

Summary of the High-Level Dialogue on the Implementation of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014-2019: A Mid-Point Review: 23-24 May 2019

The High-Level Dialogue on the Implementation of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014-2019 convened to discuss the implementation of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014-2024, including its global plan of action.

In 2012, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted resolution 67/215, by which it declared the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014-2024, underscoring the importance of energy issues for sustainable development. As 2019 marks the mid-point of the Decade, the Dialogue provided an opportunity for energy policymakers and other relevant stakeholders to not only discuss the implementation of the Decade, but also to assess progress and identify challenges and solutions. Participants also addressed the linkages between Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 (on energy), the other SDGs, and the Paris Agreement on climate change, in advance of the UN Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit to be held in New York on 23 September 2019.

Two reports were launched during the Dialogue: 'Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report' and 'the SDG7 Policy Briefs 2019.' Launching the Tracking SDG7 report, Rohit Khanna, World Bank, said at the current electrification rate, universal access by 2030 is "actually conceivable" but that due to uneven progress between countries and regions, efforts need to be ramped up to actually reach the 100% energy access target. Hans Olav Ibrekk, Norway, launching the SDG7 Policy Briefs, highlighted the need for a considerable increase in financing levels for energy transition and that such financing should be directed where they are needed the most, such as to LDCs and SIDS, which are the groups of countries most left behind.

The High-Level Dialogue took place from 23-24 May 2019 in New York, US. The event was organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) in collaboration with the Office of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) President, the co-facilitators of the Group of Friends of Sustainable Energy, and members of UN-Energy and the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on SDG 7.

On Thursday, 23 May, the High-Level Dialogue featured a series of technically-oriented expert roundtable sessions that focused on sharing key policy messages, demonstrating action and discussing future directions towards the implementation of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, including its global plan of action. On Friday, 24 May, a high-level plenary session

was held to review progress towards the goals of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, and its global plan of action.

This report provides a snapshot of the roundtable sessions that took place on 23 May and a summary of all discussions on 24 May.

Report of the Dialogue

On Thursday, 23 May, Minoru Takada, Sustainable Energy Team Leader, UN DESA, opened the High-Level Dialogue on the Implementation of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014-2019: A Mid-Point Review. He observed that the celebration of the Decade's mid-point comes at a timely moment as: the UN Secretary-General is organizing the Climate Action Summit, which will have energy as one of the tracks; and Heads of States will review all the SDGs, including SDG 7 (energy), during the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF) under UNGA auspices in September (the SDG Summit). He announced that two publications will be launched during the event's high-level segment on 24 May: 'SDG 7 Policy Briefs 2019' and 'SDG 7 Tracking Report 2019.'

Roundtable sessions

UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014-2024: Advancing SDG 7 to Achieve the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

Minoru Takada moderated the session. Sheila Oparaocha, Co-facilitator, SDG 7 Technical Advisory Group (SDG 7-TAG), and Executive Director, ENERGIA, observed that progress on SDG 7 has been "largely uneven" and advocated for, *inter alia*:

- making clean cooking a political priority;
- scaling up investments in decentralized energy solutions;
- encouraging women participation in the energy sector;

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- mobilizing funds for women entrepreneurship; and
- ensuring gender mainstreaming in policy and budgeting through disaggregated data.

Hans Olav Ibrekk, Co-facilitator, SDG 7-TAG, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway, noted that the Arctic has had 100 consecutive months of the highest temperature in history, and quoted a small-islands developing states (SIDS) leader who cautioned that “when the Arctic melts, we drown.” Observing that *The Guardian* (newspaper) is no longer labeling it “climate change” but “climate crisis,” he said emissions are going up instead of going down, including in China and other parts of Asia, while investments in renewable energy are remaining at the same level. Mentioning the Climate Action Summit, he stressed that it is now up to decision-makers to deliver, adding that “ambition is the only answer acceptable for this challenge.”

