HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

POLICY BRIEF #17

ENERGY IN SITUATIONS OF DISPLACEMENT

Developed by:

UNHCR, IOM, UNITAR, UN Environment, Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves and Chatham House

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This document is a part of a series of Policy Briefs being developed to support SDG7 review at the UN High-Level Political Forum to be held in July 2018. The objective is to inform intergovernmental discussions by providing substantive inputs on SDG7 and its interlinkages with other SDGs prepared through inclusive multi-stakeholder consultation processes. The development of these Policy Briefs is coordinated under the auspices of the Ad Hoc Informal Multi-stakeholder Technical Group of Advisors on SDG7.

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KEY MESSAGES

Issues and status of energy access among displaced people and progress towards SDG 7

- In 2018, the UN estimates that over 135 million people around the world will need humanitarian assistance. For many of these people, access to energy will be critical for survival, and how they access it will impact their health, safety, and capacity for self-reliance. Of the displaced people who are living in camp settings, some 90% are without electricity access and 80% rely on wood-based fuels for cooking.
- During humanitarian crises, access to safe, reliable, and clean energy solutions for crisis-affected people can be difficult to achieve. With a shortage of funding for energy programming, as well as limited policies and practice on energy provision within the humanitarian sector, current energy practices are often inefficient, polluting, unsafe for the users, and harmful to the surrounding environment.
- Displaced people exist in a grey area, unlikely to be part of government plans to scale up energy access. Often, they live in isolated areas or informal settlements alongside others who are also marginalized. As non-nationals, refugees are not usually part of country development plans. If displaced people return to their home areas, they often remain in fragile post-conflict/disaster situations with limited energy services.
- At present, humanitarian operations – including vital logistics and power for clinics, schools and offices – are highly dependent on diesel. This entails high annual fuel costs with additional costs of transportation to remote locations. Opportunities for cost savings are available through energy efficiency and renewable energy, which be deployed to extend clean energy access to vulnerable people.

Priority actions over the next four years

- In January 2018, key UN agencies, humanitarian NGOs, civil society groups, and representatives from the private sector came together in Berlin and took the first steps towards **A Global Plan of Action for Sustainable Energy Solutions in Situations of Displacement** with the aim that "every person affected by conflict or natural disaster has access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy services by 2030."
- To achieve this vision, the participants highlighted key challenges and identified preliminary steps to improve energy access for displaced people in the following five working areas:
    1. Coordination and Planning
    2. Policy and Advocacy
    3. Innovative Finance
    4. Technical Expertise and Capacity Building
    5. Data, Evidence, Monitoring and Evaluation
- An organizing team consisting of UNHCR, UNITAR, IOM, and other key agencies are guiding the development of a multi-stakeholder Global Plan of Action for Sustainable Energy Solutions in Situations of Displacement. A working level roadmap of the plan will be presented at HLPF 2018.

Priority actions towards 2030

- The primary vision is of the plan is: "Every person affected by conflict or natural disaster has access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy services by 2030."
- To support this goal, reduce carbon emissions, and free up scarce resources, a second vision for the plan is: "Energy efficiency is prioritized in the humanitarian system, and humanitarian organizations substantially increase their share of renewable energy."

DISPLACED PEOPLE AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Energy is often referred to as an 'enabler' – an essential ingredient in daily life. Without access to energy, we cannot cook, keep ourselves warm, see, work or study after dark, nor conduct most income-generating activities. This applies as much to displaced people as to anyone else. Currently, over 130 million people need humanitarian assistance. This includes refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees to areas rebuilding after conflict or disaster, and returnees settling other than in areas of origin. An average of 26.4 million people per year have been displaced from their homes by disasters since 2008 (IDMC, 2017), a trend likely to continue as climate change increases the likelihood and frequency of natural disasters.

While achieving SDG 7 relies on national policies, plans and programmes, and will be led by countries for their citizens, displaced people are unlikely to be part of these plans. Often, they live in isolated areas or informal settlements along-side communities who are sometimes left-behind in development planning and are less likely to be a priority. Refugees, for example, are non-nationals and if they are able to return to their homes, they often find themselves in fragile and/or post-conflict or disaster situations with impaired access to energy. To deliver on the SDG7 principle of 'leave no one behind', humanitarian agencies, NGOs and host governments must extend energy access to displaced people. At the same time, development agencies, donors, investors, and the private sector can partner with humanitarian organizations. Doing so will help achieve many other SDGs, as there are co-benefits of switching to clean and sustainable energy.

Status of Energy Access for Displaced People

In situations where large numbers of people are moving within or across borders to escape dangerous circumstances, access to any energy is a priority for basic survival. Cookstoves and fuel are needed to be able to eat. Heating is needed to keep warm. Light is needed to avoid danger, and power is needed to charge mobile phones that enable communications and contact with lost family members. Simply put, energy access impacts food security, nutrition, health, protection, shelter, telecommunications, and other key sectors highlighted in the humanitarian cluster system.

