

Electricity and Development Workshop
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Statement by
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Excellencies;
Honored delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am very pleased to be here to make some remarks on the role of energy in advancing sustainable development in Africa. As a co-sponsor of this event, I would like to first join my colleagues from UNEP and IEA in acknowledging the efforts of the Government of Kenya in hosting this event as well as congratulating the Secretariat of the Global Network of Energy for Sustainable Development (GNESD) for successfully bringing together prominent experts working on this important topic in Africa.

Energy is central to all human endeavors, and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that world leaders agreed in 2000. Whether it is electricity for schools or clinics, mechanical power for grinding and milling, clean cooking fuel to reduce indoor pollution, or energy for pumping water, energy – or, more accurately, the services that energy provides - will be required to attain these ends.

Without increasing the availability and affordability of modern energy services, many developing countries will simply not achieve the MDGs. Yet, the fact is that for the past few decades the number of people impoverished by a lack of modern energy services - roughly one-third of the world's population - has decreased very little. The warning to the developing and developed worlds could not be any clearer: No energy, no MDGs.

I know I don't need to go on to emphasize how critical the issue of access to energy services is for Africa, because all of you in front of me are experts in this area, striving to make a difference day-in day-out. So, instead of preaching, let me pose a more direct question.

My question is: "Is the setting of current energy policy priorities in Africa right on target?"

Let me explain what I mean by this. The Secretary General's report on the progress towards the MDGs, which was just released last month, noted that the world is on track to meet the poverty reduction goal by 2015, with the exception of Sub Saharan Africa. My question can therefore be rephrased as: "Are we doing right things in energy in order to help the poor and reduce poverty in Sub Saharan Africa?"

In our view, the answer is fuzzy, to say the least. According to a very quick review of all PRSPs of Sub Saharan counties we conducted recently, while all PRSPs do recognize energy issues as an important development topic, almost all of them emphasize increased investment into large-scale energy supply infrastructure as exclusive priority. Very few, if any, have treated increasing access to energy services for the poor as a priority.

The lack of focus on the poor's energy needs is so apparent, and is surprising given many direct benefits the poor can get when access to energy services be provided. For example, access to modern energy services is one of the most effective means for the poor to bring about the significant increase in economic productivity. Similarly, modern energy can offer enormous social benefits for rural women who are currently spending hours gathering fuel wood, inefficiently processing food and inhaling smoke from wood-fired cooking stoves.

Of course, PRSPs are only a part of the whole picture. And, the need for more large energy supply systems is undeniable in Africa. But what would be needed is a more balanced approach taking into account the energy needs of the poor, which can help the countries get on track of achieving the poverty reduction goal and the MDGs as a whole.

What can be done? In establishing "MDG-based" energy priorities at the national level, it is necessary to develop an output-based strategy, rather than input-based (i.e. how many MW). The UN Millennium Project, for example, has put forward the following energy targets:

- Replace 50% of the use of traditional biomass cooking fuels with modern fuels. Also increase the use of improved cook-stoves and sustainable biomass production to promote cleaner and less time-consuming use of solid fuels;
- Increase access to reliable modern energy services for all urban and peri-urban poor;
- Provide electricity for all schools, clinics, hospitals and community centers; and,
- Improve access to motive power (i.e. mechanical power) within the community for all communities.

Promoting energy for sustainable development and supporting countries to achieve the MDGs require a great deal of international cooperation. Increasing access to investment financing and enhancing public-private partnerships to overcome the challenges of the energy sector and ensure a wider and affordable access to energy services will be crucial to reach this goal. These targets embody an ambitious initiative to enhance the availability and affordability of modern energy services for the poor and help ensure that all partners can work towards the same goals. Obviously, any targets/benchmarks have to be nationally decided to fit into their specific contexts, but I hope the above list could help serve as a starting point to be used in establishing national energy strategies.

The topic of this conference "Electricity and Development" is one of the central aspects of energy debates in Africa, and therefore, in many ways the conference can help us better understand both opportunities and challenges ahead of us. As a partner to the

GNESD, UNDP is delighted to see that the network is helping centers of excellence and their experts in Africa working on energy issues to expand their knowledge networking and discuss their own solutions to the development challenges in Africa.

As the capacity development arm of the UN system on the ground, UNDP has invested over 2 billion dollars since 1996 in various energy projects in over 120 countries. We are thus keen to learn from you how best to tackle the challenges and look forward to actively joining the discussions over the next days.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank the organizers again for providing this opportunity to discuss and find solutions to this critical challenge in the hope that this meeting will foster synergies necessary to move forward with a renewed commitment.

Thank you.