Session on Sustainable Energy for All, HLPF 2020, Tuesday, July 9, 3:00 PM

Statement on Behalf of the NGO Major Group

Long Draft

Thank you. I am Rob Wheeler, Main Representative of the Global Ecovillage Network speaking on behalf of the NGO Major Group

Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all people will require transforming our energy, transportation and agricultural practices and systems. However this is what we need to do anyway in order to deal responsibly with climate change, increase agricultural productivity while retaining healthy soils, protect and restore ecosystems, promote and safeguard human health, and achieve all of the rest of the SDGs in an integrated manner.

NGOs play a pivotal role in building partnerships, educating local communities, and influencing responsive policies that impact the inherent linkages between energy access and poverty, health, wellness, nature-based solutions, and equity.

Civil society's collective knowledge and strengths hold the key to accelerated action on achieving energy decarbonization and universal access to sustainable energy, as together we work to achieve Agenda2030 in a changed global landscape.

It is thus essential that funding be provided to civil society organizations to support capacity development and local communities in implementing the transition to a renewable energy future.

Increasing renewable energy access in low-resource communities is a proven transformative pathway which accelerates action on Agenda 2030 and is particularly important in rural areas in Sub Saharan Africa where most of those still facing extreme poverty and that lack access to electricity live. Investments need to be made and technology development supported to assist those in Africa to build up their own capacity and produce their own energy infrastructure and resources.

Immediate funding is needed to electrify off-grid health clinics, particularly again in sub-Saharan Africa, where approximately 1⁄4 of all clinics lack electrification.

One of our questions for you is what should policy makers do, and how can they or we leverage financing and social safety net mechanisms to reach the 580 million people living without electricity and the 3.1 billion people still using biomass and inefficient cookstoves?

Another is, how can we get to a carbon neutral economy? We know now that we can and should sequester many giga-tons of carbon in plants, soils, roadways and the built environment. Biochar can be produced from pyrolizing carbon from either plant matter or waste materials. It can be used to create healthier and more productive soils or be sequestered in cement, asphalt, carbon fiber, recycled lumber, and paints, etc. and in the process actually produce better and more resilient products and materials.

Many examples for how this can be done can be found in the book, *BURN: Using Fire to Cool the Earth* by Albert Bates and Kathleen Draper which is available at: https://www.amazon.com/Burn-Using-Fire-Cool-Earth-ebook/dp/B07NBHQ31K

Biochar can also be produced in clean cook stoves and then be used as a soil supplement to improve soil health and productivity, water infiltration, and sequester carbon in plants and soils.

During yesterday's session on Tracking Progress on SDG 7, the IEA speaker reported that if we continue as we have been 2.3 billion people will still lack access to clean cooking in 2030, with most of these people living in Sub Saharan Africa or Asia. There is no reason that we should not be able to ensure that everyone that needs it has access to a clean cookstove. It is incomprehensible that several million people still die every year due to indoor air pollution and this being primarily women and girls. Nor should they have to walk several miles each day to collect increasingly scarce fuel wood.

There are plenty of renewable energy alternatives to such practices that are available if the international community will do what is required to invest in programmes and in the Small and Medium Size businesses that could

eliminate these problems. Many examples of appropriate technologies that are fairly low cost and that are being used productively in ecovillages and other rural communities around the world can be found at: www.ecovillage.org/climatesolutions. There are many other resources that have been developed by civil society that ought to be consulted and considered as well.

Another example of a transformative pathway that ought to be supported by policy makers is the Water, Energy, Food and Climate nexus. It is now recognized that industrial agriculture is highly energy and water intensive and often leads to land degradation. UNEP reports that organic agriculture is 2 - 4 times as productive as conventional agriculture in the developing world.

By transitioning to regenerative farming we can reduce the amount of water and energy needed to produce food and create more resiliency. Using fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides and genetically modified organisms does not tend to build up soil health and nutrients, it has repeatedly shown that adding compost, cover cropping, crop rotation, integrated pest management and employing no til agriculture does. And at the same time such practices increase resiliency to drought, retain water in the soil and ecosystem, cool the earth, and prevent soil and nutrient run-off and land degradation.

Another transformative pathway that the international community needs to further develop and invest in is the transition to renewably based transportation systems.

There is no reason that most of us should not be driving electric vehicles by 2030 or at least that most of the new cars on the road should not be electric. Planning and investments should be made now to produce and implement the infrastructure needed to service electric vehicles including charging stations and to support battery swaps.

Similarly, major new investments need to be made in research and development of biologically based fuels for air transport, quite possibly using algae and in hydrogen production and usage for shipping. And of course we have known for many years now that a major effort needs to be

made to upgrade the electricity grids all around the world.

