VOICE
UN DESA

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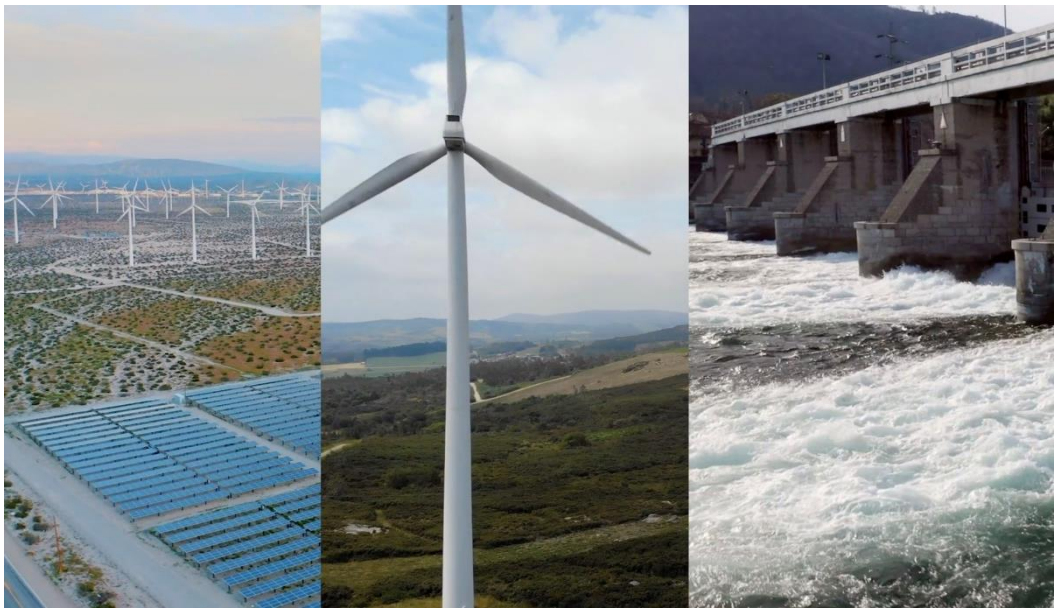


Igniting the spark of a clean energy revolution

Transforming the way our world produces energy will be critical to tackling both the climate crisis and the energy access crisis. Now, 80 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions stems from our energy production, making it one of the main drivers of climate change. And 760 million people live without electricity, while 2.6 billion cook with dirty, unhealthy fuels.

The UN High-level Dialogue on Energy, convened virtually on 24 September, is shaping up to be an historic and game-changing mobilization for action and cooperation on clean, affordable energy for all by 2030 — Sustainable Development Goal 7 — on the way to net-zero emissions by 2050.

A global roadmap to 2030 has been proposed. It suggests closing the energy access gap, shifting to decarbonized energy by quadrupling solar and wind capacity and phasing out coal plants by 2030 in richer countries, with others by 2040. The plan also calls for improving energy efficiency and tripling clean energy investment to 5 trillion dollars per year, as well as redirecting fossil fuel subsidies and putting a price on carbon. It also stresses the need for a just transition which can create tens of millions of green jobs and empower the most vulnerable.

Every country, city, financial institution, company and civil society organization has a role to play. All are being asked to submit “Energy Compact” commitments, outlining what actions they will take by 2030. Over 25 Energy Compacts have already been formed and more are being submitted for registration.

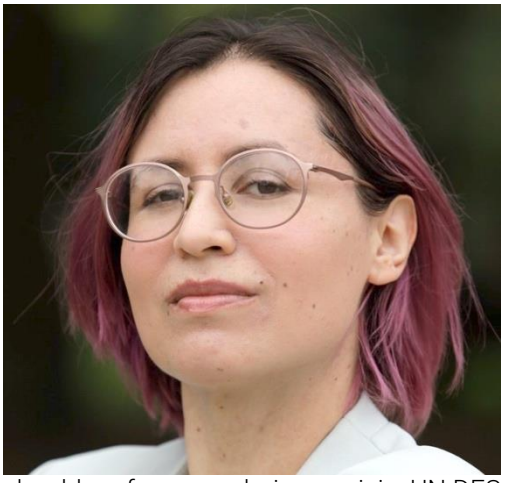
30 Governments also serve as Global Champions for the Dialogue and the private sector and philanthropy organizations are making strong commitments too. The IKEA Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation have committed to launching a $1 billion fund to boost access to renewable energy in developing countries through mini-grids and off-grid sources. India’s largest power utility, the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) Limited, announced an Energy Compact to nearly double their renewable energy capacity.

