The fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly

Side Events and Launches

Date: 13th March 2019

Title of side event:
Workshop on Just Energy Transition and Access in Africa – A pre-event of the One Planet Summit

FOCUS/ BRIEF DESCRIPTION/ MAJOR ISSUES DISCUSSED:

1. Introduction

The workshop on "Just Energy Transition and Access in Africa" was convened as a pre-event of One Planet Summit in Nairobi on the 12th of March 2019 at the Trademark Hotel in Nairobi Kenya. Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), African Coalition for Sustainable Energy and Access (ACSEA), UN Environment, African Union, African Development Bank, Society for International Development, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Christian Aid joined forces to convene this workshop. The recommendations and key messages from this pre-event is to be enunciated in the form of a common African statement to inform decision making during the One Planet Summit and UNEA-4.

About 120 participants representing diverse groups of stakeholders from private and public sector, civil society organizations, academia, line ministries, county and national governments, multinational development financial institutions, and regional economic and integration bodies engaged in energy access and energy transition, and discussed the way forward in the emotive subject of energy transition and its contribution to climate ambition. The outcome of this discussion and way forward is expected to be presented during the One Planet Summit that will be held on 14 March 2019 back to back with the UNEA 4.

2. Deliberations during the workshop

The deliberations during the workshop included:

- **Opening remarks**: by representatives from main organizers that include PACJA, AU, AfDB and UN Environment;
- **Keynote presentation**: Two keynote presentations were delivered to set the scene. These include: (A) Energy Landscape in Africa; (B) "Telling real energy poverty stories in the Global North- Energy justice as seen from the Global North";
- **Plenary sessions**: Three plenary sessions were held focusing on: (a) Energy Transition and Finance; (b) Addressing the twin challenge of climate change, energy poverty and women empowerment in sustainable energy in Africa; and (c) Public and Private Sector Engagement.
- **Three Breakout groups discussed on**: (a) Finance for energy transition; (b) Challenges and opportunities for Energy Transition and Access to achieve SDGs; (c) Issues to be reflected in the Workshop Statement to inform decisions at the One planet summit.

2.1. Key note presentations

The key note presentation by Ben Ireri, Director, Regional Renewable Energy Access for Africa, World Resources Institute focussed on the Renewable energy landscape in Africa. He mentioned important facts that about 600 million people in Africa still do not have electricity; 730 million
people rely on traditional biomass (wood fuel and charcoal) and about 600,000 people in Africa die each year as a result of household air pollution and that over 60% of these victims are women.

Jackie Paterson from USA made a presentation on “Telling real energy poverty stories in the Global North- Energy justice as seen from the Global North”. She presented the Bayton Texas case study on Pollution from the oil and gas industry. She showcased the ‘Coal-Blooded’ investments favouring the donors who are putting profits before people’s welfare and lives. She added how, Pumalanga is the most polluted place in the world due to the coal mining in South Africa.

2.2. Plenary sessions

The Panelists participated in the plenary session include:

- Fiona Wollensack, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
- Thuli Makama, Africa Director, Oil Change International
- Yannick Ongowou Sonnet, General Director of the Environment and Nature Protection, Gabon
- Mohammed Adow, Christian Aid
- Hon. Mohamed Nasr, Egypt Ambassador to Somalia & Chair, African Group of Negotiators (AGN).
- Meseret Zemedkun, Programme Manager, Energy Africa Office, UN Environment
- Suresh Patel, Kenya Private Sector Alliance
- Parmain Ole Narikae, Managing Director, Kenya Industrial Estates LTD

3. The key highlights discussed during the workshop are as follows:

- Clean and renewable energy is an enabler of income generation, increased productivity, job creation and fostering economic growth. Progress towards SDG7 and the commitment to “affordable, reliable sustainable and modern energy for all” by limiting accumulation of GHGs in the atmosphere, shifting to renewable energy and managing resources sustainably, remains slow and a critical bottleneck which threatens progress in both rural and urban communities in Africa. There is thus urgent need to solidify gains already made in identifying and targeting those who are hardest to reach with strategies and interventions, including product and service innovations.

