical Availability, Technical Tracker Availability is simply a ratio of the useful time compared to the uptime or downtime of the tracker. This measurement is a pure technical parameter and

would not allow for any agreed exclusions in the availability. To calculate the technical tracker availability, the following formula can be used:

Technical tracker availability is calculated as:

$$A_{t,tracker} = \frac{T_{t,useful} - T_{t,down}}{T_{t,useful}} \times 100$$

Where:

- $A_{t,tracker}$ = Technical Tracker Availability (%)
- $T_{t,down}$ = Period of time when the tracker is down (h)
- $T_{t,useful}$ = Period of time when the tracker is functional (h)

11.2.9. Tracking performance availability

Functional failure of a tracker can be an inaccurate tracking or out of sync tracking compared to the set point. This failure can often lead to shading or small performance deviations, based on the deviation from the sun path. The formula for the tracking performance availability is similar to the technical availability, with one small change to the classification of $T_{t,down}$. In this case the downtime is classified to any time the tracker is x (can be defined per site, depending on row spacing but ultimately can be modelled in PVSyst to give you a good general value for all seasons) degrees from the tracker set point. As long as the deviation angle is specified, this metric can be a good indicator to support the maximisation of single-or dual-axis tracking performance.

11 Key Performance Indicators / continued

11.3. O&M service provider KPIs

As opposed to power plant KPIs, which provide the Asset Owner with information about the performance of their asset, O&M service provider KPIs assess the performance of the O&M service. The use of these KPIs is not widespread in South Africa yet, however they are increasingly considered a best practice.

To perform effectively, the O&M service provider needs to have the necessary training and qualifications to enable them to resolve faults and carry inspections in a timely and professional manner.

The following time KPIs are illustrated in Figure 13.

11.3.1. Acknowledgement time

The Acknowledgement Time (also called Reaction Time) is the time between detecting the problem (receipt of the alarm or noticing a fault) and the acknowledgement of the fault by the O&M service provider by dispatching a technician. The Acknowledgement Time reflects the O&M service provider's operational ability.

11.3.2. Intervention time

The Intervention Time is the time to reach the plant by a service technician or a subcontractor from the moment of acknowledgement and whenever when visit by the O&M service provider is contractually necessary (in certain cases remote repair is possible or the O&M service provider is not able to repair the fault

and third-party involvement is necessary). Intervention Time assesses the capacity of the O&M service provider how fast they can mobilise and be on site.

11.3.3. Response time

The Response Time is the Acknowledgement Time plus the Intervention time. Used for contractual purposes, minimum Response Times are guaranteed on the basis of fault classes classified on the basis of the unavailable power and the consequent potential loss of energy generation and the relevance of the failure in terms of their safety impact. For recommendations on Response Time guarantees, see 12.3.2. *Response Time price adjustment*.

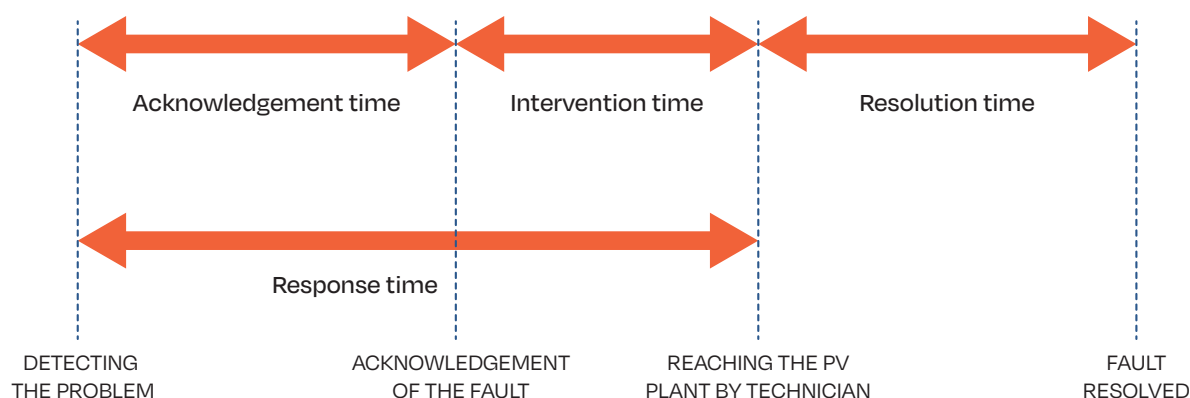
11.3.4. Resolution time

Resolution Time (or Repair Time) is the time to resolve the fault starting from the moment of reaching the PV plant. Resolution Time is generally not guaranteed, because resolution often does not depend totally on the O&M service provider.

11.3.5. Reporting

It is very important for the O&M service provider to comply with reporting requirements and reporting timelines. Content and timing of the reporting is generally agreed by the parties in the Contract agreement. Content of the reporting should be expected to be consistent and any change in content

FIGURE 13 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TIME, INTERVENTION TIME, RESPONSE TIME, RESOLUTION TIME



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or format needs to be explained by the O&M service provider. Delivery of reports per the agreed upon timeline is an important indicator for reliability and process adherence within the O&M service provider's organisation. See also 5.1. *Technical reporting*.

11.3.6. O&M Contractor experience

Experience of the O&M service provider with PV power plants in the particular country, region, grid environment and/or with PV power plants equipped with certain technology or size can play an important role. This is quite relevant for the selection of the O&M service provider and can be tracked by the owner over time (track record). The Solar Best Practices Mark can help Owners to evaluate the track record of O&M service providers. For more information, see www.solarbestpractices.com. Trained and experienced O&M service providers can reduce the amount of time spent to resolve and close faults.

11.3.7. Schedule attainment

Schedule Attainment (or Schedule Compliance) is the ability of the O&M service providers to execute the preventive maintenance schedule within the required timeframes, typically for a period of a week or month.

O&M service providers who adhere to the schedule as much as possible ensure accomplishing as much preventive maintenance and other timely corrective work as possible. Schedule compliance provides a measure of accountability.

Low schedule attainment can provide key warning signs to the asset owner regarding the O&M service provider:

- That preventive maintenance is not done which will lead to equipment failures over time.
- O&M service provider might not have sufficient number of or qualified technical staff to performance maintenance.
- O&M service provider systems such as the management of stores and spares, procurement processes are not effective.
- O&M service provider does not conduct all necessary checks to ensure system health.
- There are high levels of corrective maintenance work – which could be due to unsolved technical issues.

Best practice requires > 90%, based on the following formula:

$$\text{Schedule Attainment} = \frac{\text{Number of completed schedules in the period}}{\text{Total number of schedules for the period}} \times 100$$

11.3.8. Preventive vs corrective maintenance ratio

This metric measures the reactive nature of the plant maintenance work. Management desires reactive work to lessen in proportion to proactive work. This indicator is based on the actual number of hours technicians spend on jobs. The actual hours are measured regardless of the originally estimated hours of the planners.

When the maintenance O&M service provider has control over the equipment, the O&M service provider decides when to take certain actions to preserve equipment. When the equipment has control over the O&M service provider, the equipment drives the efforts of maintenance. A more reactive plant environment has more circumstances of the equipment experiencing problems and causing the O&M service provider to break the weekly schedule. The proactive maintenance force in control of its equipment experiences few circumstances of a sudden equipment problem that interrupts scheduled work.

Best practice requires that the ratio of preventive vs corrective maintenance is 80/20.

11.4. PV power plant/O&M service provider KPIs

11.4.1. Contractual availability

Contractual Availability is Technical Availability with certain contractually agreed exclusion factors (see below) applied in the calculation used as a basis for the general Contractual Availability guarantees provided by the O&M service provider to the Asset Owner and included in the O&M Contract. A best practice is a Minimum Guaranteed Contractual Availability of 98% over a year. (For more details on Availability guarantee provided by the O&M service provider, see 12.3.1. *Availability guarantee*).

11 Key Performance Indicators / continued

Contractual Availability is thus the parameter that represents the time in which the plant is operating over the total possible time it is able to operate, taking into account the number of hours the plant is not operating for reasons contractually not attributable to the O&M service provider (listed below in the same section).

Contractual Availability is therefore defined and calculated as:

$$A_c = \frac{T_{\text{useful}} - T_{\text{down}} + T_{\text{excluded}}}{T_{\text{useful}}} \times 100$$

Where:

A_c = Contractual Availability (%)

T_{useful} = period of time with in plane irradiance above MIT (h)

T_{down} = period of T_{useful} when the system is down (no production) (h)

T_{excluded} = part of T_{down} to be excluded because of presence of an exclusion factor (see below) (h)

Contractual Availability weighted by individual inverters' installed DC power:

$$A_{c \text{ total}} = 100 \times \sum \left(A_{c k} \times \frac{P_k}{P_o} \right)$$

Where:

$A_{c \text{ total}}$ = Availability of the plant (%)

$A_{c k}$ = Availability of the inverter k

P_k = Installed DC power of the inverter k

P_o = Plant Peak DC power (nominal power) (kW_p)

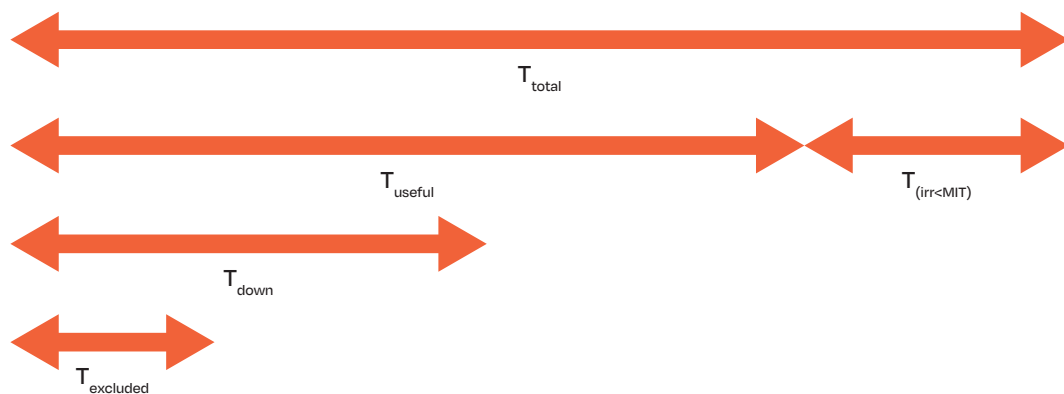
For the calculation of Contractual Availability, typically up to 15 minutes of irradiation and power production data should be taken as basis, if granularity of components remains at the level of inverter or higher. Anything below the level of inverter is then captured with the Performance Ratio calculation presented above.

As Contractual Availability is used for contractual purposes, any failure time should only begin to run when the O&M service provider receives the error message. If the data connection to the site was not available due to an external issue that is beyond the O&M service provider's responsibility, failure time should only begin after reestablishment of the link. However, if the data connection was lost due to the unavailability of the monitoring system, the failure time should count. In general, the O&M service provider should immediately look at the root cause of the communication loss and resolve it.

Figure 14 below illustrates the various periods in time mentioned above.

Like the Technical Availability, the Contractual Availability is also calculated for irradiance levels above the MIT and measured at inverter level. Individual inverters' Contractual Availabilities $A_{c k}$ should be weighted according to their respective installed DC power P_k . In this case the Contractual Availability of the total PV power plant $A_{c \text{ total}}$ with an installed total DC power of P_o can be defined as follows:

FIGURE 14 VARIOUS PERIODS OF TIME FOR THE CALCULATION OF CONTRACTUAL AVAILABILITY¹²



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¹² The T_{down} represents the whole downtime, before the exclusions are applied. Therefore, T_{excluded} is a part of T_{down} in the diagram. In practice you often first see that a plant is down (= measurement of T_{down}) and only in the course of troubleshooting one gets the information whether you can exclude part of the downtime.

The Asset Owner and the O&M service provider should agree on certain failure situations that are not taken into account (**exclusion factors**) in the calculation of Contractual Availability. Evidence should be provided by the contractor for any exclusion factor and the reason for excluding the event must not be due to an O&M service provider fault. Some good examples for exclusion factors are:

- Force majeure.
- Snow and ice on the PV modules.
- Damage/theft to the PV plant or client's main electrical supply point (including the cables up to the feed-in point) by the customer or third parties who are not sub-contractors of the O&M service provider, including but not limited to vandalism.
- Disconnection or reduction of energy generation by the customer or as a result of an order issued to the customer by a court or public authority.
- Operational disruption by grid disconnections or disruptions in the grid of the grid operator, including cable theft.
- Disconnections or power regulation by the grid operator or their control devices.
- Downtimes resulting from failures of the inverter or MV voltage components (for example, transformer, switchgear), if this requires:
 - Technical support of the manufacturer and/or
 - Logistical support (for example supply of spare parts) by the manufacturer;
- Outages of the communication system due to an external issue that is beyond the O&M service provider's responsibility. Any failure time only begins to run when the O&M service provider receives the error message. If the data connection to the site was not available, failure time shall only begin after reestablishment of the link.
- Delays of approval by the customer to conduct necessary works or delay in access to site.
- Downtimes for implementation of measures to improve the PV plant, if this is agreed between the parties.
- Downtimes caused by the fact that the customer has commissioned third parties with the implementation of technical work on the PV plant.