A coalition to mobilize Energy Compacts on green hydrogen technologies is being led by Denmark, Chile and Germany, in collaboration with IRENA, the World Economic Forum and others. Google, in partnership with Sustainable Energy for All, is mobilizing companies, governments and others to join a coalition for 24/7 carbon-free energy, recognizing that full decarbonization of electricity systems has the potential to eliminate nearly 50 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions globally.

A group spearheaded by Kenya, Malawi and the Netherlands is collaborating on a joint Energy Compact to boost access to clean cooking. Partners include UN DESA, Energia, the World Bank Group, WHO and the Health and Energy Platform of Action.

Stay tuned for lots of energy action this September, and onwards to 2030. Learn the latest here.

EXPERT VOICES



The gender inequality of time

When the pandemic hit, leaving children without a school to go to and elderly people confined to the house, it was the women of the family who were suddenly expected to become teachers, carers and domestic helpers, often at the expense of their professional careers. A new tool developed by UN DESA may soon tell us exactly how much more domestic work falls on the shoulder of women during a crisis. UN DESA Statistician Lubov Zeifman tells us about it.

Every day, an average woman puts in three times as many hours as an average man into unpaid domestic and care work. Why does this time matter?

“In the modern world, most societies are embracing gender equality, where, in theory, both men and women pursue careers while also sharing family responsibilities, including domestic chores and care work. However, our data shows that the reality is a far cry from equality. At the global level, on average, women spend almost three times as much time

on ‘unpaid work’, doing tasks like cooking, cleaning and taking care of the children, while also often working for pay outside the household.

This is problematic for many reasons. First of all, the double work burden on women places a large toll on their mental and physical well-being. Additionally, unpaid domestic and care work remains an obstacle to women’s economic empowerment. For instance, among adults aged 25-54, 83 per cent of women that live alone participate in the labour force. But that rate drops dramatically, to 48 per cent among women in couple households with children. Interestingly, the labour participation of men does not seem to be affected by their household circumstance and remains relatively constant at above 90 per cent.

This means that as a society, we are missing out when 50 per cent of our population, who are just as smart, creative and talented as the male half, is not reaching their full potential, burdened by unpaid household work. What happens inside a household is not a subject for legal regulation, so we need to think of creative policy solutions that could help women break free from this undue burden.”

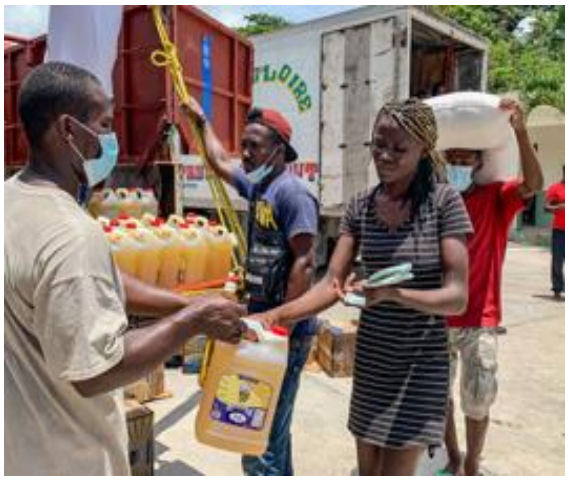
How do we know how people make use of their time? Where does all this data come from?

“We receive the data from national statistical offices, who in turn collect them from surveys of nationally representative samples. The term ‘nationally representative sample’ means that even though we are surveying a small portion of the country, the people sampled are representative enough of the country at large.

In terms of the survey methodology, it varies by country, and can include diaries where people record what they are doing for a given amount of time or what we called a stylized questionnaire where people are interviewed about how much time they spent on a list of activities the previous day, or week, for example. While the survey nature differs by country, the United Nations Expert Group on Innovative and Effective Ways to Collect Time-Use Statistics is working towards methodological guidelines that promote light technical solutions. These guidelines ensure harmonization across countries while also allowing enough flexibility to be adapted to the national context.

You are launching a new tool to measure time use in times of crisis, such as COVID-19. What will this change?

