



# Regional approaches to energy access in Africa

Village receiving electricity from microhydro power plant in East Africa.

Ray Holland and Lucius Mayer-Tasch, text | GTZ archive, photos

In the 90 percent of rural sub-Saharan Africa that depends on traditional biomass energy for energy supplies, even modest improvements in access to modern energy services can have a big impact. The major question is: how can access to modern energy services be improved on the huge scale needed to attain the Millennium Development Goals by 2015? Action to promote access to energy at national level is key but must be complemented by regional activities.

**A**fter a long period of neglect, energy is finally back on the agenda of governments, international organisations and the development scene in Africa. With more and more donors willing to provide resources for energy infrastructure and energy access in sub-



Saharan Africa, there is a need to integrate access to modern energy services into national plans such as Poverty Reduction Strategies, to develop policies and strategies and identify good projects. This wave has also prompted regional organisations to reach agreement on ways to

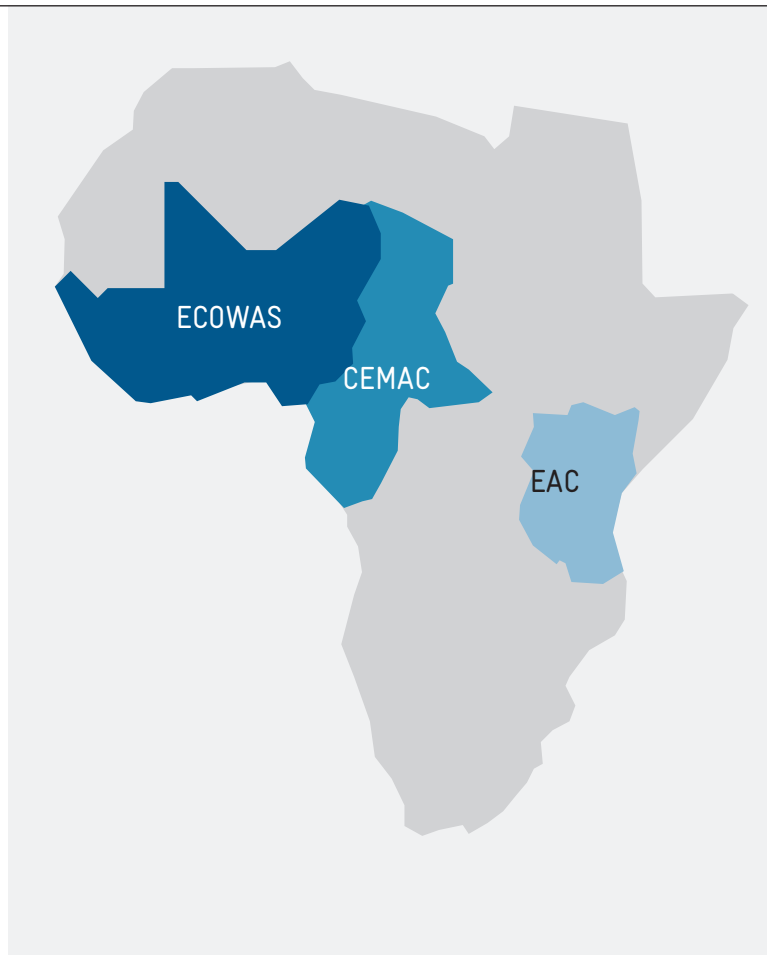
improve energy access. But what role can regional organisations play here?

In 2002, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) proposed that regional organisations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the

ECOWAS: Economic  
Community of West  
African States

CEMAC:  
Communauté  
Economique et  
Monétaire de  
l'Afrique Centrale

EAC: East African  
Community



Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC) or the East African Community (EAC), play a key role in increasing access to modern energy services. NEPAD set a target for providing access to electricity for 35 percent of the population of Africa by 2015 and modern energy for cooking such as improved stoves or fuels like Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) to half the population. Since then, all of these regional organisations have developed strategies or action plans, such as the ECOWAS/UEMOA White Paper on Energy Access, the EAC Energy Access Strategy and the CEMAC Action Plan for Promotion of Energy Access (all adopted in 2006). These regional strategies are aimed at addressing the following four targets: 1. Providing modern energy for cooking to at least half the population; 2. Energy for urban and peri-urban areas; 3. Energy for social services like energy for lighting, refrigeration and water pumping; 4. Energy for productive use, particularly motive power for milling and other crop processing.