- Downtimes caused by Serial Defects on Plant components.
- Depending on the O&M contract, time spent waiting for some spare parts to arrive is sometimes excluded from the calculation of Contractual Availability, however this is not considered a best practice.

11.4.2. Contractual tracker availability

Like the Contractual Availability, the Contractual Tracker Availability also makes allowance for pre-defined exclusions, like maintenance, panel cleaning, etc. A similar formula is used to the technical availability with provision made for any predefined contractual exclusions (see above). The formula can be seen below.

Contractual tracker availability is calculated as:

$$A_{c_tracker} = \frac{T_{t_useful} - T_{t_down} + T_{t_excluded}}{T_{t_useful}} \times 100$$

Where:

$A_{t_tracker}$ = Technical Tracker Availability (%)

T_{t_down} = Period of time when the tracker is down (h)

T_{t_useful} = Period of time when the tracker is functional (h)

$T_{t_excluded}$ = Part of T_{t_down} to be excluded because of presence of an exclusion factor (see above) (h)

11.4.3. Energy-based availability

Energy-based Availability takes into consideration that an hour in a period with high irradiance is more valuable than in a period with low irradiance. Therefore, its calculation uses not time but energy (and lost energy) for its basis:

Energy-based Availability is defined as:

$$A_e(i) = \frac{E(i)}{E(i) + E_{loss}(i)} \times 100$$

Where:

$A_e(i)$ = Energy-based Availability for the time period i (%)

$E_{loss}(i)$ = Calculated lost energy in the period i (kWh)

$E(i)$ = Plant energy production or Plant energy metered in the time period i

Generally, the *Energy Based Availability* is used within the O&M contract in the Availability guarantee chapter and then generally the exclusion factors defined for Contractual Availability apply for Energy-based Availability too.

11 Key Performance Indicators / continued

The following table provides an overview of different types of Key Performance Indicators and their main purposes.

TABLE 7 OVERVIEW OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND THEIR PURPOSES

	PV POWER PLANT KPI	O&M SERVICE PROVIDER KPI	QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE ¹³	TO BE MONITORED WITHIN THE O&M CONTRACT	GUARANTEED IN THE O&M CONTRACT	USAGE MAIN PURPOSE
Reference Yield	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	Useful during plant designing and economic valuation
Expected Yield	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	Useful during plant designing and economic valuation
Specific Yield	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	Useful during plant designing and economic valuation
Performance Ratio	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	Useful during plant life in order to assess plant performances over time
Temperature-corrected Performance	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	Useful FAC and PAC or in other specific moment in plant life to assess plant PR starting point
Energy Performance Index	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	Useful during plant life in order to assess plant performances over time, against plant expected performance at plant designing
Technical Availability (Uptime)	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	Useful during plant life in order to assess the how much time during the time frame under analysis the plant is ready to produce
Technical Tracker Availability (Tracker Uptime)	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	Useful during plant life in order to assess the how much time during the time frame under analysis the trackers are well-functioning
Acknowledgement Time	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	Useful during plant operation in order to assess readiness of the O&M service provider to "realise" (detected by the monitoring system and acknowledge by the O&M service provider) plant failures
Intervention Time	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	Useful during plant operation in order to assess readiness of the O&M service provider to reach the plant upon a failure is

¹³ Qualitative data is concerned with descriptions, i.e., information that can be observed but not computed (e.g., service experience). In contrast, quantitative is measured on a numerical scale (e.g., Performance Ratio).

TABLE 7 OVERVIEW OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND THEIR PURPOSES -
continued

	PV POWER PLANT KPI	O&M SERVICE PROVIDER KPI	QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE	TO BE MONITORED WITHIN THE O&M CONTRACT	GUARANTEED IN THE O&M CONTRACT	USAGE MAIN PURPOSE
Response Time	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	Useful during plant operation in order to assess readiness of the O&M service provider from acknowledging a failure and subsequently reaching the site
Resolution Time	X	✓	✓	X	X	✓	Useful during plant operation in order to assess the time used to solve a fault from when the plant is reached
Contractual Availability	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	Useful during plant life in order to assess how much time during the time frame under analysis the O&M service provider keeps the plant ready to produce
Contractual Tracker Availability	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	Useful during plant life in order to assess how much time during the time frame under analysis the O&M service provider keeps the trackers well-functioning
Energy Based Availability	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	Useful during plant life in order to assess how much energy has been lost due to causes attributable to the O&M service provider, during the time frame under analysis
Reporting	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Useful during plant operation in order to assess reliability of reporting services
O&M service provider experience	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	Useful during O&M Contract awarding/tendering in order to assess O&M service provider reliability on a pure documental analysis
Schedule Attainment	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X	Useful during O&M Contract awarding/tendering to assess O&M service provider reliability
Preventive vs Corrective Maintenance ratio	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X	Useful during O&M Contract awarding/tendering to assess O&M service provider reliability and effectiveness



This section contains a set of considerations for the contractual framework of O&M services for the small, medium and large-scale C&I and utility scale segment. For a simplified contractual framework, see section [14.4. Contractual recommendations for standalone PV systems](#).

A complement to the technical specifications detailed in the previous chapters, the contractual framework described in this chapter are considered as a best practice.

As a best practice, we recommend using the O&M template contract developed as part of the Open Solar Contracts suite of template contracts. This is a joint effort of the Terrawatt Initiative and the International Renewable Energy Agency. SolarPower Europe contributed to the drafting of the template O&M contract, which is one of six templates in a suite of contracts designed to be used as a package to streamline the procurement of solar projects and make it simpler to aggregate projects using standard terms. Aside from the O&M contract, the other templates include:

- Implementation Agreement
- Power Purchase Agreement
- Finance Facility Agreement term sheet
- Supply Agreement
- Installation Agreement
- Asset Management Agreement

Copies of each contract and explanatory guidance can be found at the Open Solar Contracts website: www.opensolarcontracts.org.

A common contractual framework for PV O&M is “fixed price” for specified scope of work such as administrative, operations, and preventive maintenance and then “cost plus” for corrective maintenance or additional services. For the “cost plus” part, labour rates, equipment markup, overhead and profit are negotiated in the contract and added to the actual equipment costs incurred in correcting unexpected problems.

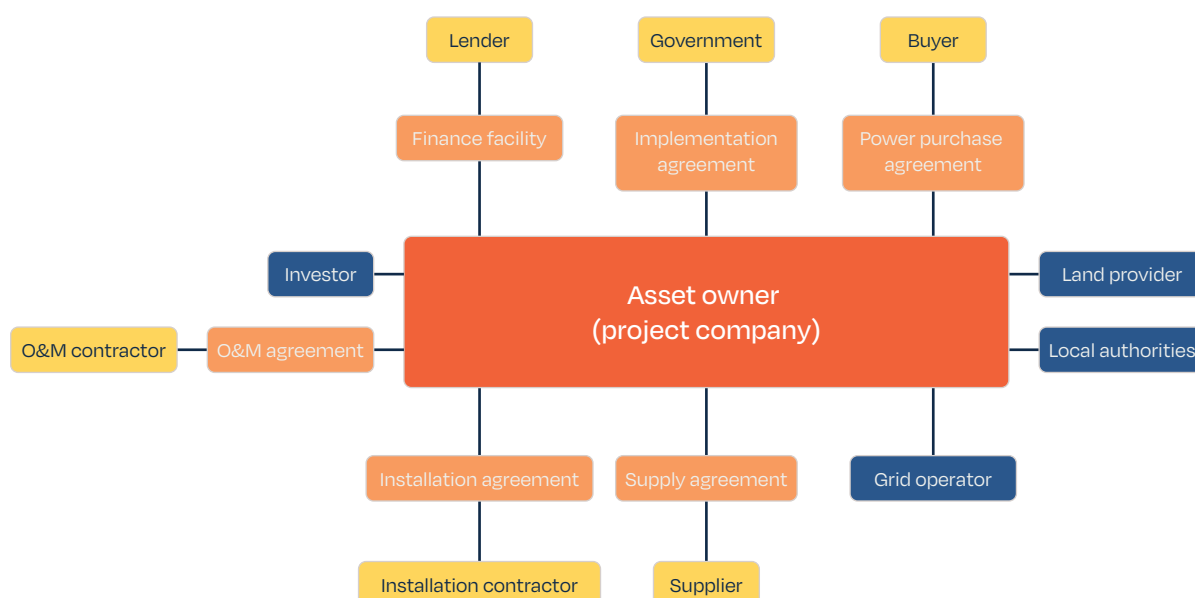
12.1. Scope of the O&M contract

Services to be provided by the O&M service provider include:

Technical Asset Management (Most of these services can be performed by either the O&M service provider or the Asset Manager).

- Reporting to Asset Owner (referred to in the Open Solar Contracts templates as “Monitoring Services”, although the detail is to be determined by the parties)
 - Reporting on PV plant performance
 - Reporting on O&M performance
 - Reporting on incidents
- Ensuring regulatory compliance
 - Legal requirements for PV plant operation
 - Power Purchase Agreements and Interconnection Agreements
 - Power generation licence agreements
 - Building permits and environmental permits

FIGURE 15 OVERVIEW OF THE SIX TEMPLATE CONTRACTS DEVELOPED UNDER THE OPEN SOLAR CONTRACTS INITIATIVE



- Warranty management
- Insurance claims
- Contract management

Power Plant Operations

- Plant documentation management
- Plant supervision
 - Performance monitoring and documentation
 - Performance analysis and improvement
 - Issue detection/diagnostics
 - Service dispatch/supervision
 - Security monitoring interface (*optional*)
- Plant operation
 - Plant controls
 - Power Generation Forecasting (*optional*)
 - Grid operator interface, grid code compliance
 - Maintenance scheduling

- Management of change (*optional*)
- Reporting to Technical Asset Manager (in case O&M service provider is not the Technical Asset Manager)

Power Plant Maintenance

- PV Plant Maintenance
 - Preventive Maintenance (which is referred to in the Open Solar Contracts as “Scheduled Maintenance”, for more information, see 7.1. *Preventive Maintenance*)
 - Corrective Maintenance in accordance with agreed Response Time guarantees (some types of maintenance activities may be beyond the scope of the contract, for more information, see 7.2. *Corrective Maintenance*)
 - Extraordinary Maintenance (generally not included in the O&M fixed fee but it is advisable that the O&M contract includes the rules to prepare the quotation and to execute Extraordinary Maintenance works, for more information, see 7.4. *Extraordinary maintenance*). In the Open Solar Contracts O&M template, this would fall within “Additional Services”.

- Additional maintenance services (optional, see 7.5. *Additional services*). In the Open Solar Contracts O&M template, this would fall within "Additional Services"

In the table below is a non-exhaustive list of Additional services and general market trends with regards to whether these Additional services are generally included in the O&M agreement or not.

All the services not included in the scope and in the fixed fee such as 7.4. *Extraordinary Maintenance* and

7.5. *Additional services* should be regulated within the contract. A dedicated clause should indicate the procedure that should include: (i) a proposal by the O&M service provider within a fixed time frame, (ii) a fixed period for the Asset Owner to accept it or request modification, (iii) a final approval. Pre-agreed tariffs for manpower, machinery renting etc could be agreed and a specific table could be attached as Contract Annex. This is provided for in the Open Solar Contract O&M template, with reference to "Standard Rates", which can be pre-agreed for additional services.

TABLE 8 EXAMPLES FOR ADDITIONAL MAINTENANCE SERVICES AND GENERAL MARKET TRENDS

	ADDITIONAL SERVICES	GENERAL BEHAVIOUR
PV site maintenance	Module cleaning	Generally included, or as a priced option
	Vegetation management	Generally included, but need to specify perimetral vegetation management and management on possible environmental compensation measures
	Sand and dust removal	Generally not included and also generally not easy to provide
General site maintenance	Pest control	Generally included
	Waste disposal	Generally included with reference to waste generated during O&M activities
	Road management	Generally not included
	Perimeter fencing repair	Generally not included and often caused by force majeure (i.e.: theft)
	Maintenance of buildings	Generally not included
	Maintenance of Security Equipment	Generally not included, these activities are performed by a separate surveillance and security provider in order to have clearly defined responsibilities (see 6.10. <i>Power plant security</i>)
On-site measurement	Meter weekly/monthly readings	Generally included since it feeds the periodical performance reporting to the Asset Owner
	Data entry on fiscal registers or in authority web portals for FIT tariff assessment (where applicable)	Generally this activity is deemed to the Asset Manager. Can be however included in O&M scope of work
	String measurements – to the extent exceeding the agreed level of Preventive Maintenance	Generally not included but a price could be agreed in advance in the O&M contract
	Thermal inspections – to the extent exceeding the agreed level of Preventive Maintenance	Generally not included but a price could be agreed in advance in the O&M contract

Spare Parts Management

(See also Chapter 9 on *Spare Parts Management*)

- Spare parts maintenance
- Spare parts replenishment
- Spare parts storage (*optional*)

For more information on the specific items in the above list, please view the respective sections and chapters of the present Guidelines.

12.2. O&M contract fee

As a best practice, O&M services should be provided on a fixed fee plus escalation basis. See [section 12.8](#) in this Chapter which discusses how spare parts management may impact on the contract fee.