Despite this, the majority of displaced people do not have access to safe, reliable, and clean energy. Of the displaced people who are living in camp settings, around 90% are without electricity access and 80% rely on solid fuels such as firewood and charcoal for cooking. Current energy practices are often inefficient, polluting, unsafe for the users, and harmful to the surrounding environment. Moreover, institutional humanitarian operations rely heavily on fossil fuels (diesel) to enable efficient and rapid delivery of essential services to the communities in need and for powering premises in remote locations.

Energy access for displaced people is not yet recognized as a formal priority in the UN system. Consequently, funding shortages, inadequate policies, and a lack of effective training hampers the humanitarian community from providing clean and sustainable energy in situations of displacement. In recent years, however, the community of actors engaged in the nexus of energy and humanitarian aid has grown and cohered. The advent of SDG 7, combined with record levels of global displacement, presents an opportunity for this community to expand and improve energy programming in humanitarian settings. At this stage, high level commitment from UN agencies and long-term support from funders are needed to capitalize on this momentum and ensure that “modern and sustainable energy access for all” includes the millions of displaced and crisis affected people worldwide.

Institutional Energy for Humanitarian Operations

Electricity in humanitarian premises is primarily produced by inefficient diesel generators.
Among the reasons are:

- site planning in emergencies based on tried and tested models and known suppliers
- lack of measured, standardized data on camp-wide operations energy demand, emissions and consumption patterns
- lack of incentives for agencies in making long term savings from reducing/substituting fuel use
- lack of knowledge about potential interventions to reduce fuel demand and introduce sustainable clean energy practices
- lack of funding for upfront costs of sustainable energy solutions
- other priorities taking primary concern before energy needs

Data on energy production and consumption of humanitarian assistance diesel consumption is often unavailable, inaccurate and/or outdated. For instance, the electricity consumption of office buildings, hospitals or water pumping stations is usually unmeasured and therefore unknown. This data is necessary to plan adequately sized renewable energy power stations and conduct cost-benefit analyses in the transition to sustainable systems.

Key Challenges

Planning and Coordination

Coordination is vital in humanitarian aid. It results in fewer gaps and duplication in humanitarian aid. In the context of energy access in humanitarian settings, coordination is even more important for two reasons. First, no formal mechanisms exist among UN or other international agencies to coordinate energy-related humanitarian interventions. Second, the issue of safe access to fuel and energy (SAFE) cuts across numerous sectors – health, food security, nutrition, protection, education, water and sanitation, telecommunications, and more. Moreover, it involves a broad set of actors, including humanitarian agencies, government representatives, the private sector, development professionals, technical experts, researchers, donors, investors, and others.

At present, energy-related assistance in humanitarian settings is still largely disparate – funded and implemented by individual agencies without reference to each other, to common strategies and principles, or to lessons learned in previous interventions.

Policies and Advocacy

The policy and advocacy challenges can be divided into three levels, local/national level, agency/implementer and donor. At the local/national level, challenges include national priorities that may not include displaced populations, lack of a ministry or ministries dedicated to energy or displaced people, legal status of displaced populations especially refugees, right to work and access to services, policy/tax disincentives for private sector and political challenges. At the agency/implementer level, challenges exist around coordination of energy projects and funding, lack of capacity and expertise on energy products and services, procurement policies, lack of accountability and leadership for the sector, a lack of collaboration between humanitarian and development agencies ("the humanitarian development divide"), and lack of rules/guidelines for incorporating energy into humanitarian program cycle. At the donor level, challenges include programming based on donor priorities vs the needs of the affected population, limited experience in cash programming and/or market based approaches, lack of understanding how energy "fits" into the humanitarian sector, lack of donor coordination and multi- year financing, and policy coherence with climate finance agenda.

Sustainable Energy Financing for Humanitarian Assistance

Energy issues are not at the forefront of humanitarian aid funding efforts, as other needs such as nutrition and health are prioritised over sustainable energy. Currently, funding in situations of displacement comes traditionally through grants and 'energy' has to compete with other needs. Commercial finance of energy plays virtually no role in this sector. In addition, funding in general is often short term (max. 1-2 years), due to budget regulations from donors, internal procedures, and the fact that sometimes the duration of humanitarian operations are unpredictable. This short term thinking and unpredictability makes it difficult to provide safe and appropriate energy solutions in acute emergencies or cover higher upfront costs for renewable energy systems or plan power purchase agreements.