Rohit Khanna, World Bank, said the Bank will invest USD 130 billion to support energy transition and will mobilize an additional USD 70 billion from the private sector. He noted the World Bank’s commitment to ensuring that going forward, 75% of its programmes will have climate co-benefits. Observing that clean cooking is “the failing indicator of SDG 7,” he lamented the wastage of USD 300 billion per year on fossil fuel subsidies, when it would cost only USD 4.4 billion to ensure that everyone has access to clean cooking. He recommended that if fossil fuel subsidies are not phased out, they should at least be made smarter, explaining that most of the current fossil fuel subsidies are very retrograde.

Biruk Mekonnen Demissie, Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the UN, explained that climate change threatens African countries’ development gains and limits their ability to implement the 2030 Agenda. Noting that 1 billion people do not have access to clean energy, with 9 out of 10 of this number living in Sub-Saharan Africa, he observed that a potential output of the Climate

Action Summit could be enhanced support for least developed countries (LDCs).

Rikke Skou Melsen, Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN, said the money needed for energy transition is available but is in the wrong places, and stressed the need to move the capital, noting that “time is of the essence.” She identified four key areas the Danish Government is focusing on when it comes to energy transition: mobilizing investments for energy transition; market-driven public-private partnerships; addressing the high-emitting sectors; and investments in LDCs.

Muhammad Imran Khan, Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN, discussed the linkages between SDG 7 and SDGs 1 (on poverty), 2 (on hunger), 3 (on health), 4 (on education), 5 (on gender equality), 6 (on water), 8 (on economic growth), 9 (on innovation), 11 (on cities), and 13 (on climate change). He stressed that 2019 is a crucial year for ramped up climate action to get on track and limit global warming to 1.5° degrees.

2019 SDG 7 Policy Briefs with a focus on the interlinkages between SDG 7 and SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13 and 16: Sheila Oparaocha moderated the session. She explained that the Policy Briefs to be launched on 24 May are linked to the SDGs to be reviewed by the HLPF 2019 under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2019 (2019 HLPF).

Noting that 40% of the world population relies on solid fuels, Kanwal Shauzab, Parliamentary Secretary for Planning, Development and Reform, Pakistan, underscored the need for market reforms to achieve SDG 7.

Mentioning that globally, only 69% of primary schools have energy access, Amy Wickham, UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), stressed the need to ensure sustainable energy access for schools. She explained that information and communication technologies



High-level representatives of the UN system, governments, and other relevant stakeholders celebrate the mid-point of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All (photo courtesy of UN DESA)

are available only through electricity and are essential to building the skills for the current and future job market.

Ahmed Abdel-Latif, International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), said the global energy transition would boost global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2.5% and create 7 million additional jobs by 2050, compared to the scenario in which energy transition does not take place. Mentioning the work of the Global Commission on the Geopolitics of Energy Transformation, he said sustainable energy would transform the relation between countries concerning peace and security, as energy transformation would bring greater energy security and enhance cooperation among countries.

Kristina Skierka, CEO, Power for All, noted that women are “heavily underrepresented” in the energy sector, and stressed that the decentralized energy sector provides a huge opportunity to increase women’s participation. She mentioned the need for a new generation of people who see potential and a career path in the clean energy sector.

Sofia Martínez-Martínez, European Commission, underlined that the world is clearly not on track to achieve SDG 7, and therefore not on track to achieve any of the SDGs. She said “aid for trade” could be a powerful tool for advancing progress on SDG 7 and SDG 13 (on climate), adding that action at the local level, in cities and communities, is essential.

Laura E. Williamson, REN21, noted that the transformation in the power and transportation sectors, which together are responsible for 80% of CO₂ emissions, is lacking. She stressed that policies alone are not enough, and that in order to make change happen, energy transition needs to be addressed from a development, climate, and systemic perspective.

Thomas Ritzer, UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN DPPA)/UN Climate Security Mechanism, said climate change is a human and environmental security risk, as climate change is a risk multiplier for conflict, especially for countries with limited capacity to manage the fundamental changes climate change brings. He explained that the UN Climate Security Mechanism is an inter-agency initiative funded by Sweden, which aims to enhance the UN’s capacity to activate the needed institutional nexus to address climate change.

