Key note speech

by

M. Gyan Chandra Acharya

Under-Secretary-General
High Representative
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States

Ministerial Meeting on New partnerships for Productive Capacity Building in the Least Developed Countries,
Session 4 on Energy

Cotonou, Benin
28 July 2014
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Talking about productive capacity would make no sense without discussing energy. This is also recognised in the Istanbul Programme of Action, where energy is highlighted as one of the Priority Areas.

Furthermore, last year's High-Level Event on Sustainable Energy for LDCs in New York outlined the importance of energy for eradicating poverty, building productive capacity and climate change.

This is true because energy is more than just a sector. Energy is an enabler, development multiplier and as the UN Secretary General has said the golden thread connecting three pillars of sustainable development.

Energy is indispensable for job creation, health, food security, access to clean water, education, a clean environment, gender equality and women’s empowerment. In short, real transformation cannot happen without energy. And sustainable development is not possible without sustainable energy.

This is why the General Assembly has declared 2014-2024 as the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All. In doing so, the UN Member States have also decided that least developed countries should receive a special focus throughout the decade.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to launch the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All to the LDCs here today.

We have ten crucial years ahead of us. Let's make them count.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Out of the 1.3 billion people that lack access to electricity worldwide, more than half live in least developed countries. Vulnerable countries such as LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, and especially the least developed countries, face the most daunting energy challenges.

Currently, more than 70 % percent of people in LDCs lack access to electricity. Energy access rates are lowest in the rural areas of African LDCs where less than 10 % percent of the population have access to electricity.

Globally, 2.6 billion rely on wood or other biomass to cook and heat their homes. And again, access to modern and clean cooking stoves is especially limited in the least developed countries. These numbers are particularly concerning knowing that exposure to smoke from cooking is the fourth worst risk factor for disease in developing countries today. It causes four million premature deaths per year, which is a higher number than deaths attributable to malaria or tuberculosis. In addition, tens of millions more fall sick with illnesses that could easily be prevented with increased adoption of clean and efficient cooking solutions.

The UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All gives us an opportunity to come together to improve this situation. The first two years of the Decade will have a special focus on Energy, Women, Children and Health.
Overall, the Decade is our chance to take action and seek new projects and partnerships. Governments can create the conditions that make partners want to invest their time and capital. We know that the interest is there.

The Decade does also mean an opportunity to showcase success stories, best practices, lessons learned, commitments and achievements. Energy transitions take time, but the many encouraging examples can inspire others to follow suit.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my role as the High-Representative of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, I serve on the Advisory Board of the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) initiative, Co-Chaired by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and World Bank President Jim Yong Kim. The two institutions enjoy a unique partnership in the context of SE4All.

Launched by the Secretary-General in 2012, the SE4All initiative has three objectives to be achieved by 2030:

- Ensure universal access to modern energy services,
- Double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency,
- Double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.

These three targets are mutually reinforcing. Studies have showed that it is more feasible to achieve all three jointly than it would be to pursue any one of the objectives individually.

My office is also working on how we can take this global policy direction to the national level, how investment could be promoted even in LDCs on this issue in an accelerated and sustained manner, and how best practices in LDCs can be replicated in other LDCs. I think this is doable and there is a strong willingness on the part of LDCs.

Experts deem that if the right conditions are in place, the three objectives are fully achievable by 2030. The objectives are also compatible with the target of keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius as compared to pre-industrial levels. As such, sustainable energy will also be high on the agenda when world leaders gather for the Climate Summit in New York on 23 September this year.

In addition to being good for the environment, renewable energy and energy efficiency do also have less spoken about benefits: Renewable energy and energy efficiency are also part of the key to ensuring universal energy access.

Renewable energy can provide mini-grid solutions for rural and remote areas off the larger grid. As we know, these are the areas where energy poverty is worst. About 80% of those without access to modern energy live in rural areas.

Looking at energy efficiency, in Sub-Saharan Africa alone, the annual amount of gas flared is equivalent to half the continent’s power consumption. In partnership with the private sector, SE4All is working to reduce this waste.

These are only two of many compelling examples of how renewable energy and energy efficiency
can also help towards ensuring energy access. It shows how the three target tracks are leading towards the same goal: sustainable energy for all.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset of this Decade, thousands of SE4All partners from all regions stand ready to support. Together - governments, the private sector, civil society, and international organisations can do a lot.

From the government side, 35 least developing countries have opted in to the SE4All initiative. Some countries are already starting to develop concrete SE4All Country Action Plans and Investment Prospectuses. These efforts are supported by SE4All hubs in the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

We will hear and learn more about this shortly.

Such common efforts will help us rally to reach for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the end of next year. But as you will know, energy as such was not part of the MDGs. It has often been referred to as ‘the missing MDG’.

It is therefore very encouraging to see that energy is now very centrally placed in the current debates around the world’s future Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

In fact, as I left New York to travel here, the General Assembly’s Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals had just concluded its work. Amongst its proposals for goals, is a goal on energy. The suggested targets are fully compatible with the SE4All objectives.

As these deliberations continue, it is crucial that we maintain the momentum by keeping energy as an integral part of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

A global goal on sustainable energy will help ensure the long-term predictability needed by different stakeholders and partners. From there on, we can continue to build a long-term global framework to ensure the necessary attention, resource mobilisation and implementation. This will also support the progress at national level, where strong political commitment, cross-sectorial sustainable energy strategies and action plans, as well as financing, are needed to ensure rapid transformation.

This way, we can keep the momentum going. This we, we can ensure that the work carries on.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

No one knows better than your countries and peoples how much energy can mean in striving for development. No one knows better how much of an obstacle energy poverty can be.

At the outset of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All here today, let us therefore take this opportunity to get the message out, loud and clear:
Ensuring sustainable energy for all is crucial for building productive capacity, poverty eradication and sustainable development. Sustainable energy should continue to be a top priority for the least developed countries.

I thank you.