- While technology and ingenuity are revolutionising the energy sector, the need for finance, robust policies, leadership and cooperation between actors is urgent. Africa’s highly centralised energy systems benefit the few and by-pass the poor who are mostly underpowered, inefficient and unequal. Lacking access to clean energy sources, over half of Africa’s population is forced to resort to biomass, such as firewood and charcoal – options that are economically inefficient and environmentally devastating. African leaders must take the decisive action to reform an inefficient and inequitable energy sector policies and practices and form the foundation of the enabling political and economic environment necessary to achieve SDG 7. The strengthened enabling political and economic environment provides the opportunity for impact driven clean energy engagement and investment.

- Africa’s energy deficits reinforce poverty, especially for women and people in rural areas. The energy sector remains one of the least gender-diverse sectors and closing this gender gap will be vital as women are key drivers of innovative and inclusive solutions in promoting sustainable energy. A clean energy transition will require empowering women to ensure gender responsive policies in energy sector, enable access to finance and market as well as
developing technical and business skills to enhance women’s empowerment and promote gender equality in situations of sustainable energy development.

- Genuine cooperation can transform the vast potential in Africa by increasing support for investment in renewable energy. The renewable energy sector presents a multi-billion dollar market opportunity ecosystem that can better ensure universal and equitable energy for all. Local, national, regional, and international partner entities demonstrate the need to engage both public and private sector actors to create and scale-up local innovative financing solutions and strategies. Estimates of the financial needs will require shared value approaches which place the people at the centre of the energy economy. Financing will be needed not only for new infrastructure but also for subsidies to support energy access for renewable energy sources.

- To enhance Africa’s prospects for managing climate risks and delivering sustainable energy for all, the world is hopelessly fragmented, underfinanced and often poorly governed climate finance institutions need to be reformed and the continent should be part of an international community that delivers multilateral solutions to shared global problems.

- While the task of addressing energy poverty and limiting greenhouse gas emissions seems daunting, price reductions in renewable energy technologies are creating new opportunities for achieving energy access. There is however need to develop and fund strategies to bridge the energy gap at all levels across the continent.

- African countries should re-think their reliance on coal and fossil fuel as source of energy. Coal, particularly, is not only risky, but rapidly becoming obsolete, a ‘stranded assets’, and economically unviable in the world. The investment trends should be instructive to Africa, where numerous coal and oil deposits are being discovered, that investments in such forms of energy may not be economically viable in the near future.

- The transition to a clean, sustainable energy presents a viable alternative economic case for African countries to skip carbon-intensive energy systems. This case has been clearly articulated in many conversations, ‘justice’, which is central to climate ambition, should be anchored into it. Africa’s energy transition should contribute to resilience of communities and not result to forced displacement of workers and people at the frontline of climate change impacts to facilitate the construction of large energy infrastructure. The solution to energy poverty in Africa lies with the people who remain the bedrock of any economy – majority living in rural areas.

4. Key recommendations and Messages

The key recommendations and messages drawn from the one day workshop deliberation and group discussions are listed below. These are meant to inform decision making during UNEA 4 and one planet Summit.

- Energy reinforces and contributes to the achievement of all Sustainable development goals including health, food, education and gender equality. It is a driver for economic and human development.

- Non-state actors in the private sector, research community, civil society, NGOs, development partners (among others) play a critically important role in developing systems to introduce innovative solutions to improve sustainable energy solutions, especially for the marginalised and unserved;

- Decentralised, people-owned, affordable and off grid energy systems should be supported as the only long-term solution to climate and energy crisis in Africa. The African Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI) and Women Entrepreneurs and Sustainable Energy in Africa (WESE) through the Africa Women Energy Entrepreneurs Framework (AWEEF) launched
as per the decisions of AMacen will be the shining examples of Africa-driven programmes to Power the continent.

- The African Intergovernmental institutions such as African Union, African Development Bank, and Economic Commission for Africa as well as Regional Economic Integration Communities play a crucial role in creating a regional policy guideline in energy sector that can respond to the Continental Development policy processes i.e. AU Agenda 2063.

- Various partners can assist in ensuring sustainable finance and business models to maximise clean energy development, technology transfer and skill development as well as building partnership for regional and national energy initiatives and supporting institutional transformation.

- Developing a regional and national energy database and information will facilitate fast tracking in energy transition.

- The need for clear and coherent policy and regulation framework with clear direction of means of implementation is crucial to attract investment and accelerate RE development.

- One Planet Summit presents an opportunity for Africa's energy transition and access, and should be welcomed in the African continent.

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