HLPF 2019 High-level Side event on
Scaling-Up Energy Transition in Small Island Developing States
17 July 2019, 1.15 – 2.30 PM
New York, UNHQ, Conference Room F

Concept Note

A side event organized by Saint Lucia, Samoa, Maldives, the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

Objective

This high-level side event will mark the launch of the policy brief on “Achieving SDG 7 in Small Island Developing States” and pave the way for the Mid-term Review of the SAMOA Pathway taking place in September 2019. It will take stock of recent developments with respect to energy transition and renewable energy uptake in SIDS. The side event will also explore the energy climate nexus and take a look at what are the vital elements in making progress in the area of sustainable energy, which would contribute to the overall sustainable development of SIDS in the remaining 5 years of the Samoa Pathway.

Background

Small island developing states (SIDS) face additional geographic barriers to economic as well as sustainable energy development. SIDS generally rely heavily on imported fossil fuels for both transportation and electricity generation, while their remoteness poses logistical and financial challenges to trade. The disproportionate reliance on fossil fuels in SIDS renders them highly vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices and directly results in these nations having some of the highest electricity tariffs in the world. This leads to higher costs of living for families and increases in the cost of doing business.

At the same time, SIDS have the potential to access several renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, geothermal, hydropower and tidal power, and have the potential to transition to renewable energy by adopting national renewable energy strategies, building the enabling environment, scaling up existing initiatives, establishing new partnerships, adopting new technologies and gaining better access to financing. Moreover, many SIDS have vast opportunities to decrease their electricity peak demand by improving generation, transmission and demand-side efficiency through the introduction of standards and labelling schemes (e.g. buildings, appliances, lighting, technical and economic losses).

“SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway” identifies sustainable energy as one of the priority areas for action acknowledging that dependence on imported fossil fuels has been a major source of economic vulnerability and a key challenge for SIDS for many decades and that sustainable energy, including enhanced
accessibility to modern energy services, energy efficiency and use of economically viable and environmentally sound technology, plays a critical role in enabling the sustainable development of SIDS.

Many SIDS are emerging as frontrunners in the pursuit of renewables-based energy systems building on the abundant local and natural resources. Also, the declining cost of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies has opened the door for new opportunities to switch to clean energy.

Sustainable energy is a powerful development multiplier and accelerating progress in sustainable energy in SIDS will have an impact across different sectors, including most of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. For SIDS, climate and energy are inextricably linked. On one hand, the energy sector is the largest contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions, which in turn have contributed to increasing global temperatures and many adverse effects in SIDS. On the other hand, exploitation of the abundant natural renewable energy resources in SIDS can contribute to enhancing energy security and build their resilience, as well as to the achievement of SDG 7, 13 and overall sustainable development. It is critically important to look at the energy climate nexus therefore, with a view to exploring integrated approaches to policy development across relevant sectors.

In 2017, the proportion of population with access to electricity in SIDS was 82%, a small increase from 78% in 2014. The disparities between urban and rural and remote areas remain wide and in 2017, 95% of urban population had access compared to 61% of rural population. Many SIDS are working towards transitioning to more sustainable energy sectors, where improved energy efficiency and renewable energy play an increasing role. In 2016, 17.6% of the electricity in SIDS was derived from renewable sources. However, a large part of this is still from hydropower and to an even greater extent the traditional use of solid biofuels (mainly for cooking).

To achieve the global goals on energy in SIDS, it will be essential to act fast to create enabling environments for private sector investment and to promote attractive project pipelines. This will require well-functioning institutions, and policy and regulatory reforms to help build credibility with investors and effectively scale up private investment, leveraging public resources for country-level implementation. SIDS also need more targeted support from their development partners for building institutional capacity to design and implement long-term energy policy and accelerate project preparation to fast-track progress.

This high-level side event will mark the launch of the policy brief on “Achieving SDG 7 in Small Island Developing States” and pave the way for the Mid-term Review of the SAMOA Pathway taking place in September 2019. It will take stock of recent developments with respect to energy transition and renewable energy uptake in SIDS by discussing and presenting best practices and successful initiatives. The side event will also explore what are the vital elements in making progress in the area of sustainable energy in the remaining 5 years of the Samoa Pathway.

Key questions to be discussed at the side event include:

- What are the key building blocks for successful energy transition in SIDS?
- What type of energy investment is needed most acutely? What are the main challenges for accessing finance to accelerate renewable energy uptake?
- What are the best means to build institutional capacity in SIDS to plan for long-term energy sector development and create synergies with climate change action?
- What are the challenges and best practices for enhancing the role of private sector partnerships in promoting renewable energy initiatives in SIDS?
- What are the vital elements in making progress in the area of sustainable energy in the remaining 5 years of the Samoa Pathway?