

SDG 7 interventions

UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development 2018

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Session 1: Intervention by Sascha Gabizon on Energy

Dear participants, I am Sascha Gabizon of WECF. We have a large EU funded program on SDGs, energy efficiency and renewable energy in rural areas, in 10 EECCA countries. I am speaking here as Women's Major Group and The Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism of the UNECE SDG process. Yesterday during CSO forum and workshops on SDG7, myself and my colleague from Latvia, were asked to give our input to this roundtable.

First of all, I would like to note that as this is the regional forum reviewing all of SDG7 in the region, we understand that a focus is given to SDG target 7.3 on energy efficiency. Maybe because it is the only target that is measurable, as it asks to double energy efficiency till 2030?

Energy efficiency can indeed reduce our current air pollution, and fast. As we heard from mr. Betnerbusch. But we – and UNECE - should not be afraid to also address the sticky issues of phasing out coal as soon as possible, phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, banning diesel cars and phasing out nuclear industry. We will address that in the next session.

The CSOs want to highlight that energy efficiency is very important especially in the EECCA region, where the need is very great. We want to recall that the energy sector is one of biggest polluters. Air pollution from coal fired power-plants, diesel cars and industry kills 600.000 people each year in our region according to WHO and UNEP. In the countries where we work, each year hundreds of children die from indoor air pollution. The situation is worst in rural areas.

I recently visited a college in rural areas of Georgia, where I met a 3-year-old child in kindergarten (which in winter has tape around the windows to avoid heat from escaping, there was no air) with tears in their eyes from the smoke from the lack of air and smoking wood stoves. We see the same in the other countries in the region. A terrible situation, and which can be improved immediately with low cost measures.

Now back to energy efficiency. All case studies have focused on lighthouse projects with cities and industries. My CSO colleague from Latvia will speak about that. Energy prices are high. Large parts of rural pop. are not connected to gas network.

I would like to share some good practise from our programs in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine where we focussed on those most left behind – low income households in rural areas. Where families only partly have a gas-connection, and many heat their homes in winter with firewood, waste or coal.

Our CLEEN program (Civil society Energy Efficiency Network), where we work with 100 CSOs and 100 local authorities, CSOs who have been doing awareness raising with youth, schools and households have reached 300000 people with tips on energy efficiency. We have help local partners to create 4 local energy companies, so called “cooperatives”, and have trained over 200 technical experts on insulation measures, e.g. windows, ceilings, where you have the greatest efficiency increase with the lowest cost. And at the same time, solar water heaters and efficient stoves can be installed, to reduce fossil fuel consumption.

The technical experts trained are 40% women. And the energy companies have set themselves as target to have 40% women at all levels in boards, as staff. The results are amazing, with a reducing of 30% of energy use and also 30% of energy costs. And that is what is the best marketing for the rural households; that in the end they can heat more rooms in their homes at a lower cost than before, when they could only heat 1 room during the winter.

In Georgia, we are working with the government and we have developed a National Appropriate Mitigation Action which has been submitted to the UNFCCC and donors to fund small subsidies to cover 30% of the cost of the insulation and solar water heaters, the rest is paid by the households. We cooperate with micro finance banks to provide the remaining 200-500 euros as loans.

Session 2: Intervention by [...?]

Dear Chairperson, dear excellences, participants, I speak on behalf of the workers major group within the UNECE Civil Society Engagement Mechanism, and I represent the Pan-European Regional Council of the International Trade Union Confederation, which brings together trade union centres from Europe and Central Asia region.

We strongly support the target to achieve coal-free energy and eventually fossil-fuel free energy. We support development of sustainable green energy, the sector that has a big potential for job creation in our region. However, we also agree that it is not enough to formulate ambitions in terms of target figures and dates; there is a need to manage transition in a responsible, inclusive and transparent manner.

Vulnerable workplaces and communities require an organised phase-out. Just transition, the key requirement of the Paris Agreement, is an economy-wide process that produces plans, policies and investments that lead to a future where all jobs are green and decent, emission are at net zero, poverty is eradicated, and communities are thriving and resilient. Just transition foresees social dialogue between governments, workers and employers to build trust and drive effective transformation.