12.3. Contractual guarantees and price adjustments

In the South African market, O&M service providers are mostly required to provide Performance Ratio (PR) guarantees, particularly in the case where a project is funded through project finance and/or where the installer is the same entity as the O&M service provider. Recent developments including the recommendations of the Open Solar Contracts initiative, show, however, that eliminating PR guarantee and only using Availability guarantees and Response Time price adjustments has several advantages in certain cases.

PR is to a large extent a result of equipment choice, design and construction, over which a (third-party) O&M service provider has little influence, beyond vegetation control and module cleaning. Moreover, removing PR as an O&M service provider KPI makes power plant handover from EPC service provider to O&M service provider or from O&M service provider to O&M service provider simpler. Generally, the PR warranties are applied on projects where the O&M service provider remain the same company (or a close company) as the EPC service provider, in which case the O&M service provider carry on the risk of the technology made by its sister company.

Availability guarantees and Response Time price adjustments protect the Asset Owner from poor performing O&M service providers. Availability is the KPI that best reflects O&M service provider's service. Thanks to the Response Time price adjustment, in

case of events affecting the performance of the plant that are not covered by the Availability guarantee, the contractor has to intervene in a pre-agreed timeframe depending on the impact of the fault. Moreover, the O&M service provider is also obliged to intervene in case of incidents not affecting the performance, referring to good industry practices in general. A further upside is that it makes the transition to a new contractor much smoother and hence allows Lenders and Owners to pick a contractor of their choice and with the sole criterium of quality of services. Availability guarantees and Response Time price adjustments avoid heavy change management process due to the necessity of recalculating the guaranteed PR in case of power plant handover, which is an obstacle in the market.

It is possible to set a PR target that can trigger a joint analysis between the Asset Owner and the O&M service provider, in order to identify causes and agrees on possible corrective actions, including revamping projects.

12.3.1. Availability guarantee

A best practice is a Minimum Guaranteed Contractual Availability of 98% over a year at least at inverter level. In certain jurisdictions, such as in Mexico, where labour legislation and the requirements of the network operator stipulate the presence of full-time technical on-site staff, a Minimum Guaranteed Availability of 99% can be provided – it should, however, be appropriately reflected in the O&M agreement's price.

For contractual KPI reasons, Availability should be calculated at inverter level, on an annual basis. For more information on this, see [11.4.1. Contractual Availability](#).

The Availability achieved by the O&M service provider is translated into Bonus Schemes and Liquidated Damages. For more information on this, see [12.4. Bonus Schemes and Liquidated Damages](#).

12.3.2. Response time price adjustment

The O&M service provider should be obliged to react on alarms received from the plant through the monitoring and supervision system within a certain period of time, 7 days a week. This translates in a minimum guaranteed Response Time with the

consequence of an adjustment to the contract price (the O&M fee) payable to the O&M service provider in the event of failure to meet the Response Times. For a definition of Response Time, see 11.3.3. *Response Time*.

When setting a Response Time price adjustment, it is recommended to differentiate between hours and periods with high and low irradiance levels as well as fault classes, i.e., the (potential) loss of energy generation capacity or relevance in terms of safety impact of the failure.

An example for response times according to fault classes can be seen below in Table 9. (Note that this example considers a larger C&I or utility-scale solar PV power plant. In case of small-scale installations, minimum Response Times may be longer.)

In case the replacement of an equipment is needed, the O&M service provider should commit to make it available to the plant's site and replace it within 8 business hours from the end of the Response Time, if the spare part is included in the portfolio of minimum spare parts list. If the spare part is not included in the minimum spare parts list, the O&M service provider should commit to order the spare part within 8 business hours from the end of the Response Time and to replace it on the plant area in the fastest possible way, after receiving the related spare part from the equipment supplier.

In case the fault cannot be fixed by the O&M service provider and the equipment supplier's intervention is required, the following actions are necessary:

- If the intervention requires spare parts up to the limit under the O&M cost responsibility (see 12.8.

Spare Parts Management), the O&M service provider may proceed without separate approval (insurance aspects to be considered).

- If the costs exceed the above budget limit, the Contractor should communicate the issue in writing to the Asset Owner within 8 business hours from the end of the Response Time.

Force Majeure events are excluded from Response Time obligations.

In the Open Solar Contracts O&M template, a failure to comply with a Response Time by more than five business days on any one occasion may also entitle an Asset Owner to terminate the O&M contract.

12.4. Bonus schemes and liquidated damages

The Availability guarantees provided by the O&M service provider can be translated into Bonus Schemes and Liquidated Damages. The Bonus Scheme concept is referred to in the Open Solar Contract O&M template as the "Availability Bonus". These ensure that the Asset Owner is compensated for losses due to lower-than-guaranteed Availability and that the O&M service provider is motivated to improve their service in order to achieve higher Availability. Higher Availability usually leads to higher power generation and an increase of revenues for the benefit of the plant owner. Hence the Bonus Scheme agreements lead to a win-win situation for both parties and ensures that the O&M service provider is highly motivated. The Open Solar Contracts O&M template provides for a list of "Excusable Events".

TABLE 9 EXAMPLES FOR FAULT CLASSES AND CORRESPONDING MINIMUM RESPONSE TIMES

FAULT CLASS	FAULT CLASS DEFINITION	RESPONSE TIME GUARANTEE
Fault class 1	The entire plant is off, 100% power loss.	4 daytime hours
Fault class 2	More than 30% power loss or more than 300 kW _p down.	24 hours
Fault class 3	0%-30% power loss	36 hours

NOTE: Fault classes and the corresponding Response Time guarantees APPLIED even if the duration of the respective power loss is less than the corresponding Response Time guarantee, provided that the power loss may occur again.

Since the O&M service provider's responsibility is focused on the O&M works for the PV asset, other influencing factors like force majeure events, grid operator activities to reduce the plant output, grid instability or offline periods should be exempted from the O&M service provider's responsibility and therefore from any Liquidated Damages. (See exclusion factors in *11.4.1. Contractual Availability*.)

An example for Availability Bonus Schemes and Liquidated Damages can be found below:

- Bonus Schemes: if the measured availability exceeds the Minimum Guaranteed Availability, the additional revenue based on the base case scenario expected annual revenue will be divided (50/50) between the Asset Owner and the O&M service provider in percentages previously agreed. There are also often minimum thresholds for bonuses to be due in case the overall plant energy does not meet certain target.
- Liquidated Damages: if the Minimum Guaranteed Availability is less than the measured availability, 100% of the lost revenue due to the Availability shortfall from the Minimum Guaranteed Availability based on the base case scenario expected annual revenue will be compensated by the O&M service provider. This is usually invoiced by the Asset Owner to the O&M service provider.
- Bonuses can be offset against Liquidated Damages and vice versa.
- The amount of Liquidated Damages should be capped at 100% of the O&M annual fee on a period of 12 months. Reaching this cap usually results in termination rights for the Asset Owner and the O&M service provider, although in the Open Solar Contracts O&M template, the right is only given to the Asset Owner.

12.5. Service standards

O&M service provider is to provide the services in accordance with all laws, authorisations, good industry practice, planning consents, manufacturer's warranties and operating manuals and to the standard of a reasonable and prudent operator.

The Asset Owner should be entitled to instruct a third-party operator to provide the services at the O&M service provider's cost, where the O&M service provider fails to provide the services and fails to follow a corrective maintenance programme.

12.6. O&M service providers' qualification

The O&M service provider has the means, skills and capabilities to operate and maintain the plant in accordance with the contractual obligations. Experience and availability of a professional organisation, skilled teams and access to spare parts are criteria for the selection of the O&M service provider. As O&M services are a combination of remote operations services and local maintenance activities, the Asset Owner should make sure that both components are well managed and interfaces between operations services and maintenance services are well defined, especially when subcontracted to different entities by the O&M service provider where each entity is responsible and can be held accountable for the overall O&M performance.

12.7. Responsibility and accountability

The responsibility of the O&M service provider is usually defined in the Scope of Works, which forms a part of the O&M contract. In the Open Solar Contract O&M template, this is set out in the O&M Services Schedule. A detailed description of the O&M scope items ensure clarity of what the O&M service provider will do during the term of the contract. In addition to the Scope of Works, the Annual Maintenance Plan (AMP) and Annual Maintenance Schedule (AMS) (please refer to attachment "Annual Maintenance Plan") outline the granularity and frequency of (predominantly) Preventive Maintenance works. The execution of the activities is being reported to the Asset Owner through the regular reporting – this forms the minimum requirements. Best practices can be seen if the regular reporting compares the executed activities with the AMP and AMS, and outlines deviations and reasoning.

Corrective Maintenance activities, which will be performed in case of any component failure or energy generation shortfall, are controlled by performance commitments signed by the O&M service provider. In the Open Solar Contracts O&M template, these are set out as "Corrective Maintenance Services".

Moreover, the Availability Guarantee and Response Time price adjustment explained in *12.3. Contractual Guarantees and price adjustments* of the present chapter also represent a level of accountability of the O&M service provider.

In most countries there are strict legal requirements for security service providers. Therefore, PV power plant security should be ensured by specialised security service providers directly contracted by the Asset Owner or, exceptionally, subcontracted by the O&M service provider. The security service provider should also assume liability for the security services provided. For more information on this, see 6.9. *Power plant security*.

12.8. Spare parts management

The Open Solar Contracts O&M template takes two approaches to Spare Parts management. Either the O&M service provider takes full responsibility for Spare Parts or there is a distinction between "Included Spare Parts", which are included in the O&M service provider's fee, and "Excluded Spare Parts", the cost of which would be payable in addition to the fee plus a pre-agreed margin. In either case, replenishing Spare Parts stock will be the O&M service provider's responsibility, although at the Asset Owner's cost in relation to Excluded Spare Parts. This guidance considers it best practice to take the second approach of clearly identifying Included and Excluded Spare Parts, in order to find an appropriate balance between the amount of risk that the Asset Owner is willing to accept against the cost of the O&M fee.

Although it is best practice for the O&M service provider to be responsible for replenishing the spare parts stock, it is not necessarily responsible for the full cost of doing so. Some Asset Owners require O&M service providers to be fully responsible for the cost of all spare parts within the O&M fee, however, the more cost-effective approach is to agree which are "Included Spare Parts" and which are "Excluded Spare Parts".

Included Spare Parts are those which the O&M service provider is to be responsible for within the O&M fee. Excluded Spare Parts are those which the Asset Owner is responsible for the cost of replenishing and do not fall within the O&M service provider's O&M fee. This is a flexible approach allowing the Asset Owner and O&M service provider to agree which spare parts fall into which category. It enables both parties to have a level of cost certainty whilst balancing this with the Asset Owner's appetite for risk.

Ownership of spares is often with the Asset Owner from delivery to site or placement in the spares stock.

In the case of excluded spare parts, ownership transfers to the Asset Owner from the date that the O&M service provider receives payment for the same.

Besides ownership matters, it is very important to make sure, upon mutual agreement, that one of the parties undertakes the responsibility of insuring the spares: as a recommendation spare parts stored on-site should be insured by the Asset Owner and spare parts stored off-site should be insured by the O&M service provider.

There should be a components, materials and spare parts defects warranty for 12 months from the date of installation, which should continue to apply even after expiry or termination of the O&M contract.

For more information on Spare Parts Management, see the *Chapter 9. Spare Parts Management*.

12.9. Power plant monitoring

The O&M service provider should operate and maintain the metering system according to local regulations or norms. In some countries there are two metering systems: one that measures power injection in the grid, owned and operated by the grid operator, and one that measures power production, owned by the Asset Owner as part of the installation and operated by the O&M service provider.

The O&M service provider will also make sure that performance monitoring and reporting is operated and maintained according to the monitoring specifications and best practices (see 10. *Data and monitoring requirements*).

The Asset Owner has the right to carry out the verification of the metering system to evaluate and control the exactitude of the measured data.

12.10. Reporting

Reporting should be done periodically, as contractually agreed between the O&M service provider (the Technical Asset Manager) and the Asset Owner. The Asset Owner should have the right to debate the report within a certain timeframe.

For more information on industry best practices regarding Reporting, see 5.1. *Technical reporting*.



Innovations and trends

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O&M service providers are increasingly relying on innovations and more machine and data-driven solutions to keep up with market requirements. Innovations in O&M services are anticipated to reduce the levelised cost of electricity (LCOE) by 0.8% to 1.4% between 2015 and 2030. The savings are dominated by improvements in OPEX and power plant availability, and hence net Annual Energy Production (source: KIC InnoEnergy, 2015).

The most important trends and innovations shaping today's O&M market are summarised in this section, grouped into three "families":

1. Smart PV power plant monitoring and data-driven O&M
2. Retrofit coatings for PV modules
3. Waterless cleaning of PV modules.