David Koranyi, UN DESA, mentioned that 5% of the humanitarian agencies’ budgets, amounting to USD 1.2 billion, is spent on diesel, and said work is currently underway to enable the transition to sustainable energy.

Regional Dimensions: Hongpeng Liu, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), moderated this session. Stating that “we are cooking our planet,” Scott Foster, UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), underscored that the world no longer has the luxury of choice but needs to ensure that all technologies support carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission reductions. He mentioned that: buildings are responsible for 40% of CO₂ emissions; this needs to be reduced to 0%; and the technology to do so is available. He called for ending energy tariffs as they are subsidies for consumption.

Radia Sedaoui, UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA), invited participants to reflect on the

social aspects of energy and on the multifaceted aspects of energy vulnerability, including conflict and inequality related both to gender and human rights.

Means of Implementation: Financing SDG 7: Marcel Alers, UN Development Programme (UNDP), moderated this session. Yeren-Ulzii Batmunkh, Ministry of Energy, Mongolia, presented the technical challenges Mongolia needs solutions for in order to increase the share of renewable energy in the country’s energy mix to 20% by 2020 and 30% by 2030.

Jagjeet Sareen, International Solar Alliance (ISA), said the Alliance focuses on SDG 7 and SDG 13, noting there is a tension between them, as the Goal to provide access to energy for all (SDG 7) could negatively impact the efforts to address climate change (SDG 13). He said the Alliance is training people in developing countries who then become certified trainers and professionals in the solar energy sector, bringing the expertise back to their countries.

Answering the Clean Cooking Challenge: Anobha Gurung, World Health Organization (WHO), said the public needs to be educated on the health risks associated with unclean cooking so that they can put pressure on their governments to make the needed regulatory changes.

Doris Edem Agbevivi, Energy Commission, Ghana, spoke about the importance of both educating people on energy transition and providing them with the actual alternatives to make the transition. She highlighted the need to put in place standards to promote the commercialization of clean cook stoves, mentioning the challenge unregulated markets pose to energy transition. She also underscored the need to address the cultural aspects of energy transition.

Donee Alexander, Clean Cooking Alliance, called for coordinating actions from heads of states to community workers, to reach the 3 billion people that need to be reached to ensure access to clean cooking for all. She lamented that in 2018, only USD 30 million was invested in clean cooking when the need is for USD 4.4 billion by 2030.

Rita Poppe, HIVOS, underscored the need for political leadership, focusing on the opportunities that electric cooking offers, and called for women to be included in the efforts to promote electric cooking. She stressed the need for increased investment in research and development, as well as in labor market development.

Measuring SDG 7 Progress: The Multi-Tier Framework for Energy Access: Elisa Portale, World Bank, presented the Global Energy Access Survey (multi-tier framework). She said the multi-tier framework is covering the 11 countries with the highest energy deficit, trying to respond to two major policy questions: how to expand access to electricity; and how to improve the quality of energy supply.

Digitalization and the Future of Energy Systems: Vijay Modi, the Earth Institute, Columbia University, said one of the main challenges with digitalization is “the colonization of software”: the technologies’ software is provided by corporations who set high costs for upkeep, making digitalization



Energy policymakers and other relevant stakeholders discuss the Decade's implementation and progress on SDG 7 (photo courtesy of UN DESA)

very expensive for developing countries. To address that, he underscored the need for localization of innovation.

Implementing the Global Action Plan for the UN Decade: Multi-stakeholder Actions and Partnerships on SDG 7 in support of the Climate Action Summit and the SDG Summit: Karim Elbana, Representative of the UN Major Group for Children and Youth, invited focus not only on helping people satisfy their basic needs with electricity, but on real empowerment. He gave the example of generators for schools in developing countries that cost only USD 40 but can have a major impact on children's education and thus their future.

Isabel Raya, UN DESA, presented the Sustainable Water and Energy Solutions Network, which aims to: share best practices and quality data; strengthen capacity building; mobilize and scale-up stakeholder action; and enhance advocacy, communications and outreach on the link between sustainable energy and water.