### The role of regional organisations

These targets have been adopted by all the member states of the regional organisations concerned, and it is primarily up to their governments to take action to achieve them. However, by acting together as regional organisations, the countries are able to provide solidarity and mutual support.

At present, none of the regional organisations has much capacity in energy access at Secretariat/Commission level, but in response to demand from their member states they have now all succeeded in putting energy access on the agenda and gaining political commitment. The regional organisations are now building their capacity to address common energy-related development concerns of their member states, harmonise policies and strategies and share experience.

### Creating a regional market

The first step in regional integration is usually economic integra-

tion, and the regional organisations of sub-Saharan Africa share the objective of developing common regional markets. This process needs to be led by regional organisations and can make a significant contribution to increased access to energy. Creating an enabling environment for intra-regional trade in energy-related products and services as well as imports from outside the region is clearly something that requires regional agreement. Reduced import duties and uniform standards for products such as solar panels and the creation of a common, bigger market for fuels, equipment and energy services can help bring about price reductions for consumers and improved services. Furthermore, regional markets allow local enterprises such as stove producers to benefit from economies of scale and facilitate trade of wood and charcoal between deficit and surplus areas. This may be complemented by harmonised subsidy schemes for rural electrification and by the transfer of successful business models to provide modern energy services to the poor (the energy access strategy for EAC puts particular emphasis on proven business models).

### Ensuring regional power supply

Many parts of Africa currently suffer from a lack of generating capacity, which poses a threat to their energy security and restricts energy access. The current power shortage in East Africa, due among other things to historically low water levels of Lake Victoria, is a case in point. The power crisis has led to load shedding as well as costly investments in private gensets and expensive diesel generation for the grid. These problems can be mitigated by joint development of energy resources and increased cross-border trade in electricity. The regional power pools that have gradually been established in all regions of Africa are playing a crucial role in laying the basis for cost-effective regional electricity supply

and successful grid extension programmes in rural and peri-urban areas. The large investment programmes needed are supported by the international financial institutions and the EU.

However, investment in major regional generation projects, interconnections and transmission lines alone will mainly benefit large industrial consumers and those already connected to the grid (e.g. urban elites). Such investments therefore need to be complemented by local investments in grid extension and off-grid access to energy.

### Exchange of experience and planning

Another important area for regional cooperation is the exchange of experience with energy access interventions, including best practices and lessons learnt. The regional organisations are therefore planning to provide a platform for exchange and joint learning for government officials, staff of rural energy agencies, NGOs, etc. This cooperation can help identify successful and cost-effective approaches for scaling up access to energy including successful business models, or public-private partnerships. The regional organisations will work closely with existing specialist national research and training institutions in this area, to provide regional services.

Collection of data across a region will facilitate regional



Participants of a regional workshop on the EAC Energy Access Strategy in Arusha

energy planning and enable monitoring of energy access indicators and targets. For instance, CEMAC is planning to establish a regional *Observatoire de l'Accès à l'Énergie* and wants to engage in coordinated regional hydro-power planning. The latter has been identified as a priority action by CEMAC, and since adoption of the strategy, the CEMAC secretariat and the member states have reviewed the existing data and defined the next steps with support from the EU Energy Initiative Partnership Dialogue Facility (EUEI PDF).

