

“Sharing Experiences: SDG7 in National Voluntary Reviews”

Monday, 18 July 2016, 13.15-14.45
Conference Room C, United Nations Headquarters

Summary

Effective national voluntary reviews are central and important tools in the efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 7 on energy, -with its three targets on energy access, efficiency and renewable energy, at country level, speakers agreed today at an informal meeting held in the margins of the ministerial segment of the 2016 high level political forum.

Co-hosted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), in cooperation with UN-Energy, the discussion brought together high-level government –and UN officials for a focused discussion on how countries are approaching implementation – and progress – of the energy goal at national level.

In his welcoming remarks, the moderator, Mr. Minoru Takada, DESA, said that with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in the early stages of implementation, this year’s national voluntary review process will primarily focus on how countries are preparing for and managing their transition towards achieving the set goals and targets. He underscored that the reviews form a core part of the high-level political forum and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and that the Forum therefore can provide a unique opportunity for countries to exchange experiences and share lessons regarding the initial steps towards implementation.

Mr. Li Yong, Director General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), highlighted in his opening remarks that goal 7 is one of the most important goals of all the SDGs, as it has an impact on most other goals including SDG9, which deals with sustainable industrialisation. “But we need to re-think how we produce and use energy to be successful in this regard.” Since the industrial revolution, he said, energy had been key to development, and had therefore always been central to the work and mission of UNIDO, including through an impressive portfolio of innovative projects. Consequently, Mr. Li concluded, UNIDO pledged its full support to all Member States in their efforts to scale up and achieve all energy goals and targets.

Delivering the key note presentation, Ms. Rachel Kyte, Chief Executive Officer of Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All, told participants that the high level political forum is a perfect time – and national reviews perfect instruments – to pivot from discussions at the global level to actual talks on how to implement in countries. “It’s about taking the agenda, discuss what works or not and start actually building,” she said, and added that inclusive and transparent integration of SDG7 at all levels, with all stakeholders, including marginalized groups, and in all sectors –planning, budgeting and execution – would be central to avoid duplication and drive progress of this “front-loaded” goal, and all other related SDGs. She noted that international support would be needed to build capacities within national institutions to enable effective national reviews.

Opening a panel focusing on lessons from national voluntary reviews in regards to SDG7, H.E. Mr. Thoriq Ibrahim, Minister of Environment and Energy of the Maldives, said that his government remains fully committed to transition from fossil fuels to sustainable energy, and had already set a series of ambitious goals to do so. “The energy landscape is already changing in the Maldives”, he said, and outlined a series of far-reaching initiatives undertaken by his government, including on emissions, import duties, building codes, and subsidies. The Minister noted that his country would continue to explore all avenues and partner with all committed stakeholders to reach

SDG7, but added that more will need to be done to reach the goals, including within the areas of financing and transfer of technology.

Dr. Mohamed El Sobki, Chairman of the New and Renewable Energy Authority of Egypt gave a detailed presentation of the current status on the three targets of SDG7 in his country. “We have achieved 99% access to energy”, he announced, but noted that the main challenge facing Egypt is to change the energy mix – citing a strategy to target a 20% increase in renewable energy – while making energy use more efficient. In this regard, he outlined a series of ambitious proposals and projects on renewable energy currently underway or in consideration in Egypt.

Dr. Patrick Birungi, Director of Development Planning at the National Planning Authority of Uganda focused his intervention on how his government is currently working on the implementation aspects of the SDGs, including SDG7. “We analysed the SDGs, we looked at the gaps, where we need more data, and then we moved towards relevant integration of the goals into our national planning to ensure that all levels of governments are working in sync with overall targets,” he said. On energy, he noted Uganda had set national targets through its “Uganda Vision 2040”, including on increasing capacity, especially from renewable sources, increase access to clean cooking, as well on improving energy efficiency. While progress is underway, challenges remain, however. These included avoiding silo approaches within governmental sectors, improve coordination to ensure delivery, develop better data, as well as securing additional funding and resources, including through private sector partnerships.

Mr. Inge Herman Rydland, Special Representative for the 2030 Agenda in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway underscored how important the energy is to most aspects of life, including development -and environmental issues. “If energy is not in place,” he said, “it will be tough to achieve most other Sustainable Development Goals.” In this regard, Mr. Rydland thought the adoption of SDG7 had been a breakthrough as it brought political consensus around a common set of goals and targets. In a Norwegian context, the national voluntary review had already proven a very useful exercise, he noted, as it had helped outline responsibilities, roles and future plans. On a more general note, he said that achieving SDG7 would take transparent and predictable investment frameworks, instruments for risk management, solid leadership, and accountable institutions. While public funding will not suffice in providing all the resources needed, aid and development assistance could serve as catalytic instruments, although Mr. Rydland cautioned, all approaches should be individual targeted as there are no one-size fits all solutions for countries.

Ending the panel, Ms. Stefanie Schmid-Luebbert, Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations in New York, gave a comprehensive overview of German efforts to achieve the energy goal. She explained that her government was already in the midst of an ambitious comprehensive and long-term energy transition. “The so-called energy wende provides a framework for sustainable energy policies with long term goals,” she said. The reasons for making this transition were to reduce carbon emissions and reach climate protection targets, to prove that energy policies can be both sustainable and economically successful, to develop new technologies as new sources of growth and employment, to reduce dependency on energy imports and to phase-out nuclear power generation. She did cite a number of challenges, however, including lack of investment in infrastructure, integration of sectors and electricity market design, but noted that her government remained confident that all goals would be met. Finally, Ms. Schmid-Luebbert outlined her governments’ support for other countries, including through numerous multilateral and bilateral energy partnerships.

Two discussants rounded off the afternoon; Mr. Ivan Vera, secretary of UN-Energy and with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, said reiterated that energy was not only important in its own right, but that achieving SDG7 would carry positive implications for a host of other goals. On reviews, he noted that the idea is not for a government to simply focus on outlining its plans for implementation, but to also establish a robust process that ensures that institutional arrangements are in place and in sync across all sectors of the government, that the public is aware of the SDGs, and

that all relevant stakeholders feel empowered and part of the overall national process towards reaching the SDGs. “Reviews can serve as effective and powerful tools to mainstream the SDGs into national plans,” he highlighted, while of course noting the need to them to differing national contexts. Ms. Susan Alzner, Head of the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS) in New York, underscored that greater inclusion of civil society will remain important in moving forward. “Collaboration always leads to better outcomes,” she said.