



Short communication

## Renewable energy in international and regional governance: Propelling development in Africa

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 12 December 2014

Received in revised form

15 December 2014

Accepted 18 December 2014

Available online 14 January 2015

## Keywords:

Energy

Global governance

Regional governance

International cooperation

## ABSTRACT

Energy is slowly accepted as a key dimension of sustainable development and a key factor for emerging frameworks of global and regional governance. This bodes well for the development of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where energy poverty is a key component of extreme poverty.

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### 1. Introduction

Over the past several years, economic news from the African continent have been quite up-lifting, with many countries boasting growth rates that are reminiscent of some of the Asian tigers (albeit with much higher population growth rates). Nevertheless, there are still many development challenges in many parts of Africa south of the Sahara, in particular in rural areas.

Energy poverty is usually part and parcel of extreme poverty. “The people who lack energy access are mainly the same people who lack access to clean water and sanitation, experience high food insecurity and would experience the worst impacts of climate change,” United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki Moon underlines in a recent report [1].

Only quite recently has the international community started to recognize the crucial role of modern energy services to unlock the full development potential of persons and communities. This Short Communication sketches some of the main strands – both normative and operational – of giving energy greater prominence in international cooperation, particularly renewable energy,

the subject of this Special Issue. For the first time, energy is taken seriously as a dimension of global governance and strengthened at the regional level, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. This emergence of energy as a factor of sustainable development is starting to transform the landscape, including and in particular in Africa.

### 2. Energy’s slow move unto the sustainable development agenda

Even though it is hardly conceivable to discuss “sustainable development” without also examining the production, distribution and use of energy, some 20 years had to pass since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit before energy considerations started to be included in global governance frameworks. Neither Agenda 21, the seminal program of action passed at Rio, nor the UN Millennium Development Declaration, adopted in 2000, contained energy considerations.

Informal multi-stakeholder platforms operating patiently over lengthy periods of time [2] and major international scientific endeavors [3] contributed greatly to building a consensus about the role of energy in the pursuit of sustainable development. In the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, recognition spread slowly that poverty eradication would remain elusive as long as extreme energy poverty was not tackled; that none of the Millennium Development Goals could be attained without appropriate

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energy interventions; and that curbing greenhouse gas emissions would require a major shift to more sustainable energy futures.

Expert groups such as Advisory Group on Energy and Climate Change (AGECC) [4] brought together major stakeholders and their reports helped jell the emerging consensus. The Vienna Energy Forum meetings of 2009 and 2011 ([www.viennaenergyforum.org](http://www.viennaenergyforum.org)), drawing on the international network built in yearly meetings of the Global Forum on Sustainable Energy ([www.gfse.at](http://www.gfse.at)) since 2000, prepared the ground for the launching of the Initiative of the UN Secretary-General on “Sustainable Energy for All” (SE4ALL, [www.se4all.org](http://www.se4all.org)) in December 2011.

SE4ALL has three overarching objectives that are mutually supportive and should be reached by 2030:

- To provide access to electricity and to modern cooking fuels for the billions of people currently without it.
- To double the rate of energy efficiency improvements.
- To double the share of renewable energies in the overall energy end use.

### 3. A new form of international cooperation on sustainable energy for all

At the Rio+20 conference in June 2012, major partners of SE4ALL came together to publicly show their support for the initiative. On 21 June 2012, the UN Secretary General announced more than 100 commitments on sustainable energy, estimated at over \$50 billion and formulated by governments; private sector corporations, small and medium-scale enterprises; financial institutions, donors and development banks; and non-governmental organizations, artists, academia, and individuals [5].

Kandeh Yumkella, who had been working tirelessly to build the needed coalitions, was named as UN-Secretary General Special Representative for Sustainable Energy for All. Since June 2013, he acts as SE4ALL’s full-time chief executive officer.