Finally, let's take a look at the need for rapidly implementing policies to remove unsustainable subsidies and to replace them with incentives and tax policies that will support the transition to a renewable economy, regenerative agriculture, and truly sustainable transportation and energy systems.

The G20 agreed in 2009 to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies and more than more than 40 countries – along with a range of international, business and nongovernmental organisations – committed to a communiqué to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies at COP 21 in Paris. Unfortunately, most of the countries in the world still today are not following up with the action needed to change their subsidy policies.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) has estimated that global fossil fuel subsidies amount to between USD 325 and 500 billion each year. The IMF reported that the negative impacts arising from the use of fossil fuel subsidies were more than $5.3 trillion by 2015.

Unfortunately it has proved to be difficult to adopt measures at the international level that would help address this growing problem. Given the resistance of some oil producing countries it might make sense to establish some type of a partnership initiative to support and assist governments in carrying out subsidy reforms either as a UN partnership initiative that is essentially a coalition of the willing OR outside of the UN as was done when the International Renewable Energy Agency was established.

An organizing effort to develop such a coalition of the willing or partnership initiative could be led by the Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform and the Global Subsidies Initiative organized by the IISD. It should be a multi-stakeholder partnership including civil society organizations, the business community, many UN agencies such as , the education and research community etc. A whole of society approach should be developed in order to determine the best and most productive policies for phasing out unsustainable subsidies and replacing them with taxes and incentives to support a regenerative, renewable, clean and sustainable energy transition in as rapid a manner as possible.

In conclusion the NGO Major Group would like to make 6 recommendations:

1. Increase cross-sectoral interventions to implement clean energy programming to benefit the greatest number of communities without harming our shared ecosystem.

2. Include in stimulus packages and aid interventions funding only for sustainable projects that incorporate clean, renewable energy.

3. Support rapid scale-up of decentralized renewable energy solutions for increasing access to decarbonized energy through community ownership and energy justice approach.

4. Implement environmental and social safeguards to ensure the urgently needed renewable energy transition supports rather than exacerbates biodiversity conservation and nature-based solutions.

5. Eliminate fossil fuel subsidies and incentivize renewables.

6. Increase healthcare funding to build more hospitals and clinics that incorporate clean energy in the planning.

Thank you for your considerations

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Short Statement

Thank you. I am speaking on behalf of the NGO Major Group

Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy for all will require totally transforming our energy, transportation and agricultural practices and systems. However this is what we need to do anyway to deal responsibly with climate change, increase agricultural productivity while retaining healthy soils, protect ecosystems, promote and safeguard human health, and achieve all of the SDGs in an integrated manner.

NGOs play a pivotal role in building partnerships, educating local

communities, and influencing responsive policies that impact the inherent linkages between energy access and poverty, health, wellness, nature-based solutions, and equity.

Civil society's collective knowledge and strengths hold the key to accelerated action on achieving energy decarbonization and universal access to sustainable energy.

It's essential that funding be provided to support all stakeholder groups to provide capacity development and assistance to local communities in implementing the transition to a renewable energy future which is particularly important in rural areas and in Sub Saharan Africa where most of those still facing extreme poverty and that lack access to electricity live. Investments need to be made and technology development supported so that Africans can produce their own energy infrastructure and resources.

Immediate funding is needed to electrify off-grid health clinics, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where 1⁄4 of all clinics lack electrification.

[A longer draft of this statement has been sent to the Secretariat to be posted on the HLPF website. It addresses the need and benefits that can come from ensuring that all people have access to clean cooking, changing our subsidy and incentive policies, investing in regenerative agriculture, sequestering carbon in everything from the soil to construction materials, transforming our transportation systems, and investing in renewable technologies.]

In conclusion we'd like to make 4 recommendations:

1. Increase cross-sectoral interventions to implement clean energy programming to benefit the greatest number of communities without harming our shared ecosystem.

2. Include in stimulus packages and aid interventions funding only for sustainable projects that incorporate clean, renewable energy.

3. Support rapid scale-up of decentralized renewable energy solutions for increasing access to decarbonized energy through community ownership and energy justice approach.

4. Implement environmental and social safeguards to ensure the urgently needed renewable energy transition supports rather than exacerbates biodiversity conservation and nature-based solutions

5. Eliminate fossil fuel subsidies and incentivize renewables.

6. Increase healthcare funding to build more hospitals and clinics that incorporate clean energy in the planning.

Please go to the UN website to read our longer statement with specific examples of how we can transition to a renewable carbon neutral future.

Thank you for your considerations