



LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: ENERGY FOR HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: 18 SEPTEMBER 2016

The high-level event on “Leaving no one behind: Energy for humanitarian response and sustainable development” took place on Sunday, 18 September 2016 at UN Headquarters in New York, US. Hosted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the event convened on the eve of the UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants, and on the margins of the 71st UN General Assembly.

The event explored how sustainable energy, the subject of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7, can improve conditions for people affected by humanitarian crises while building long-term resilience. Participants discussed how lack of energy affects the lives of displaced people, preventing children from studying, women from safely going outside after dark, and families from cooking without polluting their living spaces. Meanwhile, humanitarian agencies spend their scarce resources inefficiently by relying on diesel generators for electricity in camps.

The aim of the event was to spotlight these connections ahead of the Summit on Refugees and Migrants, which convened on 19 September.

The Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, the IKEA Foundation, the Moving Energy Initiative, Schneider Electric, and UN-Energy were partners in the high-level event.

OPENING

Ahmad Alhendawi, UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, moderated the event. Speaking of the 125 million people currently affected by the humanitarian crisis, he said not only are they displaced, but 90% of them are also “living in the dark.” He argued that all elements of the humanitarian response to the crisis would be enabled by providing reliable energy to humanitarian workers and those affected by the crisis, citing examples in education, health, gender-based violence, and environmental protection.

Kelly Clements, Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, speaking on behalf of the organizers, said “clean energy changes lives” by powering homes, hospitals, schools and businesses, and providing access to telephones, internet, and other services. She noted that almost three billion people burn solid fuels (charcoal, wood or dung) to cook food, with health impacts that disproportionately affect women and children. She underscored that investing in clean energy infrastructure can benefit not just refugees, but also host countries. Highlighting the importance of partnerships, she said UNHCR seeks to adopt innovative technologies and financing mechanisms to increase the use of renewable energy, in both emergency and protracted situations.



Kelly Clements, Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Mogens Lykketoft, President of the 70th UNGA and Co-Chair of the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, said the current crisis of refugees and migrants is the worst humanitarian situation since World War II, and that people living as refugees, internally displaced (IDPs) and forced migrants are “left far behind.” He said clean, safe and renewable energy can transcend the humanitarian-development divide by enabling sustainable solutions. Lykketoft also expressed hope that the New York Declaration to be adopted at the next day’s Summit would reflect “a real commitment” from the international community.

SPECIAL REMARKS

Moustapha Naite, Guinea’s Minister of Youth and Youth Employment, stressed lack of energy access as the root cause of many challenges in Guinea, including youth emigration due to lack of opportunities. He noted that as of 2010, only 31% of the population in Conakry and only 0.5% of the population in rural areas, had access to energy. Naite highlighted an “incubator” initiative to provide private sector support to develop ideas for helping young entrepreneurs invest in renewable energy.



Moustapha Naite, Guinea’s Minister of Youth and Youth Employment

Per Hegggenes, IKEA Foundation Chief Executive Officer (CEO), described energy access as a “basic right for human beings.” He said that six years ago, energy was not part of UNHCR’s mandate, and it was necessary to build capacity and expertise. Such changes in the humanitarian sector require sustained financial commitment, he said, noting that his Foundation has invested over US\$30 million in its work with UNHCR, including to build the agency’s capacity in renewable energy.

Hegggenes outlined efforts to enable “the kind of energy use we take for granted,” highlighting a 6MW solar farm that will soon open in Azraq, Jordan, through cooperation between the





Per Hegggenes, IKEA CEO

IKEA Foundation, UNHCR and the Government of Jordan. He added that the solar farm will continue to benefit Jordan even after Syrian refugees return home.

ACTION AND COMMITMENTS

Minoru Takada, DESA, moderated a session on commitments and actions for energy access in humanitarian situations. Takada observed that

the World Humanitarian Summit, which took place in May 2016, did not include any reference to energy in its outcome documents, and underscored the need for the UN system to more seriously consider energy-humanitarian linkages.

Ben Good, CEO of Energy 4 Impact, on behalf of the Moving Energy Initiative, suggested that in order for SDG 7 to be fulfilled for displaced persons, humanitarian institutions must have a focus and core competency on energy. He also stressed the need for long-term finance to scale up successful pilot projects: in financing for energy, he said, “everything is a bit too short term.”

Radha Muthiah, CEO of the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, explained that burning cleaner fuels supports several objectives at once: improved child and maternal health; reduction in greenhouse gas emissions; safety for women who would be collecting materials for fuel; and alleviating the “time poverty” for people who spend three to eight hours per day cooking and collecting fuel. She reported that the Alliance has worked with ISO to create standards for cookstoves, in order to support investors’ interests. She also called on the UN system to include energy issues at key levels, noting that it is currently not a “cluster” within the UN’s humanitarian response system.



Radha Muthiah, CEO of the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves

Emmanuel Lagarrigue, Schneider Electric, expressed his company’s view that “access to electricity and energy is a basic right.” He said Schneider’s Access to Energy Programme began as a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative 14 years ago, and now provides training and job creation, reflecting a deeper commitment than only supporting lighting for education and safety, refrigeration to keep vaccines stable, and electricity for sanitation facilities. Takada commented that while the original project was part of Schneider Electric’s CSR but not its business, the portfolio has evolved to include business ventures, allowing those initiatives to grow further.

Paul Corrigan, Mainstream Renewable Power, focused on the high prices for energy paid by the world’s poorest people. He shared a case from South Africa where prices for solar and wind power are dropping thanks to a competitive bidding process led by the government and Mainstream’s low-priced bids. The resulting scale and pace of wind and solar deployment has enabled the powering of almost 100 million homes. Mainstream hopes to expand the approach in Ghana, Senegal and Egypt, Corrigan said.

OPEN FLOOR AND DISCUSSION

Several participants offered reflections on the speakers’ presentations. One encouraged UNHCR to go even further in strengthening its emphasis on energy and to bring lessons learned in the renewable energy industry into the humanitarian sector. Another participant said it is “heartening” that energy has been included in the SDGs, recalling the unsuccessful efforts to incorporate it in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). He said prices do not come down by themselves, but as a result of governments offering feed-in tariffs and taking other steps to build the market.

CLOSING

Alhendawi said the discussion had captured different views on the scale of the problem, the nexus between the humanitarian crisis and renewable energy, and potential solutions, including both “low-hanging fruit” and more long-term responses. The event would help to ensure that the issue is not overshadowed by more political discussions at the UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants, convening on 19 September, he said.

Clements summarized the discussion with several points, including:

- The problem is clear, as are the reasons for tackling it, such as for the refrigeration of vaccines and minimization of violence towards women and girls;
- In addition to the 10 million refugees in camps and IDPs, solutions must also be oriented towards host communities and displaced people in urban settings;
- Solutions require institutional change. UNHCR is still developing its capacity in the energy area, and must make sure it is sustainable. In January 2016, UNHCR finally identified where energy fits in the agency;
- Data and statistics are important for driving change; countries need information to convince partners of the need for change; and
- Youth, girls and other affected people must be involved directly in developing solutions.

Clements closed the meeting, commenting that from the humanitarian point of view, “we feel embraced and not alone” in trying to solve difficult problems.



Participants during the event