

High-Level Dialogue

Pandemic Response and Recovery and Africa's Energy Transformation

Wednesday, 20 May 2020

Background Note

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented global emergency that is affecting health, economies and livelihoods of billions of people. While the pandemic has reached almost every country, the crisis is only starting to unfold in Africa. The pandemic exposed all nations' fragilities, but there is no doubt that it is affecting vulnerable communities and countries disproportionately.

As the health and humanitarian crisis unfolds, the pandemic is multiplying the already-existing risks and vulnerabilities of the African energy sector. Fragile energy security situation will severely impede many African nations' ability to cope with the health crisis and economic downturn. Moreover, access to modern energy services remains a major challenge across Sub-Saharan Africa, with around 548 million people still having no access to power and 894 million lacking access to modern clean cooking solutions.

The immediate priority for the African continent remains to save lives, bring the health emergency under control and alleviate associated economic hardship. But the recovery measures adopted in the face of COVID-19 must also address long-term development deficits and create resilient economies and societies, with a central role for locally available renewable energy resources.

Endowed with immense renewable energy resources, Africa has already embarked on a transformative energy pathway. Accelerating progress in this regard can alleviate immediate energy challenges, while creating jobs, advancing industrial development and promoting human welfare. The International Renewable Energy Agency's (IRENA) Global Renewables Outlook 2020 report revealed that Africa could meet about 23% of all its energy needs from renewable energy by 2030, with Sub-Saharan Africa being one of the regions with highest shares of renewable energy in total primary energy supply in 2030 (43%). Energy transformation in Africa would result in multiple socio-economic benefits.

Renewable energy deployment could result in up to additional 2 million green jobs created in sub-Saharan Africa. Renewables-based energy system would yield a positive impact in the GDP gains in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is attributable to a strong increase in net energy exports.

Against this backdrop, the African Union Commission (AUC) and IRENA are organising a virtual Ministerial Dialogue bringing together Governments, development partners and regional and multilateral institutions to consider actions needed to advance a transformation of the energy systems in Africa, given the latest developments and national experiences in the face of COVID-19.

Objective

With a view to improving the continent's resilience and stimulating economic recovery and sustainable growth in the post-pandemic period, the discussion will offer a platform for African governments and development partners to reflect on effective means for reinforcing action towards accelerating the ongoing energy transformation in Africa, in light of Africa's Agenda 2063 goals and alignment of the pandemic response with the sustainable development and climate objectives.

Guiding questions

1. How is the African energy sector feeling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how are African institutions and governments responding to it?
2. What instruments exist and/or could be developed by development partners and international institutions to support African energy sector's response to the current pandemic and how fast can they be deployed? Which ones can be accessed now and after the pandemic?
3. What lessons are being learned and how can these lessons help the continent be better prepared and promote energy transition?