The Moving Energy Initiative estimates that there is currently a funding gap of $335 million USD to provide all refugees with basic levels of energy access for cooking and lighting. Moreover, in the context of camps for displaced people, electricity for the camp infrastructure is mainly provided through unsustainable diesel generator solutions, instead of applying renewable energy technologies. A transition towards more sustainable financing is required, since fuel alone costs camp operators an annual estimated 100 million USD.

Technical Expertise and Institutional Capacity

The design and implementation of energy solutions is technical, complex and depends on legal and governance frameworks. As crisis conditions are often fragile in nature and initial humanitarian response generally lacks capacity to serve continuous needs upon high volumes of arrival, energy is not the priority in emergency situations. However, emergency energy products such as solar lamps, mobile phone chargers, and fuel efficient stoves can help to improve the safety, food security, nutrition, and health of displaced people in crisis. This being said, a bulk of the challenges faced in sustainable energy adoption after initial emergency response could be mitigated through institutional capacity and awareness for the important role energy plays in quality response. Energy for displacement situations is still a niche area that affects many cross cutting themes but is not normally focused on as its own category. These challenges are important to be understood so technical expertise can be acquired, capacity can be built institutionally, and appropriate trainings can be administered to relevant beneficiaries.

Among other activities, experienced staff with a background on energy in humanitarian settings is needed to conduct solid assessments of energy needs and recommend context-appropriate solutions; provide training on the proper installation, use, maintenance, and benefits of energy products; develop energy strategies that incorporate considerations for the health, safety,

livelihoods, and well-being of crisis-affected people – especially women and children – and their surrounding environment; and identify opportunities to transform short term solutions into long term income-generating activities, such as locally producing improved cook stoves or firewood alternatives. These activities build the capacity of crisis-affected communities to cope with future disasters and encourage humanitarian actors to consider longer-term strategies.

Data, Evidence, Monitoring and Evaluation

In general, there is a lack of data and readily available information, and limited specific evidence on the issues or in-depth studies that compare cross-cutting issues or regional evidence. Few detailed studies exist on the impacts of existing energy programmes in displaced settings, including data from monitoring, learning and the knowledge emerging from those programmes. Few studies compare cross-cutting issues or regional evidence.
Practitioners, field staff or researchers do not often share data and/or receive inadequate training on existing evidence and tools. There is a lack of standardised or published information: where data is available, for example from pilots and start-up projects, it is not consistent or available openly. Each pilot often has its own set of indicators and reporting structures, making it difficult to compare evidence across programmes. Insufficient learning from existing programmes, as information is often not published or made available to other practitioners, results in duplicative projects with poor results.

How to fill the gap and achieve sustainable energy access for displaced people

Improved Planning and Coordination

Planning and coordination mechanisms must directly engage key decision-makers and programme staff at all levels. Crucially, displaced people and host communities must be included in the design and implementation of energy programs to ensure that their needs and priorities are reflected. Some informal coordination mechanisms, including the Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE) Humanitarian Working Group, currently exist at the global and national levels and may be incorporated into this process.

Policy Changes and Increased Advocacy

At an international multilateral level, this means explicitly recognizing the issue of sustainable energy for displaced people in global policy agendas. At agency level, it means incorporating energy considerations and best practice into core programming. And at national host country level, this means showing where sustainable energy solutions can contribute to national and local sustainable development objectives and facilitating the relevant aid and investment.

New Financing Mechanisms

In the short term, funding for energy programming needs to be incorporated into budgets for emergency humanitarian assistance. Given the cross-cutting nature of energy access, funding for energy activities could be incorporated into existing budgets for health, food security, protection, and other areas. In the long term, there is a need to bolster finance for sustainable infrastructure and renewable investments, as well as support humanitarian agencies to incorporate energy programming into their budgets, address energy needs in acute emergencies, and shift to more environmentally sustainable modes of delivery. To match the growing needs and achieve progress on a larger scale, new financing mechanisms such as CAPEX free business models, crowd investments, shift from grant funding to impact investment or corporate engagement, peer to peer transitions and block chain backed applications need to be explored.

Building Institutional Capacity for Better Energy Response

Trainings and technical expertise must be incorporated into sustainable energy solutions and targeted, audience appropriate capacity building techniques should be incorporated institutionally, from top level policy makers to end users. The skills and capacities of displaced people should be utilised, to ensure that they have an active role in future energy interventions, ensure they have appropriate technical knowledge to enable delivery, and create jobs and livelihood opportunities for both displaced people and host communities

Improved Data, Evidence, Monitoring and Evaluation

Coordinated effort around data for energy needs and interventions must be high-quality, accurate and relevant for users. Relevant data should be automatically collected utilizing already existing mechanisms when possible and integrated to humanitarian response and data should be digitally shared openly between stakeholders. Where possible, data should be harmonised and standardised to enable comparison and to facilitate effective monitoring and evaluation.

