

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Vienna Energy Forum

‘Energy Access’ Session

Wednesday 29 May 2013, 14:30 – 16:00

Remarks by Mary Robinson, President, Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice

We are entering a key period in the framing of the post-2015 development agenda with the report from the High Level Panel due to be presented to the UN Secretary-General in just two days, the thematic consultation process nearing completion, and preparations for the special event on the MDGs in September at which time the UN Secretary-General will present his vision for the post-2015 development agenda. At the same time there has been renewed emphasis on issues relating to access to energy: The Sustainable Energy for All initiative will facilitate action on sustainable energy development globally between now and 2030, and the United Nations General Assembly has declared the decade 2014-2024 the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All.

However, all of these processes, all of the policy-making and all of the consulting will be meaningless unless it results in tangible benefits for the 1.3 billion currently without access to electricity, and for the 2.7 billion who rely on traditional biomass fuels for cooking and heating. Specifically, we must target our efforts at those at the bottom of the economic pyramid, those who have little or no disposable income and will not benefit from market based initiatives to improve access to sustainable energy.

- Who here has spent four hours each day securing firewood for our household and cooking needs?
- How many of us have had our education, and our ambitions, curtailed by the fall of night?
- Who among us has given birth in darkness?

All of us here today know that energy is inextricably linked to the major global challenges of our time: poverty, food security, access to clean water, public health, education, economic growth and climate change. We know that access to sustainable forms of energy has the potential to transform lives and is critical to addressing each of these challenges.

Efforts to integrate energy into the post-2015 development framework must ensure that we address the critical question of scale. How do we scale up in order to meet the energy demands of those without access to energy? While there is no silver bullet, my colleagues at the Mary Robinson Foundation, and I, are of the opinion that social protection systems have the potential to deliver access to sustainable energy on a much greater scale than heretofore. Our approach, a climate justice approach, is informed by the belief that all have a right to development. Our challenge is to bridge the vast gulf in resources between rich and poor, both within and between countries, in a climate-constrained world. The issue of access to energy brings that challenge into sharp focus and the reality is that we are failing in our efforts to deliver energy to the very poorest. Market-based solutions alone will not enable us to achieve our objective of universal access to modern energy services.

Social protection systems have already identified the people who are poorest and most vulnerable and, as a result, whose energy needs are greatest. They have the delivery mechanisms in place to meet multiple policy objectives across different sectors; health, food security and energy.

In a May 2012 ‘thematic think-piece’, the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda wrote:

‘In view of the multiple roles that social protection can play in social and economic development, the post-2015 framework should contain an objective that ensures the inclusion of all groups in development and society through extending adequate social protection.’

The development of a social protection floor at international level provides a unique opportunity to link energy provision with efforts to combat inequality, vulnerability and poverty. We have shared our idea with the World Bank, who brought their Social Protection

and Energy divisions together for the first time to discuss its potential, and are currently exploring the viability of initiating pilot programmes.

As a member of the Advisory Board of the Sustainable Energy for All initiative I will work to ensure the initiative reaches its goals on universal access, energy efficiency and renewable energies. Key to this will be the use of targeted approaches to reach the poorest in society.

We are all familiar with the satellite image of the African continent in darkness. It serves as a stark reminder of the realities of poverty and of our collective failure to ensure fairness in the distribution of resources, technologies and knowledge. Yet, we know that addressing the energy needs of the poorest and most vulnerable is not beyond our collective capabilities.

It will require increased investment in low-carbon technologies in addition to the reallocation of existing financial resources. It will require education on the value of access to affordable forms of sustainable energy and the consequent benefits in the areas of health, education and the empowerment of women. Above all, it requires a sense of urgency and a willingness, at the political level, to tackle the critical issue of scale.

I urge those of you drawn from the energy and investment communities to connect with your colleagues in government, international agencies and NGOs working on social protection. Working together you can realise the ambition of Sustainable Energy for All.