“The collection of time use data can be heavy on the financial, human and time resources. Yet, knowing how people are spending their time during crises is invaluable to policy makers, as it allows them to see how a given crisis is affecting the daily lives of the population and to respond accordingly. Our innovative tool allows countries to collect such data rapidly and at relatively low cost. In addition, this tool can be modified to reach groups that may have been excluded from traditional time use surveys, for various reasons. It could provide insights into how these groups, otherwise unrepresented, are spending their time, even if it is not comparable with rigorously collected Time Use Statistics.”



Four things you should know about food systems

Billions of people, from farmers to supermarket cashiers, to those who monitor food safety or install irrigation technologies contribute to the world's food systems. This web of connected people and processes is at the heart of food security and nutrition for the world's growing population. As the global community prepares for the Food Systems Summit this month, here are four things you should know about the world's food systems:

1. Food systems are an entry point for achieving all 17 SDGs

The 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report identified food systems as one of six entry points where the SDGs are deeply connected and where coordinated actions can have cascading positive impacts across Goals and Targets. For example, by harnessing synergies and addressing trade-offs, actions on food systems can advance climate action and gender equality, reduce hunger and poverty, create jobs and generate economic growth.

2. We are not on track to deliver on the food-related SDGs

Looking ahead, food systems will need to deliver nutritious food for a global population of 9 to 10 billion people with greatly reduced environmental impacts. The challenge is great. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, hunger was on the rise after years of decline (as many as 811 million people were hungry in 2020) and obesity is also rising globally.

3. Doing more of the same will not feed the world, and may wreck our planet

Existing practices throughout food systems are associated with biodiversity loss, deforestation and land degradation (which can contribute to the spread of disease); and agriculture is associated with 70 per cent of freshwater use and 29 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions.

4. Partnerships, science and technology can transform food systems

Coordinated and cohesive approaches to transformation are needed that join-up business, government, science, individuals, and community cutting across silos. Science and technology also have a vast potential to address trade-offs in food systems, but there is a need for more knowledge sharing, increased access to technologies, and capacity building. Some resources are already in place to facilitate such exchanges including the UN Technology Facilitation Mechanism and the online platform for technology and knowledge sharing – 2030 Connect.

The Food Systems Summit is an opportunity to mobilize resources and formulate innovative and cross-cutting actions drawing on the best available knowledge and dialogues at all levels and among all stakeholders.

Together, we can change the way we power the world

By Alok Sharma, President of COP 26 Climate Conference

Solar changed Neville's life. I saw this for myself when, as UK Secretary of State for International Development, I visited his home in Kenya, and he told me how off-grid solar power was helping him to study for his degree.

That's just one example of how the global challenges we face are related. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognise this, and energy is a great example. Among others, SDG7, Affordable and Clean Energy for All, supports the SDGs on Gender Equality, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and of course Climate Action.

Globally, the World Bank estimates that we could save 140 million working years, every year, if power freed people from the need to collect fuel and enabled them to cook faster. Tasks overwhelmingly performed by women and girls.

Renewables can bring reliable power to communities for the first time, spurring growth and development. As in Nigeria, where the government plans to use solar to connect 5 million households to reliable power for the first time.

And moving from polluting forms of power like coal to clean, green energy is essential if we are to avoid the very worst effects of climate change by meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement. In that Agreement, the countries of the world committed to limit the rise in global temperatures to well below 2 degrees centigrade, aiming for 1.5 degrees centigrade. We can't achieve that without action on energy. And time is running out.

To keep the 1.5-degree limit alive we must halve global emissions by 2030. Action on power, which accounts for almost a quarter of global emissions, is vital. Analysis shows that to keep the 1.5-degree limit within reach, countries must move away from coal. That is why energy transition is a focus of COP26, and why one of my personal priorities is to consign coal power to history, in a manner that is fair to all. Including by supporting the transition in developing countries.

This is eminently achievable, not least because, as I have said before, the economic tides have turned and are sweeping the world towards a clean future. Solar and wind power are now cheaper than coal and gas around the world. Renewables create good, green jobs. And we can make the transition a just one, as shown by a deal to train an offshore wind construction workforce, recently signed by renewables firm Ørsted and North America's Building Trades Unions.

Globally, the clean energy transition is making progress. Under the UK Presidency, every G7 country has committed to move to an overwhelmingly decarbonised power system at home in the 2030s, and to stop financing coal abroad. South Korea is ending international coal finance too, meaning that two of the three largest funding nations are no longer putting their money into coal. And pension funds, insurance firms, and investors have signed up to the Powering Past Coal Alliance, which aims to accelerate the transition away from coal.