Despite the recognition of a just transition in Paris, there are still only few plans for handling social transition away from fossil-fuel-dependent society. Rather than responding to social justice concerns, politicians are still captive of the wealth and influence of the fossil-fuel companies. That has to be changed, and there are already good examples from some of the cities, that just transition is possible.

We call to:

- Invest in jobs – to develop policies that promote decent work, including fundamental workers’ rights and occupational health and safety, in new green energy sectors; the employment of women in the renewable energy sector is low and efforts to improve women’s participations are necessary.
- Respect contribution that workers in fossil-fuel industries have made to today’s prosperity and provide them with income support, retraining and redeployment opportunities, as well as secure pensions for older workers;
- Make sure that social protection schemes are adequate, human rights are respected and no one is “sacrificed” for the bigger Good;
- Develop active labour market policies, including vocational education and training and skills building for workers concerned;
- Invest in community renewal and economic diversification to gain hope and trust of regions and townships at the forefront of the energy transition;
- Support innovation and technology sharing to enable a rapid transformation of energy;
- Ensure involvement of workers, businesses and communities in the sectoral plans for transforming megacities;
- Promote and exercise genuine social dialog on the level of sector, territory or nation, including collective bargaining with workers and their unions for workplace changes, resource productivity and skills development.

Goal 7 is closely interlinked with other SDGs and equally is dependent on their progress, particularly, 1 (no poverty and social protection), 3 (good health), 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 9 (industrial innovations and infrastructure), 10 (reduced inequalities), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 13 (climate action) and 16 (peace, justice and institutions). Chair, in conclusion, I would like to repeat: energy renewal is possible, if it is implemented in a well-governed and inclusive way.

Session 2: Intervention by Olga Djanaeva

Thank you Chair, my name is Olga Djanaeva from the Rural women’s association Alga from Kyrgyzstan. I speak on behalf of the Women’s Major Group and as part of the UNECE Civil Society Engagement Mechanism.

In my organisation we work with over 2000 local women and men, in 10 rural communities on empowering women. We have just completed a statistical survey amongst 800 local women and men, on SDG 5, SDG7 and SDG6. What appeared is that bad housing conditions, including lack of safe energy, is a main barrier to women’s empowerment. Women carry the burden of unpaid care and domestic work. They often work 4 times more unpaid hours than the men in their households to ensure access to energy for cooking, heating and washing. There is a need to create incentives for local companies and households to generate sustainable energy themselves.

With our NGO partners BIOM and CAWS we have demonstrated how rural households can shift to renewable energy. For example, how to set up energy cooperatives which construct solar-water-heaters and energy-efficient-stoves. But we lack a national strategy to create sustainable energy cooperatives across all rural areas. It means the withdrawal of laws that limit decentralization. We need to decentralise and to regionalise energy production and distribution, empowering the role of local communities especially in rural areas.

International banks and donors have also not focused on this area. Therefore in winter, energy poverty is severe. Families often live all winter in one room where they live and sleep, and spend a large share of their income on firewood. Or worse, they will burn plastic waste, creating indoor air pollution including with dioxin emissions.

So there is a need to tackle energy poverty. It is not about exchanging subsidies for industries for subsidies for households, as some governments happily reported. Governments are responsible for making energy affordable for citizens. Programs for women's economic empowerment are key, whilst ensuring decent wages, fair taxation and income redistribution. Energy on market prices will not be affordable for people, as their salaries are too low to pay the bills.

Finally we want to mention that, nuclear energy is not an alternative. It is an industry of extreme risk, which produces eternal waste, and should also be phased out, like coal and oil, in a strategic, planned way that would also require a just transition and engagement of social partners and other stakeholders

We need to pioneer and develop new approaches to energy generation, which require investments and innovations. The investments in development of sustainable energy are vital, and not the investments in pipelines, coal plants and also nuclear plants. There is a need for technology-sharing, particularly with countries in our part of the region.

And in conclusion, I would like to highlight the need to approach hydro-energy in a strategic way, as in Central Asia water resources are in the centre of geopolitical interests and well-being of our societies is depended on the ability of political leaders to discuss and to find solutions that are above selfish national interests.

Thank you