13.1. Smart PV power plant monitoring and data-driven O&M

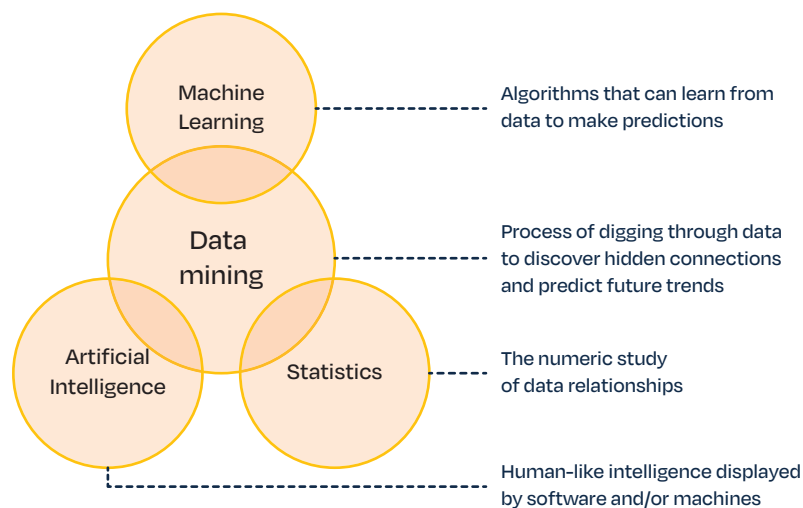
Traditional monitoring systems generally consist of on-site data loggers that collect electrical data from devices installed on the PV plant inverters, strings, meters and weather data from meteorological stations. A management software then allows remote performance management, data visualisation, basic KPI calculations, reporting and alarm and ticket management.

These systems, used on their own, commonly fail to detect the root causes of underperformance. The industry is therefore rapidly moving towards the adoption of 'smarter' solutions based on advanced data mining techniques.

Data mining is the process of digging through data to discover hidden connections and predict trends. Sometimes referred to as "knowledge discovery in databases," the term "data mining" was not coined until the 1990s. Its foundation is comprised of three intertwined scientific disciplines as shown in Figure 16 on the following page.

Although data mining is not a new discipline, its capabilities are now being unleashed due to the potential of big data and increasingly affordable computing power and storage. Its potential to enable O&M service providers to move beyond manual, tedious and time-consuming practices to quick, easy and automated data analysis is now becoming more tangible (source: SAS, 2018).

FIGURE 16 DATA MINING FOUNDATIONS



Adapted from: WWW.SAS.COM

13.1.1. Advanced aerial thermography

Purpose and description

The general functionality of thermographic data has already been outlined in *Chapter 10.10.1. Infrared thermography*. While thermographic inspections have become well established as a tool in preventive and corrective maintenance scheduling, the amount of effort and manual labour required for data gathering in the field has posed financial and operational challenges for their widespread use.

Using thermographic cameras mounted on drones (Remotely Piloted Aircrafts, RPAs or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, UAVs) or purpose-modified piloted aircraft, instead of handheld devices, the operator flies over the PV modules to capture thermographic images or videos. This data is then analysed to create inspection reports which can be used to form the basis for preventive and corrective maintenance tasks. If deployed properly, aerial thermography can bring a number of operational and financial advantages.

It is recommended to refer to the Aerial Thermography Checklist of the Solar Best Practices Mark for a synthesis of the most important best practices and recommendation with respect to aerial thermography.¹⁴

Data acquisition

In this stage a flyover is performed where raw thermographic infrared (IR) images and visual photos or videos are recorded. Depending on the solution additional geolocation services and 3D modelling of the entire plant may be offered. Some other solutions provide additional sensors to record weather variables (usually irradiance and ambient temperature) during the flyover.

Post-processing

The post-processing activities consists of all the data processing and analysis techniques to produce the final report and all the related deliverables. These activities can be done manually or automatically by means of specialised software.

The activities comprised in this stage can be thought as serial list of subtasks described in the table on the following page.

The data acquisition stage is now well understood as drone technology ripens and becomes a trend. There are already many companies that offer high-quality industrial aerial flights. Usually, companies using drones as a daily-work tool do not only conduct IR

¹⁴ The best practice checklists of the Solar Best Practices Mark are available at: www.solarbestpractices.com.

TABLE 10 AERIAL IR THERMOGRAPHY – POST-PROCESSING SUBTASKS

POST-PROCESSING SUBTASK	DESCRIPTION
Geolocation of PV modules	Manual or automated location of the PV modules inspected. Layout recreation with precise geolocation down to individual module ID or even to module's serial number.
Thermal anomalies detection and classification	Manual or automated detection of thermal anomalies, where the exact position of each affected PV module is identified on the plant's layout. Minimum requirements for this analysis can be found in <i>IEC TS 62446-3:2017</i> .
PV module failure analysis	Diagnosis and root-cause analysis of PV module failures. This is where the link between thermal anomaly and PV module failure is done (warning: not all the thermal anomalies may be considered failures). Temperature differences should be projected to nominal irradiance in accordance with <i>IEC TS 62446-3:2017</i> .
Data analytics	Basic or advanced data treatment to describe the impact of failures in the PV plant. For example, degradation trends, failure distribution by harm degree and by module manufacturer; power losses assessment and impact on revenue, etc.
Maintenance implementation plan	Actions needed to minimise yield losses based on defect criticality. It can be seen as a list of recommendations that can be directly translated into scheduled or corrective field operations.
Inspections follow-up	Usually as a cloud-based platform, it's where the results of previous inspections can be easily compared with new ones, for example, year-to-year power degradation.
Reporting	Report created manually or automatically. In most cases the report is tailored to the customer's needs and requirements. It contains the summary of the findings and additionally, depending on the provider, it could contain some calculations of estimated power losses.

Source: BAYWA R.E.

inspections of PV plants, but also industrial aerial inspections of oil ducts, off-shore oil extraction platforms, roads, bridges and wind turbines, just to name a few. Therefore, the data acquisition stage is an activity that could be easily outsourced by O&M service providers, mitigating the risks related to technology obsolescence and avoiding the costs of drone regular maintenance.

There are some companies which utilise specially modified piloted aircraft in lieu of drones for inspections of large sites and portfolios. These systems have advantages of much faster capture times (up to 150 MW/hr) while maintaining high resolution due to the higher quality of cameras which can be used. These systems have the disadvantage that the costs can be prohibitive for individual sites due to greater mobilization costs.

Most companies today still rely on manual data processing, which represents a big drawback for large

portfolios as human-error drives down the accuracy of thermal imaging assessment. This means that companies with automated solutions have a huge advantage in this regard.

Aerial inspections and their associated post-processing activities are evolving very rapidly, and the quick adoption of new technologies is of high strategic importance in today's highly competitive O&M market.

Pilots

Any aerial thermography or other PV module and plant monitoring application involving drones or piloted aircrafts must be carried out by a licensed operator and in accordance with all local and EU-level civil aviation regulations. Before any such operations can take place, each flight must be thoroughly planned from a logistics, regulatory and safety perspective, and a comprehensive on-site risk assessment conducted,

with findings recorded in a flight log. In addition to the collected inspection data, each flight should also be fully recorded in terms of date, time, wind speed and direction and battery levels.

Advantages and disadvantages

With the advent of aerial inspections, resources required for data collection can be significantly reduced. Aerial infrared (IR) thermography might seem a trivial activity, but when not conducted following a set of minimum technical requirements (described in IEC TS 62446-3:2017), it is almost of no use for effective plant maintenance. In that context, high-quality IR images captured by an aerial platform and their proper post-processing allow for a detailed PV module failure analysis that could trigger conclusive maintenance decisions. Furthermore, field interventions can be optimised, and PV plant underperformance can also be better understood and addressed (e.g., faulty modules that need to be replaced can be identified with precision and high-quality IR images can be used as proof in warranty claiming processes). Aerial thermography reduces the inspection time and the number of personnel on site. For instance, using this method, a 12MW_p PV plant can be inspected in a single day. Additionally, since images are taken from the air, the data yields a helpful overview to check whether plant layout and other documents are correct.

As with any form of thermography, the inspection method is limited by meteorological conditions: For the inspection data to be of value, a minimum radiation of 600 W/m² is required. For drone inspections, in order for the RPA to be controlled safely, and depending on the type of RPA used, wind speeds should not exceed 28 km/h.

State of play

The demand for IR inspections is growing fast, and so is the range of services offered by new players in the market, who are now pushing aerial inspections beyond basic reporting. Advanced aerial inspections, understood as semi-automated or fully automated solutions are being put into practice for both IR inspection stages, data acquisition and post-processing.

Aerial thermography is becoming a widely accepted and employed tool of inspection in corrective maintenance worldwide. Given the price drop in equipment (both RPAs and thermographic cameras), it will become even more available. Further innovation is to be expected in autonomously controlled RPAs as well as data analysis using Artificial Intelligence.

If deployed properly, aerial inspection could become a cornerstone technology for effective O&M, and they would not only be an activity performed just to comply with contractual obligations.

13.1.2. Automated plant performance diagnosis

Purpose and description

As described in SolarPower Europe's Global Market Outlook, the PV industry showed in 2017 the highest growth in the energy market, with total capacity installed of nearly 100 GW worldwide. In such a context, PV plant reliability is subject to higher reliability requirements. With special consideration for aging plants where the secondary market is growing, automating diagnostics of PV assets is crucial.

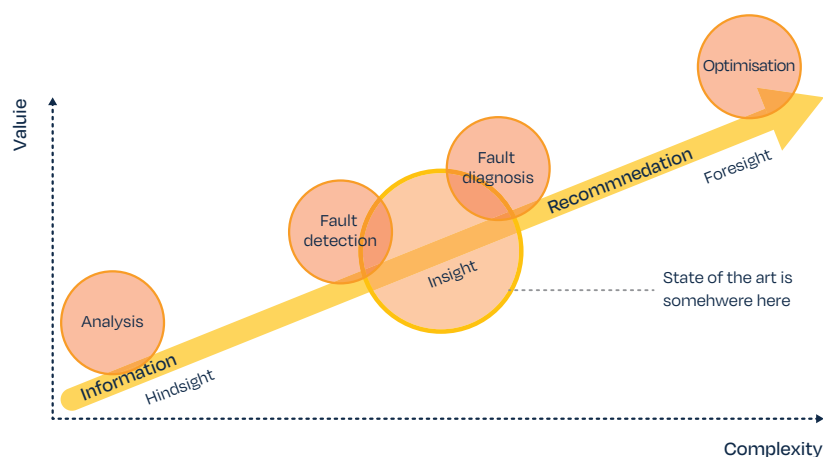
Until now, plant performance assessment is typically executed in a top-down approach, analysing low performing objects by drilling down from substations, inverters to junction boxes and strings. This process is time consuming and expert dependent. Furthermore, the process does not guarantee revealing all underperformance issues.

Automated bottom-up diagnosis using advanced big data mining techniques can overcome the disadvantages of classic plant performance assessment by experts: time saving of expert data handling, more error prone and better diagnosis performance.

State of play

Big data mining algorithms have been successfully applied to solar plant data and have proven to reveal performance issues beyond top-down expert analysis in a semi-automated way. Further R&D into this subject area serves to make the algorithms more robust for automated application on large portfolio's and bringing them to root-cause failure identification.

FIGURE 17 AUTOMATED PLANT PERFORMANCE DIAGNOSIS



Source: ACHIM WOYTE, 3E

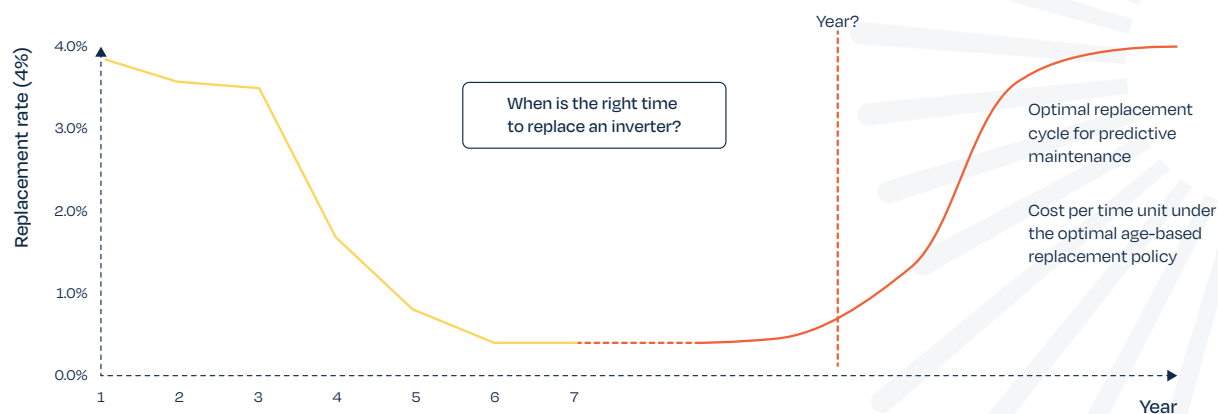
13.1.3. Predictive maintenance for optimised hardware replacement

Purpose and description

Operational costs of PV plants can have a significant impact on the total LCOE and therefore, on the profitability of a project. Optimisation of operation quality, reducing maintenance costs and maximising plant performances, is the key for a successful project. This process goes through a trade-off between reducing the number of interventions and spare parts replacement during the lifetime of a project while ensuring the plant performs in the best conditions.

Preventive maintenance is scheduled periodically according to contractually agreed schedules based on expert knowledge. On top of that, condition-based maintenance may be scheduled when the operator identifies an unexpected deviation in performance through the monitoring system, even before the system would fail. Different maintenance optimisation models are employed to find the optimal balance between the costs and benefits of maintenance interventions. All those models count on the probability of failure of each component of the PV system and the impact of possible single device failure over the entire system. For example, in the case

FIGURE 18 PREDICTIVE MAINTENANCE FOR OPTIMISED HARDWARE REPLACEMENT



Source: ACHIM WOYTE, 3E

of PV inverters, it is still uncertain what their actual lifetime will be under site specific operating conditions. In practice, inverters will not fail at a precise given moment in time as often modelled in the business plan. Moreover, failure-based maintenance i.e., replacing the inverter(s) when this fails may not be the most efficient solution.