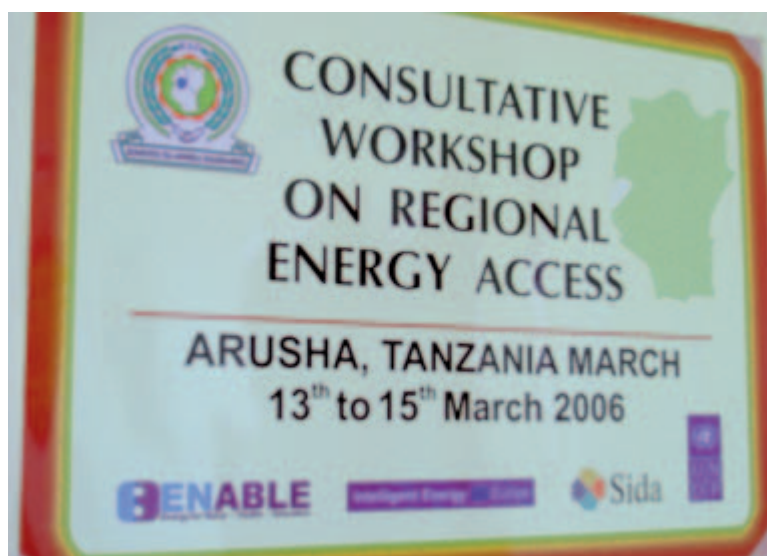
### Advocacy and fund mobilisation

The existence of a regional strategy provides a further argument for making more resources available for access programmes and

for important but neglected issues such as the household energy sector. In addition, it may facilitate the mobilisation of funds from bilateral and multilateral donors. This has the positive side-effect of making external support more coordinated and reducing transaction costs. These are all areas where the regional activities can clearly complement and help improve action at national level. However, the issue of subsidiarity deserves serious attention. In this respect, the EAC's access strategy is a positive example: while the Secretariat is expected to play a critical role in coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the strategy, the actual implementation is the responsibility of national governments and the private sector.

### Conclusion

The regional organisations have suddenly become new players in the game, and it remains to be seen how much of the good intentions will be put into practice. The fact that each of the three regional strategies has been taken up by the heads of state of the member states concerned is encouraging. In addition, there is some evidence of follow-up action. For instance, the CEMAC Secretariat, along with the ministries of energy and the utilities and the Central African Development Bank, has submitted a



proposal to the recent EU Energy Facility for countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) for co-funding of a peri-urban electrification programme that would connect 62,500 households to the grid. ECOWAS has developed a concept for a new Regional Agency for Energy Access (RAEA), and the EAC member states have drawn up action plans to kick-start their strategy. As these strategies get underway, there is an opportunity for the regional organisations to learn from each other in order to be more effective in jointly working for the achievement of the ambitious continental access targets as envisioned by NEPAD. New initiatives, such as the World Bank's Africa Energy Access Action Plan under the Clean Energy and Development Investment Framework, demonstrate that the issue of access to energy is now receiving serious attention from both donors and African decision-makers. ◀

Ray Holland and Lucius Mayer-Tasch work in the management unit of the EUEI Partnership Dialogue Facility based at GTZ headquarters in Eschborn, Germany.

EUEI PDF has supported the development of the CEMAC energy access action plan, the EAC access strategy as well as a study on the Regional Agency for Energy Access (RAEA) that is foreseen in the ECOWAS white paper.

Ray.Holland@gtz.de  
Lucius.Mayer-Tasch@gtz.de

### Documents on Regional Energy Access

- ECOWAS/UEMOA, White paper for a regional policy geared towards access to energy services for rural and periurban populations in order to achieve the Millenium Development Goals, Abuja/Dakar 2005
- \* ECOWAS/UEMOA/EUEI PDF, Study on the establishment of a West African Regional Agency for Energy Access (RAEA), Abuja/Dakar/Eschborn 2006
- \* EAC, Strategy on scaling up access to modern energy services in order to achieve the Millenium Development Goals, Arusha 2007
- \* CEMAC, Plan d'action pour la promotion de l'accès à l'énergie dans la région CEMAC, Bangui 2006

### Contact information:

EUEI Partnership Dialogue Facility (EUEI PDF)  
c/o Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)  
P.O. Box 5180  
65726 Eschborn, Germany  
Tel +49 61 96 79-7108  
Fax +49 61 96 79-80-7108  
Ray.Holland@gtz.de  
www.euei.org



Partnership Dialogue Facility (EUEI PDF)

This article has also been published in GTZ, Energising Sustainable Development – Concepts and Projects, Eschborn 2007.