High-level Plenary Session on review of the progress towards the goals of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All

Welcoming Keynotes: Opening the session on 24 May, Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, said the SDG 7 Policy Briefs will inform the 2019 HLPF and the SDG Summit.

Luis Alfonso de Alba, Special Envoy for the 2019 Climate Summit, underlined that the world is not on track to achieve SDG 13 (on climate change). He said energy transition is essential for achieving SDG 7, and mentioned that energy will be one of the focus areas of the Climate Action Summit, the work on that focus area being chaired by Ethiopia and Denmark. He noted that concrete proposals for the Summit are currently being prepared, with the Secretary-General supporting ambitious initiatives such as stopping the investment in coal.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, ESCAP, via video message, said ESCAP is supporting member countries in designing roadmaps to implementing SDG 7 at the national level.

Achim Steiner, Administrator, UNDP and Co-chair of UN-Energy, speaking about the SDG 7 Tracking Report 2019, said the "tyranny of averages" masks both the great success stories, which do exist, and the gaps that remain. He expressed hope that the Climate Action Summit, with its energy track, will send a strong

signal to the 2020 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 26).

Rachel Kyte, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All, Co-chair of UN-Energy, and CEO of SEforAll, stressed that there is currently a global climate emergency making the implementation of SDG 7 "even more elemental." As UN-Energy Co-chairs, she said she and Steiner are concerned about the pace of progress. She identified five important takeaways from the SDG 7 Tracking Report 2019:

- incremental progress in implementation;
- progress on efficiency but not at the pace we need;
- the slowing pace of progress in renewable energy;
- the "stubborn and shameful" number of people who still do not have access to clean cooking; and
- the African continent, which might be left behind when it comes to the SDGs.

Session 1: Ministerial Remarks: Davaasuren Tserenpi, Minister of Energy, Mongolia, called for increased cooperation and removing the non-physical barriers to energy transition, including those that are trade-related.

Barshaman Pun 'Ananta', Minister of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Nepal, said Nepal aims to provide energy access to its population through a mix of grid and non-grid electricity. He noted that flagship programmes are currently being developed to replace fossil fuels with clean sources of energy, including solar and hydro-energy.

Kanwal Shauzab, Parliamentary Secretary for Planning, Development and Reform, Pakistan, noted that Pakistan has reduced its CO₂ emissions by improving the share of renewable energy in its energy mix, which is currently 11%, announcing plans to increase it to 65% by 2030. She observed that the private sector in Pakistan is aligning its operation with the SDGs, including SDG 7.

Session 2: Measuring Progress Towards the Objectives of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014-2024: Officially launching the Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report, Rohit Khanna, World Bank, said the electrification trend started to accelerate after 2015 and, at the current rate, it is "actually conceivable" to reach universal access by 2030. However, he noted, because progress is uneven between countries and regions and the last 10% of those to be reached are always the hardest to reach, unless efforts are ramped up, we will not

reach the 100% energy access target. The formula for energy access is clear, he said: strong political commitment from governments; adequate fiscal incentives; stepped up private sector investment; and long-term energy planning.

Werner H. Obermeyer, WHO UN Office, highlighted the urgency of ensuring access to clean cooking for all. He explained that 3 billion people continue to cook by burning biomass, such as wood and charcoal, with the resulting indoor air pollution leading to approximately 4 million premature deaths yearly.

Leonardo Rocha Souza, UN DESA, said many countries still need investments in their national statistics systems to be able to provide the data needed to track progress on SDG 7.

Ahmed Abdel-Latif, IRENA, said renewables increased the fastest in the electricity sector, with efforts needing to accelerate in transport and heat end-uses, which represent 80% of the total final energy consumption.

Dave Turk, the International Energy Agency and Chair of SDG 7 Tracking Report 2019, said progress on improving global energy intensity has accelerated but it is still short of SDG 7 target on energy efficiency. He noted that progress is variable across sectors, with industry benefiting from policy-driven action in China and India, and freight transport lacking due to limited policy.