A good predictive monitoring system could help on assessing the optimal hardware replacement cycle by modelling the uncertainty in the time-to-failure with a known probability distribution function. Maintenance optimisation models can provide tools relying on the output from root cause analyses, remaining useful lifetime analyses and alerting and prediction of assets failures in the optimal planning of maintenance and related resource allocation.

Big data analytics can bring added value at any stage of O&M objectives: analysis from observation of collected information to fault detection, fault diagnosis and finally optimisation through recommendations issued from the advanced monitoring system. Today different approaches are proposed. Whereas classic Artificial Intelligence (AI) proposes an advanced diagnostic through knowledge-based models, unsupervised and supervised learnings methods offer different approaches (e.g., neural networks) using statistical approaches.

Advantages and disadvantages

Advantages:

- Lowering the cost of ineffective scheduled maintenance
- Reducing device downtime

Disadvantage:

- Methods are often very sensitive to device models and brands and can thus not be generalised easily.

State of play

Today, no model has been proven to be completely reliable. Big-data analysis allows easy recognition of a fault and, in some cases, provides a clear diagnosis and recommendations on the short-term actions to take to avoid probable upcoming issues. The trend is to model the behaviour of the entire system and to plan optimal maintenance and hardware replacement

programs in the medium to long term. This will of course reduce the overall risk of a PV project and hence increase the investing opportunities.

13.1.4. PV plant yield forecasting

Purpose and description

Electricity generation from PV plants is limited by the varying availability of the sun's radiation. Even though grid operators are generally obliged to dispatch PV plant production at all times, the growing penetration of PV may force new regulations to guarantee grid stability and the correct balancing of electricity supply and consumption at all times, causing unpredictable losses to plant owners (curtailment).

Ramp-rate control with and without local storage is currently studied in order to mitigate the impact of fast irradiance fluctuations on power system stability. Approached from the generator side, large PV plants could also contribute to power system stability by providing upward or downward reserves. Technically, this is possible; however, particularly the provision of upward reserves will reduce the overall performance of the plant in question. The business case for such operation modes will depend on the incentives available for deviating from the objective of maximum energy yield.

State of play

The prediction of PV production is becoming an essential tool to capture economies in a market with large penetration of variable renewable energy sources. Expected PV yield output accounting for specific PV plant simulation model and forecasted meteorological resource is a well proven technology. Algorithms that are able to match weather forecasts with PV plant characteristics in order to predict energy production on an hourly basis for few hours ahead and up to the next 48 hours are already playing an important role in the monitoring software market.

The market is rapidly moving towards the need of advanced intra-day correction of the forecasted energy production at sub-hourly resolution and by taking into account actual PV plant conditions like remote curtailment, broken inverters, local losses, etc. Therefore, long and short-term data collection constitute an added value to improve the PV plant yield forecasting.

A clear communication protocol between devices in the field (sensors, modules, inverter, loggers, etc.) would help to improve the intra-day forecasting and better exchange with the energy grid. A comprehensive exchange of information between the devices can be used by the simulation model to compute performance expectations. This can be achieved by a trained machine learning system where the operator can set, review and validate specific conditions. In this frame, a proper standardization of terminology and languages used by any communicating device onsite is crucial. The topic of Internet of Things and its application to PV is addressed in the following Section 13.1.5.

13.1.5. Internet of Things (IoT) and auto-configuration

Purpose and description

Solar monitoring, being a crucial function in the asset operations, is often still a painful and costly process: failing or unstable local hardware, failing communication between the local devices, failing communication with the cloud or data centre infrastructure, configuration issues in loggers or in the portal, high costs for communication, configuration or reporting.

Additionally, requirements with respect to the interaction of the solar power plants with the grid and the electricity markets, increase and put new specifications on the speed, the protocols and the security levels applied.

Internet of Things (IoT) in photovoltaic systems represents an interoperability environment where all devices in the field are connected to each other and spontaneously show themselves as available to be connected to the system. Additionally, each connecting device should provide the following information:

- Device parameters (brand, type, Serial Number, internal datasheet specifications)
- Device status and conditions (operational status, temperature, etc.)
- Connection with other devices & mapping (strings connected, inverter, sensor position, etc.)
- Any other relevant information

Standardisation efforts (e.g., SunSpec Alliance's Orange Button initiative) are taking place throughout the PV market and will help to improve on configuration costs for solar monitoring. However, the solar monitoring industry will also benefit heavily from the emerging Internet-of-things technologies that further improve plug-and-play behaviour of device communication, improve the quality and the security of the communication and reduce the cost of hardware.

Advantages and disadvantages

Advantages

- Reduce the cost of monitoring hardware and infrastructure.
- Reduce the cost of configuration and maintenance of the monitoring infrastructure.
- Improve the quality and the stability of the data.
- Improve the security level and the options for bidirectional communication.

Disadvantages

- Existing hardware and monitoring equipment will not be necessarily compatible with the new Internet-of-Things technologies resulting in hybrid solutions until the former technologies are phased out.

State of play

Many Internet-of-Things (IoT) technologies have passed the prototype phase and are available for massive deployment. However, many different technological solutions and approaches are still available in the market and no final best-practice approach has emerged.

Again, this leads to a standardisation issue for industry-wide adoption of Internet-of-Things technology within the solar industry and as such benefits from its advantages will be reduced when considering PV on a larger scale.

13.1.6. Future best practices in document management systems

Purpose and description

Asset contractual and technical documentation as described in today's Best Practices can be handled either physically or electronically, as far as the employed Document Management System (DMS) keeps all documents ready consultation by or transfer to relevant stakeholders. The inventory of technical documentation linked to a portfolio of plants can become very complex, especially in an era where the solar sector is moving towards a secondary market. Considering the number of documents to be stored and exchanged per plant, the increasing number of stakeholders that should have free access to a subset or the totality of the documentation, the physical exchange and storage of files becomes nearly impossible to be maintained without a proper quality process. Electronic document management and storage is thus becoming a best practice within the Solar industry.

At the same time, the use of meta-tags instead of a classical tree structure is a technique of filing that is becoming more widespread where asset documentation can be considered as relevant to different stakeholders or belonging to different portfolios. The use of meta-information and their standardisation under a common nomenclature is seen as the next best practice, especially to facilitate the contractual management of big portfolios and the maintenance operations.

Next to meta-tagging documents with additional information, making any document (scan, word, xls, mail, etc.) full text searchable adds to the best practices to make sure that all information can be listed and searched for when the need occurs.

Both technical and contractual documentations, including device replacement, scheduled maintenances, operators contacts, calendar of operations, intervention reports, should be tagged and electronically stored using a standardised terminology. This will facilitate their retrieval and updates as well as operation management or transition of a plant to a new O&M service provider.

Additionally, the selected DMS should allow a suitable user management system that will automatise the exchange and security of sensitive documents between stakeholders.

Advantages and disadvantages

The idea of meta-tagging documentation allows any document to be tagged with different criteria. This way any piece of information can be stored over multiple time areas, assets, records or any relevant criterium. The meta tagging allows the user or the applications to filter information on relevant criteria only. For example, only pictures from a certain period, or only plans from a defined equipment type. This way of meta tagging also avoids the need for documents to be copied or stored in multiple locations.

State of play

In terms of technological readiness and market uptake, digital DMS solutions using meta-tags and full-text search are already existing and adopted by some Asset Managers and O&M service providers. This technology could become soon a best practice, though the standardisation of document tagging in the solar industry is not yet implemented.

Document recognition and meta-tag auto-filling is already available on most documents including some scanned file types via OCR (Optical Character Recognition). At a next level, image recognition and auto-tagging would save operational time.

13.2. Retrofit coatings for PV modules

13.2.1. Anti-soiling coatings

Purpose and description

Solar cells, just like human eyes, need a clean field to function properly. Deposits and particles covering the surface of PV panels, like soiling, staining, dirt and grime, leaves, pollen, bird droppings, lime-scale and other environmental or industrial pollutants, prevent solar radiation from reaching the cells of PV modules and inevitably the efficiency and the optimal function of the solar system is reduced.

Soiling influences the levelised cost of electricity (LCOE) in two ways: by leading to an O&M cost (periodic cleaning), and by reducing the energy produced from 1%-10% in normal cases and up to 80% in extreme situations. In general, the presence of dirt or any other particles on the module surface has an impact on the anti-soiling properties; specific coating products with anti-soiling properties which also provide anti-reflective performances have been developed in the last years.

Advantages and disadvantages

Modules treated with anti-soiling coatings get dirty less quickly and are easier to clean and therefore maintain higher performance levels for longer, reducing the amount of module cleaning necessary and increasing yield by up to 3%. This is particularly interesting in arid regions, as anti-soiling coatings can help to reduce water use for PV module cleaning.

Some anti-soiling coatings can also be used to restore corroded PV module surfaces. Most anti-soiling coatings are relatively easy to use so that they can be applied by the O&M service provider.

When it comes to applying coatings to already installed modules in general, the O&M service provider should carefully evaluate possible consequences for PV module warranties and for any incentive or tariff schemes.

Retrofit anti-soiling coatings are a layer applied on the surface of the modules that in principle do not affect the properties of the glass surface and that can be removed if needed for warranty purposes.

State of play

There are already various commercially available anti-soiling coatings that can be applied on PV modules that have already been installed. New solutions are also being developed – some of which outperform older anti-soiling coatings or even anti-reflective coatings in terms of power gain. The new generation of retrofit anti-soiling coatings are mostly based on spray technologies but some anti-soiling coating suppliers are developing specific solutions for desertic areas that are applied via mechanical systems.

13.2.2. Anti-reflective coatings

Purpose and description

Reflection losses are one of the first loss factors occurring in the energy flow when converting sunlight to electricity via the PV power plant.

New anti-reflective coatings (ARC) that can be applied directly via a 'retrofit' method onto PV modules already installed in the field. Applied to the surface of the panels, these coatings reduce the reflection and thereby the losses due to reflection resulting in a higher energy output.

Innovative new coatings specifically engineered for aftermarket application are based on the same technology platform as the leading anti-reflective technology for new modules. These coatings reduce the amount of light reflected off the glass, allowing more light to travel through to the solar cell and to be converted into electricity.

An ARC works by providing an incoming photon with a very gradual transition from air to glass. It does this by varying the porosity of the material from very high at the coating-air interface to very low at the coating-glass interface. An ARC layer has typically a thickness of 120-150nm and can be applied on the module surface through special equipment, commonly named "applicator", or via spray. Both technologies provide different results in terms of layer uniformity, thickness and performance. The more controllable is the coating process the better will be the final result.

ARC is based on a silica-gel solution that is applied on the module surface. Once applied, the solution becomes a solid layer after a period of curing. Tests executed with mechanical application show power gain in the range of 3%-5%. An additional point to be considered when it comes to ARC retrofit technology is the durability of the coating layer. A good ARC should last for at least 5 years with a physiological yearly degradation that shouldn't reduce the coating properties more than 30% from its original performance.

Advantages and disadvantages

Retrofit anti-reflective coatings can increase module output in the field by up to 3-4%. In some cases, pilot tests have shown energy gains up to 5%.

When it comes to applying coatings to already installed modules in general, the O&M service provider should carefully evaluate possible consequences for PV module warranties and for any incentive or tariff schemes. An ARC, if applied properly through a mechanical application specifically developed for the purpose, does not damage the module surface. A new generation of modules has an ARC applied during the manufacturing process. A coating supplier that performs ARC properly should be able to provide the client specific warranties (e.g., product liability insurance).

State of play

There are already commercially available anti-reflective coatings that can be applied in a retrofit manner. Other products are currently being developed and tested to substantiate the applicability of the solution on a large scale and data will be collected from different locations.

“Mature” ARC technologies which has been tested for years are already available. They provide reliable results both in terms of durability and overperformance. This coating solution is based on a mechanical application via a controlled process that involves pre-coating measurements, quality control during the coating process and post-coating measurements. For this purpose, sophisticated equipment such as spectrometers, able to measure the variation (%) of reflection before and after the coating process, are needed. The market provides a wide offer of such devices and with prices in the range of 5-9k EUR, but not all spectrometers are good for ARC applications.

13.3. Waterless cleaning of PV modules

In many places around the globe which receive significant precipitation at least once a month, the need to wash solar panels is almost irrelevant. A study published in the International Journal of Sustainable Energy found that one gram of dirt per square meter can decrease a panel's output by more than 30 percent, which is why commercial PV farms often employ some form of cleaning (Al-hasan & Ghoneim, 2007).

However, many utility-scale and commercial and industrial PV sites in South Africa are located in arid climates. These arid regions are known for large amounts of dust and insufficient rainfall to automatically clean solar panels. Furthermore, in some of these regions, access to clean water is a problem which further exacerbates the problem of cleaning solar modules.