Last year, the UK COP26 Presidency launched the COP26 Energy Transition Council to enhance international collaboration and get the clean energy transition moving faster. This brings together more than 20 governments, and 15 international institutions, including development banks, to support the green transition in developing countries. We also launched the Rapid Response Facility, which is currently responding to over 15 country requests for timely, flexible support with their energy transition. And we plan to build on these initiatives beyond Glasgow, so that strong partnerships between governments, investors and communities continue to scale-up clean power, green grids and energy access.

All this progress is positive but there is further to go ahead of COP26. Because the clean energy transition needs to move much faster to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement, and unfortunately 480 gigawatts-worth of new coal power stations are still planned around the world.

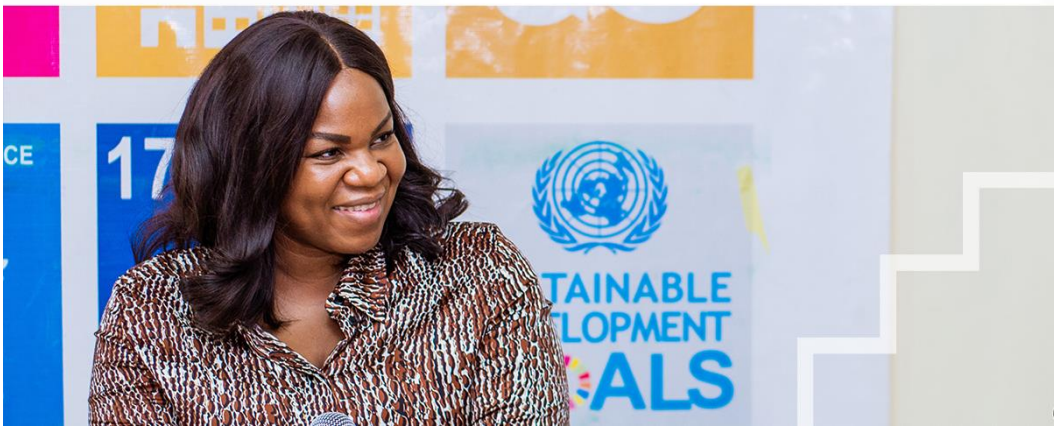
Ahead of COP and at the summit itself, countries and investors need to step up with big, bold commitments to drive the clean energy revolution. So that we are able to end coal power globally. I urge countries to commit to end coal financing abroad, stop building new coal power plants at home, rapidly phase out existing ones, and support a just transition in coal-dependent communities.

Together, we can revolutionise the way we power the world, leaving no one behind. Spurring growth and development, while protecting our planet for future generations.

** The views expressed in this blog are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*

SDG BLOG

Damilola Ogunbiyi,
CEO, Sustainable Energy for All



Achieving SDG7 will put us on a pathway to net-zero

By Damilola Ogunbiyi, CEO and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All and Co-Chair of UN-Energy

The energy transition story is a story of energy access. I've often said this, and it's worth repeating. The climate crisis and the energy access crisis are intrinsically linked. The billions of people who lack access to safe, clean, and reliable electricity and cooking fuels are forced to rely on polluting means to go about their daily lives. This produces the power equivalent of up to 1,000 coal-fired power stations. The clean energy transition is impossible while energy poverty still exists. We will not be able to meet our goal of net-zero by 2050 unless we're able to provide safe, clean, and affordable access to electricity and cooking solutions to every person on the planet.

But we're not even close. Even in pre-pandemic times, we were far from achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 – universal energy for all. The pandemic has pushed us further from this goal. And with just over nine years to go, there is an urgent need to pull together every country and corporation to make bold and ambitious commitments to support a just and human-centred energy transition.

The scale of the challenge

In Africa alone, 570 million people live without access to electricity, and close to a billion people lack access to clean cooking solutions. This energy poverty impacts every aspect of what it means for people to live a modern, dignified life.

For instance, without access to electricity, health centres cannot provide appropriate levels of service to the populations they serve, which can mean the difference between life and death. In sub-Saharan Africa, 60 per cent of all health centres do not have access to electricity. Of the ones that do, only 34 per cent of hospitals and 28 per cent of health clinics have reliable access. This impacts the safe storage of vaccines and medicines, and the running of life-saving equipment like ventilators. Globally, half of all vaccines are ruined owing to lack of refrigerated storage facilities.

