Keynote address
by
Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu

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

Remarks at the Project Launch Event:
“Sustainable Investment Study in Malawi

Venue: BICC

Lilongwe, Malawi
7 February 2019
9:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.
Ms Banda, Chief Director, Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mining, 
H E Ambassador Ligoya, Permanent Representative of Malawi to the UN & Global Chair of LDCs. 
Excellencies, Distinguished Heads of Missions, 
Ms Maria Torres Macho, Resident Coordinator & Colleagues, 
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost, my sincere thank you and appreciation to the Government of Malawi for your hospitality and warm welcome. I also wish to thank the Government of China for its financial support for this meeting and my colleagues at UNDP. I am honored to share with you my opening remarks at this project launch event. I am a staunch supporter of all of us to partner and accelerate Malawi’s progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 7: access to energy.

As you know, a key task of OHRLLS is to advocate for the 91 vulnerable countries, with a total of about 1.2 billion population of our shared planet. The issues are very diverse but three groups can be distinguished: least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states. Malawi finds itself in two groups: least developed and landlocked country groups.

Access to energy remains a major challenge for all 91 vulnerable countries that my office represents. It is a very critical issue because access to clean energy is closely linked to poverty eradication, climate change, health, education, water and overall structural and economic transformation.

We all want healthy children, educated girls, inclusive and productive societies. We want to effectively address climate change. After all these are basic human rights. But to get there, we must look at sustainable energy as a means for realizing inclusive and sustainable development.

The global community 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and more specifically SDG 7, aim at precisely doing that. SDG 7 is to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all by 2030 with emphasis on efficiency gains and renewables. It also makes a special reference to expanding infrastructure and upgrading technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services, in particular in the least developed countries. In turn, the Paris Climate Change Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda also underline the importance of sustainable energy and map out necessary actions. Energy is also referred to under “productive capacities”, as one of the eight priority areas for action of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, 
Yes, global efforts drawing attention to energy access as part of larger development frameworks are abundant. But the situation remains daunting in least developed countries. Only 44.8 per cent of people in LDCs have access to electricity. In Malawi, the numbers for access to electricity are even lower. This means that urgent action is needed. We must ask ourselves how we can better work with least developed countries, like Malawi, to achieve SDG7 by 2030.

As I said before, OHRLLS places very high priority on promoting sustainable energy in vulnerable countries for all the reasons already mentioned. OHRLLS has brought together
the leaders and policy makers from these countries to discuss the challenges they face in enhancing their energy access. It has clearly emerged from these discussions that the national ownership and political will for energy transition is there, and these countries are eager to scale-up and speed-up their energy initiatives.

As they say, “where there is a way, there is a will” so we have the will, but what is holding us back? I see two issues, capacity and finance.

Access to finance remains a key challenge for LDCs. The main constraints for accessing finance for expanding modern energy include lack of scale, lack of substantial local investment, institutional capacity constraints, poor or non-existent credit ratings to name a few.

On the capacity front, sub-optimal project preparation capacities and skills prevail. Of course if you cannot prepare bankable projects and show implementation capacity, there is an issue.

And this brings me back to Malawi.

Malawi is endowed with various renewable energy sources. Malawi has made progress in adopting and implementing national renewable energy strategies. Yet further and faster efforts are needed in creating enabling environment and regulatory frameworks, scaling up existing initiatives, establishing new partnerships, adopting new technologies and gaining better access to financing. This also implies strengthened regional collaboration for energy security, and as a tool to trigger needed economies of scales to attract investments.

Today’s launch event is all about DOING. It signals the kickoff for a practicable investment study assessing how to increase investment in sustainable energy. The study will articulate how Malawi can attract and generate the required investment to achieve SDG7 and leapfrog to clean energy.

The investment study must be able to provide an approach for operationalizing national sustainable energy plans and strategies towards achieving SDG 7. It must identify a set of implementable programmes and projects, including their investment requirements, that can then be presented to potential private and public investors. Its purpose is to crowd-in investments, to accelerate sustainable energy transition by combining different investment opportunities in one package, as well as enhancing an enabling environment.

Many of you may ask how this study will be different from the ones already carried out. Will it just be another study ending up in the shelf or drawer? How can we ensure that this investment study will lead to increased access to electricity?

First, we do not have the time nor resources to fail. We must ensure that the citizens of Malawi are heard and above all are included in that tremendous opportunity space that access to energy provides.

My Office and the entire UN system stands ready to support Malawi in the implementation of the investment study. There is one certainty, if we want results, we must partner. So I am very happy to see the presence of development partners, civil society and representatives of international organisations and development banks. We are in this together. Your presence
this morning serves as a positive acknowledgment of the importance of the broad alliance of stakeholders that is needed to support Malawi in its energy transition.

My message is that SDG7 in Malawi is within reach. Let us together We must step up and we need urgent action. With us is a highly skilled team of technical experts from Rocky Mountain Institute to work with the Government authorities on this project. The 2030 Agenda is about our collective vision to leave no one behind. It is our responsibility to work together and forge even stronger partnerships for one goal, ensuring that the energy transition reaches everybody and that includes the poorest and most vulnerable communities.

Once again, energy is catalytic in development. Energy access is a basic human right paving way to improved health, education, means of production and gender equality and I could go on. I urge that the investment study will also take into consideration these aspects and find solutions to improve access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking.

I look forward to listening to you and to an enriching and action focused discussion.

Thank you for your kind attention.