Various solutions have been launched over the past few years including nano-coating the glass on solar modules installed in arid areas (see also section 13.2.1. on *Anti-soiling coatings*), the use of pneumatic cleaning systems which employs pressurised air jets and robots which use a combination of brushes and air blowers to remove dust, sand and bird droppings from modules without using water.

For example, in a current commercial solution rotating soft micro fibre elements and air that flows parallel to PV module surface push dust particles along the downward slope of the modules. The cleaning device is integrated into the support structure (one device per row) and slides over the tables along the row. The cleaning process is normally applied on a daily basis and is fully autonomous. The individual parts are controlled by a central management system and perform self-cleaning cycles of the micro fibre elements. Weather forecasts are evaluated in order to avoid cleaning during severe weather conditions. The system does not need an external power supply²⁰ but uses its own PV module and battery. Several PV module manufacturers have agreed to use the solution.

Since this kind of solution comprises additional structural elements, it should be installed in the construction phase. In order to decide whether such an investment is necessary, soiling characteristics of the site should be determined before construction in a soiling study (for example, soiling ratio, soiling variability index; see Micheli et al. (2017)).

Further research in this field is ongoing in multiple facilities globally and it is expected that the outcome of this research will result in ever-better solutions and PV yield performance as these solutions are commercialised.



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South Africa has an 85% electrification rate (World Bank Group, 2019). This means that just under 9 million people still do not have access to electricity (World Bank Group, 2019). Standalone solar installations are key tools in the efforts to achieve universal electrification. This chapter assists in the application of the best practices, detailed in the previous chapters of the document, to standalone, off-grid PV plants with storage.

All best practices mentioned in these Guidelines could be theoretically applied to the smallest systems. However, Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) require different O&M services to ensure the effective management of energy supply and demand. The chapter discusses the various types of BESS that are in use in South Africa and details best practice recommendations for quality management of these systems. Different to on-grid systems, standalone installations have several different objectives, such as:

- Availability of electricity at the moment of demand and ease of maintenance;
- Availability of professional knowledge: expertise is not always available;
- Local instead of central monitoring.

Standalone solar PV systems are often combined with Energy Storage Systems (ESS), which decouple energy generation from demand. ESS are a set of technologies whose aim is to decouple energy generation from demand and/or low renewable generation. The systems allow for excess electricity to be “stored” and released during periods of high

electricity demand, providing cost-saving opportunities to consumers and ensuring a steady and safe electricity supply. So, energy storage contributes to better use of renewable energy.

The selection of a storage system can significantly influence a project's overall O&M strategy. Technical parameters such as battery lifetime, efficiency, depth of discharge (DoD), energy density and/or power density, should be taken into consideration at the development stage to select the adequate ESS and avoid unnecessary costs throughout the project's lifecycle. For example, the decision of whether to use an open, a containerized or a building-based, air-conditioned solution will impact battery lifetime and O&M tasks.

14.1. Environment, Healthy & Safety

Necessary precautions as outlined in Chapter 3. *Environment, Health & Safety* should be taken for standalone solar PV systems. Further emphasis should be placed on training and skills required for working in heights and on rooftops. It is more likely that access to the system is available to other parties not directly involved in the upkeep of the solar system. Installers and O&M service providers should provide “stakeholder training” for people working or living in the proximity of the installation.

Provision for South African Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) with regard to handling of potentially hazardous or fire-risk equipment should be accounted for by the O&M service provider.

14 O&M for standalone solar installations with storage

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Proper signalisation of dangers should be displayed beside any hazardous device. Furthermore, warning signs indicating electrical risks like HV, DC or live conductor should be properly installed and maintained by the O&M service provider.

Operators should ensure that batteries are kept secured and locked with access control and at least two zones of security. Smaller battery systems are considered high risk items for theft in South Africa. The O&M service provider should conduct a security assessment for the installation and provide adequate equipment to secure battery systems. This will be based on a location and facility basis and must be done in coordination with the Asset Management Insurance policy.

EH&S considerations for Energy Storage Systems

Most batteries are subject to environmental regulations that require recycling or proper disposal at the end of performance period. The ESS mentioned above are electrical appliances and as such are subject to significant health & safety risks. To prevent hazards (e.g., uncontrolled release of energy), an appropriate risk assessment must be performed during the design and planning phases and necessary safety precautions implemented. The hazards must be identified during these stages and appropriate measures taken to mitigate risk and to protect those operating the system. The main risks are impact, excessive heat, crush or water penetration and electrical shock. There is also a significant health and safety risk of poisoning or mishandling hazardous materials, especially the sulphuric acid electrolyte added to lead-acid batteries.

Both external and internal factors should be considered during the risk assessment since, in some cases, the ESS itself can be the cause of hazardous event. The major hazards for large-scale ESS can be categorised as follows:

- **Electrical**, occurring when there is direct contact between a person and the system. Battery systems are typically designed to follow the low-voltage directive with a voltage range of 75-1500 V DC and 50-1000 V AC.
- **Mechanical**, occurring after a physical collision.
- **Poisoning or exposure to hazardous materials**, for example, through leaking of chemical components from the system. This could be the non-aqueous

electrolyte mix of a lithium-ion battery or the sulfuric acid in lead-acid or redox-flow batteries.

- **Other**, occurring due to an explosion, fire, thermal runaway, improper treatment of the cooling agent, etc.

To avoid risks, the system should not overheat, come into contact with water, or suffer from either electrical stress or high humidity. The risk of electrical shock can be mitigated – as is common practice in photovoltaic plants – by regularly maintaining the system and ensuring appropriate electrical insulation, for instance, by wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). The energy storage system should be maintained by trained technicians since improper handling increases the risk of electrical shock. For personnel qualifications during the installation and maintenance of stationary batteries, reference should be made to IEEE 1657 - 2018.

Safety data sheets should be provided to those operating the system. In case of repair or replacement, addition or alteration of the system, the safety system should be re-evaluated and, if necessary, additional safety systems implemented.

It is best practice to design the system in a way that allows straightforward removal and replacement of modules and a separation between battery components and other equipment such as the HVAC or power conversion system (PCS) including inverter and transformer. The system itself should be easily accessible for inspection without needing to significantly disassemble the ESS system. Disposal of hazardous material should comply with local and national rules and regulations.

When dealing with owners of off-grid standalone systems, who are usually not professional solar stakeholders, additional thought must be given to the information provided to them at all stages of project lifecycle.

- Retailers/installers should be clear about the need for ongoing maintenance and make sure this is reflected in any financial analysis provided to customers. Best practice would involve either:
 - The retailer providing maintenance service themselves (or)
 - Ensuring a clear and continuous handover to 3rd party O&M service providers.

- Provide a manual to the homeowner with contact information and description of operational indicators and procedures they can do, including clear documentation that states the customer as responsible for maintaining original insolation/shade
- Provide fire safety instructions and maintenance manuals for fire safety equipment such as fire extinguishers, smoke detection, which should be monitored for expiration and replaced timeously.

14.2. Monitoring & reporting

In the case of standalone systems, the Asset Owner is typically not a solar professional, therefore reporting needs to be easily understood and clear. The purpose of reporting is to verify the asset is performing in accordance with expectations as guaranteed by the retailer/installer in the selling process.

A central question is to ensure the accuracy of the performance monitoring of a standalone PV system, given the likely absence of a pyranometer and module temperature sensors.

Key Performance Indicators

For reporting to Asset Owners, emphasis shall be placed on the Energy Performance Index (EPI, see 11.2.6), overall availability (including the battery system), and battery capacity degradation/ state of health (SOH).

If EPI is greater than 100% the system is performing to expectation based on actual weather conditions experienced.

The expected yield based on actual weather conditions must use the same assumptions (PR, shade, degradation) as was made to invest. The EPI should be reported to Asset Owner at least annually, but the O&M service provider should be reviewing and take action more frequently (monthly).

Reference yield data collection

In order to accurately calculate the Energy Performance Index, collection of Reference Yield (Local Irradiation) and temperature data is required.

The following methods can be applied for collection of reference yield as seen in Table 11 below.

Operating and monitoring of energy storage systems

To increase the lifecycle and efficiency of an ESS, the implementation and regular follow-up of an efficient monitoring system is essential. ESS should always be equipped with an **Energy Management System (EMS)** to track charge/discharge states and make sure that the system stays within the operating state of charge (SoC) limits, because this may have contractual and warranty implications. The EMS should also gather data coming from energy meters, auxiliary systems and operating parameters, such as temperature, voltage, current, power level, state of charge, state of health and warning messages, in order to assess the condition of the ESS daily. Average current rates and temperature are typically also relevant to track as they influence the guarantees. Data granularity depends on size and type of battery.

TABLE 11 METHODS SUGGESTED FOR THE COLLECTION OF REFERENCE YIELD

REFERENCE YIELD SOURCE	ACCURACY	HARDWARE COST	COMMENT
Onsite Pyranometer	High*	High	For more information, see 10.9.1. <i>Irradiance measurements</i> . Public pyranometers may be used if available.
Module level sensor	High	High	
Satellite Data	Medium-High**	None	For more information, see 10.9.1. <i>Irradiance measurements</i> .
Cell Sensors	Medium	Low	
Local Comparison	Medium-Low	None	The established baseline must be verified.
Historic Data	Low	None	Monthly variation may be +/-20%.

* Pyranometers and cell sensors needs periodical cleaning and recalibration to keep the highest level of accuracy. If this cannot be sustained, a good satellite irradiation data set is preferable.
 ** Satellite data accuracy depends on type of source. However, the best references have a granularity of 3x3 km² and do not include local shades.

14 O&M for standalone solar installations with storage

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It is a minimum requirement to monitor the SoC of batteries, because it may have a great importance for battery lifetime. For example, a permanent charging level of under 50% should be avoided for lead-acid batteries, while a high charging level > 90% is increasing aging typically for lithium-ion batteries. The information of the battery monitor shall be accessible to the person responsible for the O&M of the off-grid system, above all SoC in % of total capacity. Another important component of an off-grid system is the charge controller (also called solar regulator). It limits the electric current for charging/discharging the batteries in order to prevent overcharging, and may protect against overvoltage, which can reduce battery performance or lifespan and may pose a safety risk. It may also prevent completely draining a battery ("deep discharging"), or perform controlled discharges, depending on the battery technology, to protect battery life. Apart from normal maintenance tasks, it is important to regularly monitor error log file.

Operator should log and report any alarms and trip events. Communication of these, based on contractual obligations should be agreed with the asset owner and/or utility interface in advance. Reporting of extraordinary failures/incidents should include an initial log of incident (flash report) followed by a full incident report detailing cause of fault, repairs undertaken, time for correction, on-site or additional spares utilised, loss of production estimates and impact on associated system components.

14.3. Types and Maintenance of Energy Storage Systems

Even though off-grid systems are designed to require minimum maintenance, it is important to adhere to a maintenance plan, in order to ensure availability and normal lifetime of the systems' components. For a proposed maintenance plan for standalone PV systems, see *Annex f*.

The most critical parts of off-grid systems are the batteries (or ESS). In the following we will discuss three battery classes:

- Lead acid batteries
- Lithium-ion batteries
- Redox-flow batteries

14.3.1. Lead Acid Batteries

There are two types of lead acid batteries:

- Wet cell batteries (or flooded cell batteries)
- Dry cell batteries

The **wet cell** batteries used in off-grid PV systems are normally vented lead acid batteries (VLA batteries, flooded lead acid batteries). In principle thick lead-based plates that are flooded with an acid electrolyte. The container is unsealed ("vented"), because gases produced during operation need to escape to the air. Therefore, the batteries have to be kept upright and the area be well ventilated to ensure safe dispersal of the hydrogen gas it produces mainly during overcharging. Normally they are kept in dedicated battery rooms, and strict safety measures have to be observed. VLA batteries are highly reliable, if maintenance instructions are observed (for example, adding purified water in order to regenerate the electrolytes). However, flexibility is limited, because after some months it will be difficult to add new batteries to an existing system. It is important to use VLA batteries dedicated for solar applications. The VLA batteries that are used in cars or motorcycles are inappropriate for solar systems, because they will wear out quickly.

A **dry cell** battery uses a paste electrolyte, with only enough moisture to allow ion flow. Therefore, it can operate in any orientation without spilling. Valve-regulated lead-acid batteries (VRLA batteries; sealed lead-acid batteries, captive electrolyte lead-acid batteries) are lead batteries with immobilized sulfuric acid electrolyte. Since they are sealed within polypropylene plastic and hydrogen recombines with oxygen inside the battery, water or gases do not escape under normal conditions, and water needs not to be added. For this reason, they are also called 'maintenance-free' batteries, even if this term is misleading, because it only refers to water refilling. They are 'valve-regulated', because security valves will vent the batteries, when gas pressure becomes too great inside the battery, for example because of excessive overcharging.

Two common types of VRLA batteries used in PV systems are:

- Gel batteries, which use a silicon dioxide gel as electrolyte.
- Absorbed Glass Mat (AGM) batteries, where a fiberglass mats absorb the electrolyte.

14.3.2. Lithium-ion batteries (LIB)

In the last years another type of dry cell battery has spread rapidly: **lithium-ion batteries (LIB)**. They combine high power density (small size), high cycle-count (number of charge-discharge cycles during lifetime), and fast discharge and recharge times. They may also operate at higher ambient temperatures as compared to lead-acid batteries. Furthermore, a LIB pack normally includes a battery management system, which facilitates battery handling. From a CAPEX perspective, they are (still) more expensive than lead-acid batteries, but prices are decreasing rapidly, and LCOE may already be lower.