By end of 2014,

- more than 100 countries (including 85 developing countries) have joined SE4ALL as partners.
- In 30 focus countries, some 14 of them in Africa south of the Sahara (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda), the SE4ALL Country Action Process has been promoted.
- SE4ALL partners are developing action agendas, investment prospectuses, energy policies, rural electrification plans, and strategies for scaling up clean cooking solutions.
- Of particular note is the €40 million SE4ALL technical assistance facility of the European Union (EU) for Africa; Norwegian Energy+; the World Bank’s Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP) SE4ALL technical assistance facility; the proposed United Kingdom SE4ALL mini-grid facility and the recently launched EU rural electrification financing facility in support of SE4ALL.

The European Commission and individual European countries are committed, in support of SE4ALL, to reduce energy poverty by more than 500 million people within two decades. SE4ALL has a memorandum of understanding, since September 2014, with the US Power Africa initiative, United States (US) President Barak Obama’s initiative to increase energy in Africa. The EU and US commitments taken together, if implemented, would mean that extreme energy poverty might at least be halved by 2030.

At the UN Climate Summit on 23 September 2014, SE4ALL launched a new Global Energy Efficiency Accelerators platform to promote energy efficiency in buildings, lights, appliances, transport, industry and district heating that should result in cuts of more than 1 Giga ton of carbon emissions annually by 2025, not to speak of the billions of dollars saved.

Alliances between private banks, multilateral and national development banks, and institutional investors have the potential of mobilizing an additional \$120 billion in energy sector investments. Almost 2000 energy experts from almost every country on the globe join together in the Energy Access Practitioner Network and the World Bank ensures a robust Global Tracking Framework which was launched in 2013 ([www.se4all.org/tracking-progress/](http://www.se4all.org/tracking-progress/)). It establishes baseline energy data and provides regular bi-annual updates on trends in energy access, renewable energy and energy efficiency.

SE4ALL is still in search of its future legal nature. Any format chosen will have to allow for a good interaction between the public and the private sectors. As the World Energy Commission Trilemma Reports 2012 and 2013 ([www.worldenergy.org](http://www.worldenergy.org)) underline, public and private players need to listen better to each other and to interact more effectively. Governments need to set clear, long-term frameworks for markets; private sector players have to articulate their needs and expectations clearly to governments.

But an “Initiative” cannot sign checks, nor rent premises. The options are to align with the UN; to form another international organization; or to operate out of a non-for-profit non-governmental setting. For some stakeholders, strict intergovernmental settings and alignment to the UN may seem narrow. Yet the UN’s convening power and ability to promote global consensus are irreplaceable. Perhaps more clarity will be shed on the most desirable future shape for SE4ALL, as the post-2015 architecture in general – in particular the mechanism of review – is reflected upon. Clearly, SE4ALL would need to be one of the pillars of this post-2015 architecture, so the institutional setting finally chosen should be commensurate to the task.

“A robust mechanism to review implementation will be essential for the success of the goals. The General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum will play a key role in this regard”, the Outcome document of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970, para. 14) states. Annual Global Sustainable Development Reports will help in this review of implementation. And entities within the UN system will have to take responsibility for elaborating the chapters relating to the different sustainable development goals. Many of the sustainable development goals have well-established homes within the UN system, but some do not. Energy, with the undefined final status of SE4ALL, is currently among the more “unhoused” ones.

### 4. UN-decade of sustainable energy for all

In 2012, the UN General Assembly decided that 2014 to 2024 should be the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All. On 16 December 2013, member States agreed on the first overall energy mandate for the Secretary General who is tasked to coordinate the UN’s work on the Decade on SE4ALL. All member States are urged to contribute to it.

In his report on the decade (A/69/395), the UN Secretary General lays out some broad pillars for a global plan of action for the Decade including strategic objectives, a suggested broad outline of activities and focus areas, milestones and tracking of progress and organizational arrangements. Foremost among the strategic objectives is to catalyze actions at all levels to transform the world’s

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