Schools that operate without reliable electricity face higher drop-out rates, especially among adolescent girls. Farmers who do not have adequate, temperature-controlled storage and transport facilities report higher post-harvest losses. Small businesses and entrepreneurs are unable to grow and increase profits owing to restricted hours of operations because of electricity constraints. In the absence of reliable power, many resort

to fossil fuel-based generators that come at a high price – economically, environmentally, and ultimately, socially as well.

Putting people at the centre of our efforts to achieve SDG 7 has the power to unlock multiple socio-economic benefits for regions in Asia and Africa that continue to grapple with the impacts of the pandemic.

So, how do we get there?

It starts with commitment

Recognizing that the clean energy transition is tied to the achievement of several SDGs, this September, the United Nations High-level Dialogue on Energy will include a global call to action in the form of Energy Compacts providing an opportunity for countries and corporations to express commitments to accelerate the deployment of clean energy solutions. These commitments will continue to be updated throughout the current Decade of Action to ensure action that will put us on a trajectory towards achieving the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

But we need adequate financing

Commitments won't amount to much unless they're backed by political will, inclusive planning approaches, and most importantly, finance, in order to move towards action. The Energy Compacts include an opportunity for developed countries and organizations to offer support for developing countries as part of their commitment to a clean, equitable energy transition.

To achieve universal energy access, we need an investment of at least USD 45 billion annually until 2030. We need stronger ambition to drive this volume of financing. And we need to ensure that the right solutions receive finance to support the faster delivery of clean energy solutions to achieve our net-zero agenda.

We cannot do this alone

During my time at the Lagos State Electricity Board as well as with the Federal Government of Nigeria, I saw first-hand the kind of impact electrifying economies can have on people and communities. Countries like Nigeria have made immense strides in closing the access gap, but much more needs to be done to help grow the economy and lift people out of poverty, while at the same time ensure a sustainable future for our planet.

We cannot keep speaking to developing countries like this is a problem they need to solve and looking to developed countries like they have all the solutions. We're all in this together and we all need each other. No country or organization is going to be able to solve the climate crisis alone. The pandemic has shown us why energy access is so critical for countries to be able to respond effectively to crises like these.

Collaboration and partnerships across various levels is imperative if we are to deliver sustainable energy for all which will generate multiple benefits.

Young people are the energy leaders of tomorrow

While we need the participation of all countries and organizations to push towards a just and inclusive energy transition, we must include young people as part of this process. I recently had the opportunity to speak to a group of young entrepreneurs in Lagos, Nigeria. I always come away from interactions like these inspired by the enthusiasm and resolve of the younger generation. This energy needs to be leveraged in our fight for a just, equitable and sustainable world. Young people need to be given the opportunities and skills to further progress and develop energy leaders of the future.

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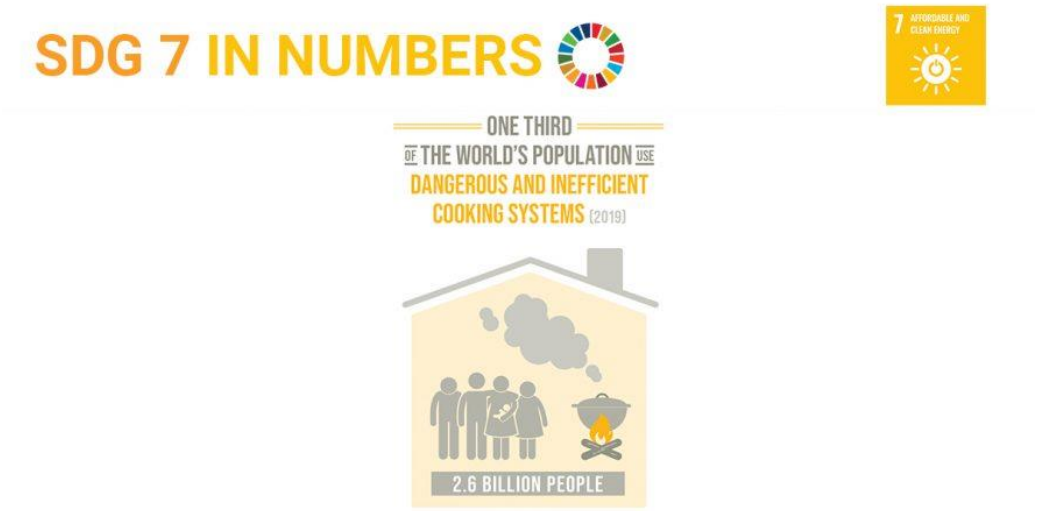

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