Interlinkages with other Sustainable Development Goals

Studies show that two-thirds of the SDGs depend on access to clean and affordable energy. Three important ones for displacement settings are:

Environment

Improving energy response for displaced people has a direct link to the environment. With access to renewable, reliable energy sources, harmful environmental practices such as deforestation from firewood collection and CO_2 emissions from diesel generators can be mitigated.

Economic

Having access to sustainable energy enables livelihood opportunities, for example, micro-businesses like barbers and tailors to operate machinery, or increased hours of light that can be used for income generating activities.

Gender

Energy poverty has a direct effect on women's and girls' quality of life in these settings as they are traditionally the family members spending time collecting firewood, which exposes them to sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and to unhealthy indoor smoke conditions when preparing meals.

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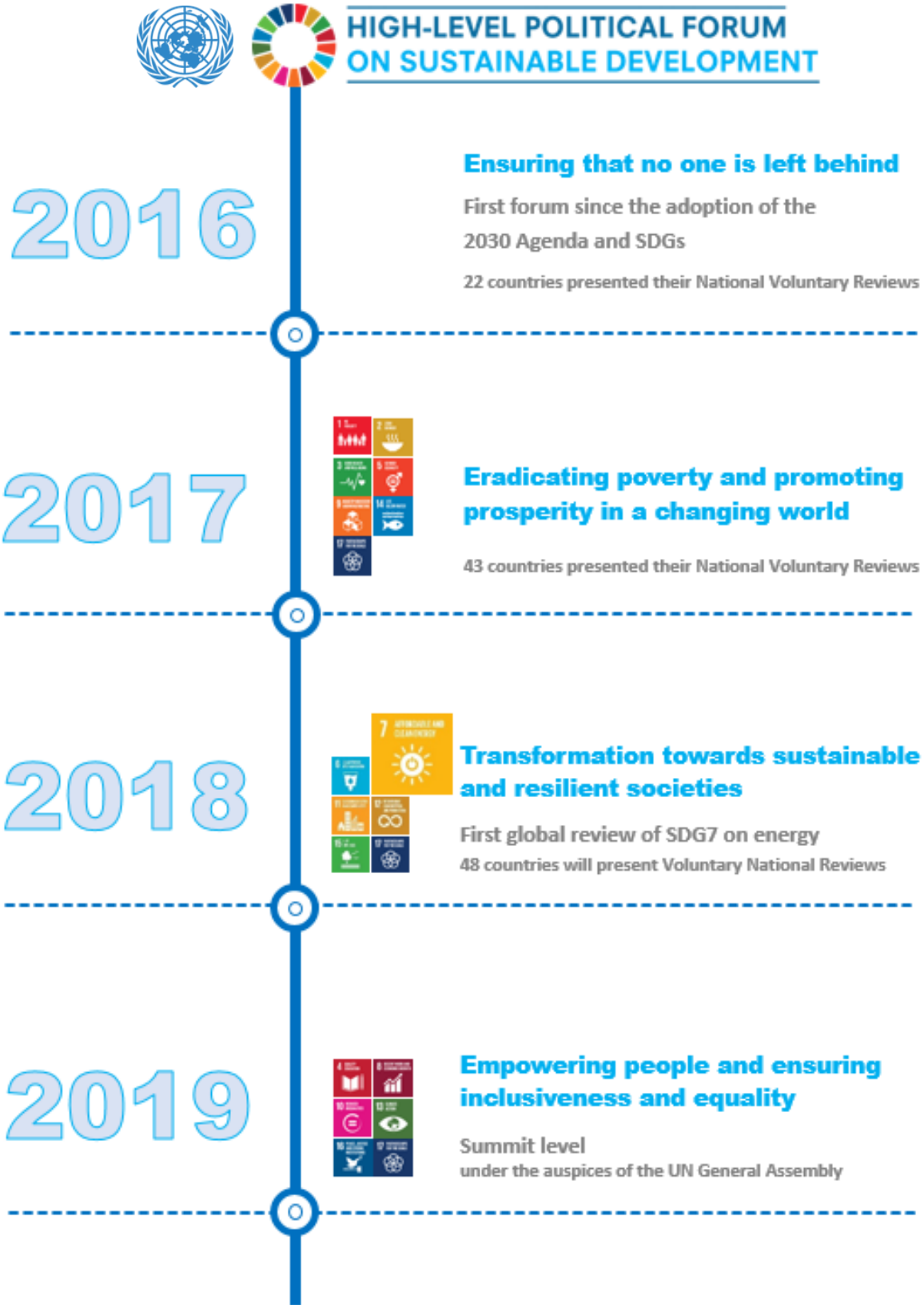

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