14.3.3. Redox-flow batteries

A flow battery, or redox flow battery (after reduction-oxidation), is a type of electrochemical cell where chemical energy is provided by two chemical components dissolved in liquids that are pumped through the system on separate sides of a membrane. Ion exchange (accompanied by flow of electric current) occurs through the membrane while both liquids circulate in their own respective space.

Apart from battery typology, three factors determine battery lifetime:

1. Ambient cell temperature
2. Cycling profile (average SoC and DoD)
3. Quality of maintenance

The rated capacity of a battery is based on an ambient temperature (typically 25°C). Any variation from this operating temperature can eventually alter the battery's performance and shorten its expected life. Depending on the type of battery, this factor may be more or less important.

Each cycle (discharge and subsequent recharge) reduces the battery's relative capacity by a small percentage, albeit a much smaller percentage for LIB. Length, speed/profile and depth of the discharge cycle determine the reduction in battery capacity.

Gradual decrease in battery life can be monitored and evaluated through voltage checks, load testing or monitoring. Periodic preventive maintenance extends battery string life by preventing loose connections, removing corrosion and identifying bad batteries before they can affect the rest of the string. By respecting the manufacturer's maintenance guidelines, the end of battery life can be accurately estimated, and replacements scheduled without unexpected downtime.

In order to perform a systematic maintenance, a description of how to test component and system is required. In case of repair or replacement of any component within the system, it should be checked whether the change complies with the applicable regulation.

The storage system (battery) should provide an operational manual, including at least the following topics¹⁵:

- System overview and site layout.
- System component description.
- Maintenance cycles for all components, including the actions to be taken during the inspection and maintenance activities and the necessary skill set.
- Safety instructions.

Spare parts management

In order to guarantee a nearly 100% availability of the system, strategic spare parts need to be stocked on site, such as fuses and surge protections and long-lead items. If economically feasible, the O&M service provider should have basic spare parts in stock, as described in chapter 9 on Spare Parts Management. Failing this, care should be taken to select component manufacturers which can provide local service and fast replacement of faulty goods. In this case, the inverter, BMS module, and batteries are the most important spare parts.

¹⁵ Note: this list is intended to be illustrative and not limiting.

14 O&M for standalone solar installations with storage

/ continued

14.4. Contractual recommendations for standalone PV systems

To ensure maximum availability of a solar asset, the owner should perform or subcontract a proper operations and maintenance activity. The Asset Owner

should have access to a customer support hotline and know who to contact in the event of issue. This information should ideally be placed next to the inverter. O&M services for distributed systems should cover the incidents seen in Table 12 below.

TABLE 12 INCIDENTS COVERED BY O&M SERVICE AGREEMENTS FOR DISTRIBUTES SOLAR SYSTEMS

INCIDENT	CLASSIFICATION	COMMENT
Inverter alarms	Minimum requirement	Alarms generated by the inverter should be acknowledged at least daily. Maintenance responsible should take necessary actions in the shortest delay (within 2days)
Battery alarms	Minimum requirement	Alarms when operating conditions hurt the guarantee (necessary actions to be taken in 1 week), fire alarms (immediate action required), etc.
Monitoring Failure	Minimum requirement	O&M service provider should have good guidelines and troubleshooting guides that allow system owner to self-diagnose and resolve within 2days.
Inverter failure	Minimum requirement	As soon as inverter failure is indicated by inverter alarms or monitoring failure a replacement should be installed within 1 day.
System Level Performance Alerts	Best Practice	Duration and frequency of reporting should be according to the expected accuracy and availability of live irradiation data. Best Practice for monthly comparison, minimum annually.
Module- String/ Inverter Level Alerts	Recommended	For commercial projects with more than one inverter, reporting should be at minimum at inverter level. String or MPPT level reporting to alert to string failure is recommended where possible.
Module cleaning (and pyranometers or sensor cells if present)	Minimum requirement	The expectation for module cleaning planning should be based on the site, the installation type and size, the environmental conditions. Actual planning of module cleaning can be adjusted based on the performance (EPI) of system over time.

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A. Applicable international standards for solar O&M

Generic for O&M	
IEC 62446-1:2016	Photovoltaic (PV) systems - Requirements for testing, documentation and maintenance - Part 1: Grid connected systems - Documentation, commissioning tests and inspection
IEC 62446-2	Photovoltaic (PV) systems - Requirements for testing, documentation and maintenance - Part 2: Grid connected (PV) systems - Maintenance of PV systems
IEC TS 63049:2017	Terrestrial photovoltaic (PV) systems - Guidelines for effective quality assurance in PV systems installation, operation and maintenance
IEC 60364-7-712:2017	Low voltage electrical installations - Part 7-712: Requirements for special installations or locations - Solar photovoltaic (PV) power supply systems
System Performance and Monitoring	
IEC 61724-1:2017	Photovoltaic system performance - Part 1: Monitoring
IEC TS 61724-2:2016	Photovoltaic system performance - Part 2: Capacity evaluation method
IEC TS 61724-3:2016	Photovoltaic system performance - Part 3: Energy evaluation method
IEC TS 61724-4	Photovoltaic system performance - Part 4: Degradation rate evaluation method (not yet published as of October 2019)
IEC TS 63019:2019	Photovoltaic power systems (PVPS) - Information model for availability
ISO 9847:1992	Calibrating field pyranometers by comparison to a reference pyranometer
Specialised Technical Inspections	
IEC TS 62446-3:2017	Photovoltaic (PV) systems - Requirements for testing, documentation and maintenance - Part 3: Photovoltaic modules and plants - Outdoor infrared thermography
IEC 61829:2015	Photovoltaic (PV) array - On-site measurement of current-voltage characteristics
IEC TS 60904-13:2018	Photovoltaic devices - Part 13: Electroluminescence of photovoltaic modules
Other supporting documents	
IEC TS 62738:2018	Ground-mounted photovoltaic power plants - Design guidelines and recommendations
IEC TR 63149:2018	Land usage of photovoltaic (PV) farms - Mathematical models and calculation examples
IEC 60891:2009	Photovoltaic devices - Procedures for temperature and irradiance corrections to measured I-V characteristics
IEC 61853-1:2011	Photovoltaic (PV) module performance testing and energy rating - Part 1: Irradiance and temperature performance measurements and power rating
IEC 61853-2:2016	Photovoltaic (PV) module performance testing and energy rating - Part 2: Spectral responsivity, incidence angle and module operating temperature measurements
IEC 61853-3:2018	Photovoltaic (PV) module performance testing and energy rating - Part 3: Energy rating of PV modules
IEC 61853-4:2018	Photovoltaic (PV) module performance testing and energy rating - Part 4: Standard reference climatic profiles
IEC 60904-5:2011	Photovoltaic devices - Part 5: Determination of the equivalent cell temperature (ECT) of photovoltaic (PV) devices by the open-circuit voltage method

B. Proposed skill matrix for O&M personnel. (Download it from www.solarpowereurope.org)

Planned	Not required	Required	Update required
	</		

C. Documentation set accompanying the solar PV plant. (Download it from www.solarpowereurope.org)

INFORMATION TYPE AND DEPTH OF DETAIL / AS-BUILT DOCUMENTS			
NO.	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS	DESCRIPTION	COMMENTS
1	Site Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location / Map / GPS Coordinates Plant Access / Keys Access Roads O&M Building Spare Parts Storage / Warehouse Site Security Information Stakeholder list and contact information (for example, owner of the site, administration contacts, firefighters, subcontractors / service providers, ...) 	
2	Project Drawings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plant Layout and General Arrangement Cable routing drawings Cable list Cable schedule/ cable interconnection document Single Line Diagram Configuration of strings (string numbers, in order to identify where the strings are in relation to each connection box and inverter) Earthing/Grounding System layout drawing Lightning Protection System layout drawing Lighting System layout drawing (optional) Topographic drawing 	"Lightning Protection System layout drawing" can be considered as optional
3	Project studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shading study/simulation Energy yield study/simulation Inverter sizing study 	
4	Studies according to national regulation requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voltage drop calculations Protection coordination study Short circuit study Grounding study Cable sizing calculations Lightning protection study 	
5	PV Modules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Datasheets Flash list with PV modules positioning on the field (reference to string numbers and positioning in the string) Warranties & Certificates 	
6	Inverters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> O&M Manual Commissioning Report Warranties & Certificates Factory Acceptance Test Inverter settings Dimensional drawings 	
7	Medium Voltage/ Inverter Cabin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium Voltage/Inverter Cabin layout and general arrangement drawing Medium Voltage/Inverter Cabin foundation drawing Erection procedure Internal Normal/Emergency Lighting Layout Drawing Fire Detection and Fire Fighting System Layout Drawing (if required) HVAC system Layout Drawing HVAC system Installation & O&M Manual HVAC Study (according to national regulations) Earthing system layout drawing Cable list 	
8	MV/LV Transformer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> O&M Manual Commissioning Report Factory Acceptance Test Report Type Test Reports Routine Test Reports Warranties & Certificates Dimensional drawing with parts list 	

NO.	MINIMUM REQUIREMENT	DESCRIPTION	COMMENTS
9	Cables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Datasheets Type & Routine test reports 	
10	LV & MV Switchgear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single Line Diagram Switchgear wiring diagrams Equipment datasheets and manuals Factory Acceptance Test report Type Test Reports Routine Test Reports Dimensional drawings Warranties & Certificates Protection relays settings Switching procedure (according to national regulations) 	"Protection relays settings" and "Switching procedure" are considerations for the MV Switchgear
11	HV Switchgear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single Line Diagram Steel structures assembly drawings HV Switchyard general arrangement drawing HV Equipment Datasheets and Manuals (CTs, VTs, Circuit Breakers, Disconnectors, Surge Arresters, Post Insulators) Protection & Metering Single Line Diagram HV Equipment Type & Routine Test Reports Interlock study Switching procedure (according to national regulations) Warranties & Certificates 	
12	UPS & Batteries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation & O&M Manual Commissioning report Warranties & Certificates Datasheets Dimensional Drawings 	
13	Mounting Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mechanical Assembly Drawings Warranties & Certificates 	
14	Trackers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mechanical Assembly Drawings Electrical Schematic Diagrams Block diagram Equipment Certificates, Manuals and Datasheets (Motors, Encoders) PLC list of inputs and outputs (I/O) by type (Digital, Analog or Bus) Commissioning reports Warranties & Certificates 	
15	Security, Anti-intrusion and Alarm System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security system layout/general arrangement drawing Security system block diagram Alarm system schematic diagram Equipment manuals and datasheets Access to security credentials (e.g., passwords, instructions, keys etc) Warranties & Certificates 	
16	Monitoring/ SCADA system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation & O&M manual List of inputs by type (Digital, Analog or Bus) Electrical Schematic diagram Block diagram (including network addresses) Equipment datasheets 	I/O list includes e.g., sensor readings that are collected by data loggers.
17	Plant Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power Plant Control System description Control Room (if applicable) Plant Controls instructions Breaker Control functionality (remote / on-site) and instructions List of inputs and outputs 	
18	Communication system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation and O&M manual System internal communication External Communication to monitoring system or Operations Centre IP network plan Bus network plans 	

D. Important examples of input records in the record control. (Download it from www.solarpowereurope.org)

RECORD CONTROL				
NO.	ACTIVITY TYPE	INFORMATION TYPE	INPUT RECORD	REFERENCES/ COMMENTS
1	Alarms / Operation Incidents	Alarms description	Date and Time, Affected Power, Equipment Code / Name, Error messages / Codes, Severity Classification, Curtailment Period, External Visits/Inspections from third parties	
2	Contract Management	Contract general description	Project Name / Code, Client Name, Peak Power (kWp)	
3	Contract Management	Asset description	Structure Type, Installation Type	
4	Contract Management	Contract period	Contract Start and End Date	
5	Contract Management	Contractual clauses	Contract Value, Availability (%), PR (%), Materials / Spare parts, Corrective Work Labour	
6	Corrective Maintenance	Activity description	Detailed Failure Typification, Failure, Fault Status, Problem Resolution Description, Problem Cause	EN 13306 - Maintenance. Maintenance terminology
7	Corrective Maintenance	Corrective Maintenance event	Associated Alarms (with date), Event Status	EN 13306 - Maintenance. Maintenance terminology
8	Corrective Maintenance	Corrective Maintenance event log	Date and Time of Corrective Maintenance Creation (or Work Order), Date and Time status change (pending, open, recovered, close), End date and time of the intervention, Start date and time of the intervention, Technicians and Responsible Names and Function	EN 13306 - Maintenance. Maintenance terminology
9	Corrective Maintenance	Intervention equipment/ Element name	Affected Power and Affected Production, Equipment Code / Name	
10	Inventory Management	Warehouse management	Inventory Stock Count and Movement, Equipment Code / Name	
11	Monitoring & Supervision	Equipment status	Date, Status log (protection devices, inverters, monitoring systems, surveillance systems)	
12	Monitoring & Supervision	Meteo data	Irradiation, Module temperature, Other meteo variables (ambient temperature, air humidity, wind velocity and direction, ...)	IEC 61724 - Photovoltaic system performance monitoring - Guidelines for measurement, data exchange and analysis
13	Monitoring & Supervision	Production / consumption data	AC active and reactive power at PV Plant Injection Point and other subsystems or equipment, Consumption from auxiliary systems, Other variables (DC/AC voltages and currents, frequency), Power from DC field	IEC 61724 - Photovoltaic system performance monitoring - Guidelines for measurement, data exchange and analysis
14	Monitoring & Supervision	Performance data	PV Plant Energy Production; PR; Expected vs Real	

