

Global Conference

Rural Energy Access: A Nexus Approach to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication

**Economic Commission for Africa
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
4-6 December 2013**

Aide Memoire

Background

More than 1.2 billion people lack access to electricity and 2.8 billion still rely on unsustainable solid biomass as fuel for cooking and heating. Around 1 billion (85%) of those without electricity and 2.2 billion (78%) depending on solid biomass live in rural areas. Communities in rural isolated areas represent, in many cases, the poorest segment of the population in developing countries, including Sub-Saharan Africa and developing regions in Asia and Latin America.

There is a strong nexus between energy and other important development factors such as education, health, gender, environment, economic growth, food security, and water. Sustainable access to modern energy services is a critical input and catalyst for improving the productive capacities and welfare of rural isolated communities, leading to poverty eradication and sustainable development. Extension of national grids, in most countries, is too expensive to cover these isolated areas. Nevertheless, appropriately scaled renewable energy systems – in particular advanced “clean” cookstoves and stand-alone (off-grid) electric generation systems that are practical, reliable, durable – are now both widely available and affordable.

“Sustainable Energy for All,” the major initiative of the Secretary-General, includes as one of its three main objectives Universal Access to Modern Energy Services by 2030. The implementation plan for this initiative acknowledges the importance of supporting rural isolated communities in their efforts to secure sustainable energy access. Recognizing that energy is a critical factor in sustainable development, the 2012 General-Assembly declared “2014-2024 the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All.” One of the main areas of work expected during this decade is related to the reduction of energy poverty in rural isolated communities by achieving the corresponding access to modern energy services.

The mandate resulting from the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, “The Future We Want,” supports this objective. Paragraph #129 states: “...We are all determined to act to

make sustainable energy for all a reality and, through this, help to eradicate poverty and lead to sustainable development and global prosperity.” Paragraph #125 recognizes: “the critical role that energy plays in the development process, as access to sustainable modern energy services contributes to poverty eradication, saves lives, improves health and helps provide for basic human needs.” Also, paragraph #126 emphasizes “...the need to address the challenge of access to sustainable modern energy services for all, in particular for the poor, who are unable to afford these services even when they are available.”

Although efforts are being made to address the issue of universal energy access and its linkages with other sustainable development factors and sectors, many challenges and barriers remain that need to be assessed and overcome.

Objectives

The main objective of the Conference is to provide an opportunity to strengthen capacities on policy, technical and entrepreneurial approaches to rural energy access for eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development in rural communities. More specific objectives include:

- Promoting dialogue among practitioners, experts, donors and policy-makers to facilitate closer cooperation on rural sustainable energy access;
- Assessing potential integrated policy options to address rural energy access and to identify synergies that can be realized from the links between energy and other development factors including health, education, economic growth, gender, water and food security;
- Discussing ways to apply models and practices to allow the scaling up of the use of clean cookstoves and stand-alone renewable energy systems;
- Identifying best practices and lessons learned and sharing international and country-level experiences in rural energy-access development;
- Assisting participants in identifying relevant renewable energy products, systems and services for rural communities; and
- Supporting the Rio+20 follow up process and the post-2015 development agenda. The emphasis will be on stand-alone electricity systems and advanced cookstoves and will include an exhibit highlighting some of the technologies and products which are now available or are in development.

The Conference will also provide opportunities for South-South as well as North-South-South capacity building, technical cooperation and exchange of experiences. At the conclusion, it is anticipated that the participants will gain an enhanced understanding of the opportunities and synergies that can be derived from broader cooperation on rural sustainable energy access and from a nexus approach to sustainable development and poverty eradication. Important outcomes will be derived from the shared knowledge of measures for enhancing capacity development programmes on technical and entrepreneurial strategies as well as from the critical information from the exchange and sharing of best practices and lessons learned.

Participants and Target Audience

Participants in this event include: practitioners, representatives of governments and local authorities, entrepreneurs and representatives of relevant private sector businesses, along with experts and representatives from multilateral, international, regional, and national organizations, regional and international banks, NGOs, academia, civil society, and manufacturers and developers of technologies and systems especially designed for use in rural isolated communities. All participants will have the opportunity to share lessons learned, experiences and best practices in rural sustainable energy access.

Officials from the United Nations system as well as researchers and experts from private and public sectors will support the event by reviewing and disseminating knowledge on capacity development programmes, partnerships, technologies, systems, products and services. In addition to the staff organizing the Conference from UNDESA, SE4All and ECA, the UN entities expected to participate include: UNDP, ESCAP, WHO, UNEP and FAO. Other international organizations expected to support and participate in this effort include the UN Foundation and IRENA.

Organization

UNDESA will lead the organization of the global event in cooperation with the “Sustainable Energy for All” team, ECA and UN-Energy. UNDESA will sponsor the participation of a limited number of participants from developing countries.

ECA will provide facilities for the global conference and exhibit space for the technologies, products and systems that the private sector is planning to bring to the event. Additionally, ECA will provide logistical support for the preparation and organization of the event. Also, ECA is expected to participate in and lead some sessions of the conference, given the fact that rural energy access represents a major priority for Africa.

Timing and Duration

The event is scheduled for 4-6 December 2013. It will consist of a total of six plenary sessions, two sessions each day. Each session is expected to last three hours.

The tentative agenda, which is subject to change, includes:

Session 1: High-Level Panel: Leadership for Rural Energy Access

Session 2: A Nexus Approach to Rural Energy Access

Session 3: National, Regional and Global Programmes for Rural Energy Access

Session 4: Enabling Factors for Providing Modern Energy Services for Rural Areas

Session 5: View of Practitioners of Rural Energy Supply

Session 6: Moving Forward

Two-hour lunch breaks and extended post-session receptions each day provide participants with extended opportunities for off-agenda meetings and consultations, informal networking and visits to the technology exhibit.

Venue

The Global Conference will be held at the Conference Facilities of the UN Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The technology exhibit will take place in the exhibit area of the Conference Facilities of ECA located adjacent to the conference room where the event will take place.

Languages

The Conference will be conducted in English with simultaneous interpretation into French.

Proceedings

The Conference will be conducted in a “paper smart” manner. All documentation and presentations will be made available to participants in electronic format. The electronic proceedings will be published on the webpage: <http://sustainable.development.un.org>.

Logistics

A separate circular with information for participants will be issued approximately six weeks ahead of the Conference.

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