Session 3: Policy Challenges and Opportunities to Reach the Goals of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014-2024: Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General, UN Office of the High Representative for the LDCs, Landlocked Developing Countries, and SIDS (OHRLLS), underlined that it is alarming that the 20 least electrified countries are LDCs. She expressed hope that the High-level Review of Progress on the SAMOA Pathway, to take place on 27 September 2019 in New York, will create opportunities for the partnerships needed to foster energy transition in SIDS.

Ibrekk, launching the SDG7 Policy Briefs, mentioned that the current financing levels for energy transition are lower than what is required, and need to be increased significantly and also directed where they are needed the most, such as to LDCs and SIDS, which are the groups of countries most left behind.

Oparaocha presented the interlinkages between SDG 7 and the SDGs reviewed by the 2019 HLPF under ECOSOC, which the SDG 7 Policy Briefs focus on:

- over 230 million children go to primary schools without electricity, compromising education and development outcomes (SDG 4);
- energy efficiency and renewable energy investments continue to act as robust socio-economic drivers, including through net employment gains (SDG 8);
- ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all is a key condition for reducing inequalities (SDG 10);
- the decarbonization of the world's energy systems and attainment of the SDG 7 targets, including ensuring universal access to modern energy, are mutually reinforcing and thus must be advanced at the same time (SDG 13); and
- the potential benefits from the global energy transition will contribute to greater peace and security by fostering more inclusive, climate-resilient, and sustainable societies.

Upendra Tripathy, Director General ISA, said the cost of solar needs to go down further in order to activate the solar market.

Noting that Citigroup is moving USD 5 trillion daily while achieving the SDGs by 2030 necessitates USD 1.4 trillion yearly, Michael Eckhart, Citigroup, said the global capital market is so much larger than what is needed for SDG implementation, and that achieving the SDGs is therefore possible. The major problem is that capital is flowing but not to where it is needed, he said: 93% of global capital is flowing in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, and only 7% in developing countries. He suggested that the World Bank create a global initiative to strengthen the bankability of public-owned utilities in order to make developing countries more attractive for investment.

Session 4: Interactive dialogue - Accelerating the Implementation of the Global Plan of Action of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014-2024 - Actions and Commitments related to SDG 7 in support of the Climate Action Summit and the SDG Summit: Martin Bille Hermann, Permanent Representative of Denmark, said it is not likely that emissions will peak in 2020 as they should. He stressed that “we are not moving in the right direction,” noting that although the world needs to achieve zero net CO₂ emissions by 2050, fossil fuel production is currently increasing. Observing that “we have the money we need in the capital markets and the needed technologies, which will only become better, but we do not have time,” he stressed the urgency to move that capital and technologies in the right places, “rapidly and at scale.”

In the ensuing discussion, Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland, underscored the need for data to achieve SDG 7 and the 2030 Agenda's promise to leave no one behind.

Lois Michele Young, Permanent Representative of Belize, on behalf of the Alliance of Small-island States (AOSIS), urged international support for the specific needs of SIDS.

Rodrigo Alberto Carazo Zeledón, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the UN, underlined the contribution of Costa Rica's reliance on renewable energy to the protection of biodiversity and natural resources, and presented Costa Rica's plans to achieve the full decarbonization of its economy and 100% reliance on renewable energy.

Toshiya Hoshino, Permanent Mission of Japan to the UN, mentioned that the G20 Summit and the Tokyo Conference on Africa's Development to be hosted by Japan in 2019, are opportunities to increase momentum for energy transition and curbing climate change.

During the two-day discussions, participants also raised issues related to the need to, *inter alia*: reach out to the people and educate them about climate change because, on the ground, people have a hard time identifying climate change let alone consider that there is a climate crisis; convince decision-makers that this is a crisis; engage high-emitting sectors; and find incentives for politicians to focus on clean cooking.

Closing Remarks: Closing the meeting, Elliott Harris, Assistant-Secretary-General, UN DESA, assured participants that the outcomes of the discussions will inform the 2019 HLPF, the Climate Action Summit, and the SDG Summit to take place in September 2019, with the main messages coming out of the event to be also shared with UNGA and other relevant stakeholders. He closed the meeting at 1:25 pm.