RECORD CONTROL				
NO.	ACTIVITY TYPE	INFORMATION TYPE	INPUT RECORD	REFERENCES/ COMMENTS
15	Preventive Maintenance	Intervention equipment/ Element name	Affected Power and Affected Production, Equipment Code / Name, Intervention Start and End Date	
16	Preventive Maintenance	Maintenance description	Measurements, Preventive Maintenance Tasks Performed, Problems not solved during activity and its Classification and Typification, Technicians and Responsible Names and Function	
17	PV Plant Documentation	Commissioning	Commissioning Documentation and Tests Results	IEC 62446 - Photovoltaic (PV) systems - Requirements for testing, documentation and maintenance - Part 1: Grid connected systems - Documentation, commissioning tests and inspection
18	PV Plant Documentation	Operation and maintenance	Equipment Manuals, PV Plant O&M Manual	IEC 62446 - Photovoltaic (PV) systems - Requirements for testing, documentation and maintenance - Part 1: Grid connected systems - Documentation, commissioning tests and inspection
19	PV Plant Documentation	System Documentation	As built documentation (Datasheets, wiring diagrams, system data)	IEC 62446 - Photovoltaic (PV) systems - Requirements for testing, documentation and maintenance - Part 1: Grid connected systems - Documentation, commissioning tests and inspection
20	Warranty Management	Claims registration	Affected Equipment, Claim Description, Occurrence Date; Communications between O&M service provider, client and manufacturer/supplier	

E. Annual Maintenance Plan: On-grid. (Download it from www.solarpowereurope.org)

The utility maintenance plan is conceived for a 3-5 MW site (land-locked site far from seashore). The distributed maintenance plan is conceived for a 50 kW to 1 MW fixed mount rooftop installation with secure access. The maintenance plan applies for both utility and distributed solar plants. For distributed, please take into account the following legend.

a: distributed: only if required; b: distributed: recommendation; c: distributed: not applicable; d: distributed: best practice

The abbreviations describe the importance and frequency of the maintenance tasks related to each component of the solar plant:

D: Daily; M: Monthly; Q: Quarterly; SA: semi-annual; Y: yearly; nYr: every n years; T: Total installation; S: Defined subset; R: random subset.

EQUIPMENT	TASK	IMPORTANCE	FREQUENCY	EXTENT
Modules	Integrity inspection & replacement	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Thermography inspection	Recommendation	Y	T
	Measurements inspection	if required	Y	S
	Check tightening of clamps	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Modules cleaning	According to local conditions	(Y)	T
Electrical cabinets and switchboards - Array/string junction box - Generator junction box - AC switchboards - AUX switchboard - General utilities switchboard - Weather station's cabinet - Monitoring system cabinet - Communication cabinet - Security system board - Other cabinets	Sample internal inspection of junction boxes (if possible)	Recommendation	Y	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Documents inspection	if required	Y	T
	Check labelling and identification	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Electrical protections visual inspection & functional test	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check fuse status	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check surge protection status (if applicable)	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check integrity of cables & state of terminals	Minimum requirement ^a	Y	T
	Sensor functional verification (if applicable)	Recommendation ^a	Y	T
	Measurements inspection	Best practice ^a	Y	T
	Thermographical inspection	Recommendation ^a	Y	T
	Check tightening	Minimum requirement ^a	Y	T
	Lubrication of locks	Minimum requirement ^a	Y	T
	Monitoring operation test (if applicable)	Recommendation ^a	Y	T
	Integrity inspection	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Check labelling and identification	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Check cable terminals	Minimum requirement	Y	R
Cables - DC / AC cables - Cables in switchboards, cabinets, inverters	Measurements inspection	Recommendation	Y	R
	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Documents inspection	Best practice	Y	T
	Check labelling and identification	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Electrical protections visual inspection check correct operations	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check fuses	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check surge protections	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Thermographical inspection	Best practice ^b	Y	T
	Sensors functional verification	Minimum requirement	Y	R
Inverters - Central inverters - String inverters				

EQUIPMENT	TASK	IMPORTANCE	FREQUENCY	EXTENT
Inverters - Central inverters - String inverters	Measurements inspection	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check parameters	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Functional test of ventilation system	Minimum requirement	SA	T
	Check batteries	According to manufacturer's recommendations	(Y)	T
	Replace batteries		(3yr)	T
	Replace fans		(5yr)	T
Transformer ^c - Power transformer - AUX transformer	Safety equipment inspection	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Clean filters	Minimum requirement	SA	T
	Replace filters	Minimum requirement	2yr	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	According to local conditions	(Y)	T
	Check labelling and identification	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Thermographical inspection	Best practice	Y	T
MV switchgear incl. protection devices ^c	Functional verification of sensors & relays	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check parameters	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check oil level (if applicable) and max. temperature	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check of cooling system (fans) if applicable	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check of MV surge discharger devices (if applicable)	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	According to local conditions	(Y)	T
	Safety equipment inspection	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check labelling and identification	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Electrical protections visual inspection	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Thermographical inspection, if possible	Recommendation	Y	T
	Sensors functional verification	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Measurements inspection	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check correct operation	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check fuse status	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check cables terminals	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Battery / UPS check	Minimum requirement	Y	
	Mechanical lubrication	According to manufacturer's recommendations and necessity	(5yr)	T
	Replace certain mechanical parts		(5yr)	T
	Battery / UPS replacement		(3yr)	T

EQUIPMENT	TASK	IMPORTANCE	FREQUENCY	EXTENT
MV switchgear incl. protection devices °	Check protection parameters	According to local grid code	(5yr)	T
	Functional check of protection devices		(5yr)	T
Power analyser °	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check labelling and identification	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Measurements inspection	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Software maintenance	Recommendation	Y	T
	Monitoring operation test	Minimum requirement	Y	T
Energy meter	Check parameters	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check labelling and identification	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Check values and parameters	Recommendation	Y	T
	Check of communication devices (modem, converters) if applicable	Recommendation	Y	T
Power control unit °	Check batteries	According to manufacturer's recommendations	(Y)	T
	Replace batteries		(3yr)	T
	Functional verification		Y	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
UPS °	Check batteries	According to manufacturer's recommendations	(Y)	T
	Replace batteries		(3yr)	T
	Functional test of ventilation system (if applicable)	Best practice	Y	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	According to manufacturer's recommendations	(Y)	T
	General maintenance		(Y)	T
Emergency generator (if applicable) °	Check correct operation		(Y)	T
	Replacement of filters		(5yr)	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check correct operation	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check conformity to local security standards	Minimum requirement	3yr	T
Lights and electric sockets	Integrity check & cleaning	According to manufacturer's recommendations	(Y)	T
	Functional verification		(Y)	T
	Change of air filters		(Y)	T

EQUIPMENT	TASK	IMPORTANCE	FREQUENCY	EXTENT
Water supply system (if applicable)	Integrity inspection	If applicable	Y	T
Fire detection central (if applicable)	Integrity check & cleaning	According to manufacturer's recommendations and local requirements	(Y)	T
	Check correct operation		(Y)	T
	Battery inspection		(Y)	T
	Sensors functional verification		(Y)	T
Lightning protection (if applicable)	Cleaning of cameras & sensors	Minimum requirement	(Y)	T
	Integrity inspection		Y	R
	Integrity inspection		Y	T
Fences and gates	Lubrication of locks	Minimum requirement	SA	T
Vegetation	Vegetation clearing	According to local conditions	(Q)	T
Paths	Integrity inspection	Best practice	Y	T
Drainage System	Vegetation clearing	Recommendation	Y	T
	General cleaning	Minimum requirement	SA	T
Manholes	Integrity inspection	Best practice	Y	T
Buildings	Integrity check & cleaning	According to local requirements	(Y)	T
	Lubrication of locks	Minimum requirement	SA	T
	Documents inspection	According to local requirements	(Y)	T
	Check fire extinguishers		(Y)	T
Safety equipment	Check earthing		(3yr)	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check correct operation	Minimum requirement	Y	T
PV support structure	Integrity inspection	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Check tightening	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Check potential equalization	Minimum requirement	2yr	T
Tracker system °	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check correct operation	According to manufacturer's recommendations	(Y)	T
	Check tightening		(Y)	R
	General maintenance		(Y)	T
	Mechanical lubrication		SA	T

EQUIPMENT	TASK	IMPORTANCE	FREQUENCY	EXTENT
Weather station ^d	Integrity check & cleaning	According to manufacturer's recommendations	(Y)	T
	Functional test of sensors		(Y)	T
	Check correct operation		(Y)	T
	Check batteries (if applicable)		(Y)	T
	Monitoring operation test		(Y)	T
Irradiation sensors	Integrity check & cleaning	According to manufacturer's recommendations and local requirements	Q	T
	Calibration		2yr	T
	Monitoring operational test		Y	T
Communication Board	Functional communications check	Minimum requirement	D	T
Intrusion detection and verification system ^e	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Functional verification of intrusion detection	According to manufacturer's recommendations	(Y)	T
	Functional verification of alarming		Y	T
	Functional verification of cameras		M	T
	Specific maintenance		Y	T
Stock of spare parts ^d	Inventory of stock	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Visual inspection of stock conditions	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Stock replenishment	Minimum requirement	M	T

F. Annual Maintenance Plan: Standalone off-grid systems. (Download it from www.solarpowereurope.org)

The standalone PV maintenance plan is conceived for a 10-300 kWp site.

The abbreviations describe the importance and frequency of the maintenance tasks related to each component of the solar plant:

D: Daily; M: Monthly; Q: Quarterly; SA: Semi-annual; Y: Yearly; nYr: Every n years; T: Total installation; S: Defined subset; R: Random subset.

EQUIPMENT	TASK	IMPORTANCE	FREQUENCY	EXTENT
Modules	Integrity inspection & replacement of broken modules	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check tightening of clamps	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Modules cleaning	According to local conditions	(Y)	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
Electrical cabinets and switchboards - Array/string junction box - Generator junction box - AC switchboards	Documents inspection (if applicable)	Best practice	Y	T
	Check labelling and identification	Best practice	Y	R
	Electrical protections visual inspection & functional test	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check fuse status	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check surge protection status (if applicable)	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check integrity of cables & state of terminals	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Measure Uoc and Isc of individual strings	Best practice	Y	T
	Check tightening of terminals	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Lubrication of locks	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Integrity inspection (where accessible)	Minimum requirement	Y	T
Cables - DC / AC cables - Cables in switchboards, cabinets, inverters	Check labelling and identification	Best practice	Y	R
	Check cable terminals	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Documents inspection	Best practice	Y	T
Charge controller	Check labelling and identification	Best practice	Y	R
	Electrical protections visual inspection, check correct operations	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check surge protection (if applicable)	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check error log	Best practice	Y	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	Minimum requirement	Q	T
	Documents inspection	Best practice	Y	T
	Performance test of inverter (10 min at maximum rated power)	Best practice, according to manufacturer's recommendations	Y	T
	Check labelling and identification	Best practice	Y	R
	Electrical protections visual inspection, check correct operations	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Check fuses	Minimum requirement	Y	T
String inverters / charge controller	Check surge protection	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Functional test of ventilation system	Minimum requirement	SA	T
	Clean filters	Minimum requirement	Q	T
	Replace filters	According to local conditions	(2yr)	T

EQUIPMENT	TASK	IMPORTANCE	FREQUENCY	EXTENT
Batteries	Integrity check & cleaning (especially the terminals)	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Thermography of battery terminals	Best practice	Y	T
	Check the electrolyte level in each cell (VRLA)	Minimum requirement *	Q	T
	Check batteries, for example - Measure float voltage and current of the entire bank - Measure terminal voltage of individual batteries - Visual check of state of sulfation (VRLA) - Check specific gravity of electrolyte (VRLA) - Check voltage balance and internal temperature (LIB) - Check status / error log of battery management system (LIB, if available)	According to manufacturer's recommendations	(Y)	T
	Replace batteries		(3yr)	T
Emergency generator (if applicable)	Functional test of ventilation system (if applicable)	Minimum requirement	SA	T
	Integrity check & cleaning	According to manufacturer's recommendations	(Y)	T
	General maintenance		(Y)	T
	Check correct operation		(Y)	T
	Replacement of filters		(5yr)	T
Lightning protection (if applicable)	Integrity inspection	Minimum requirement	Y	R
Fences and gates	Integrity inspection	Minimum requirement	Y	T
Vegetation	Lubrication of locks	Minimum requirement	SA	T
	Vegetation clearing	According to local conditions	(Q)	T
PV support structure	Integrity inspection	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Check tightening	Minimum requirement	Y	R
	Check potential equalization	Minimum requirement	2yr	T
Spare parts	Check for completeness	Minimum requirement	Y	T
	Complete spare parts	According to manufacturer's recommendations	(Y)	T
		* Best practice: monthly		





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