

*Coordination of energy in Africa remains a challenge, but alignment possible;
summary conclusions from the AEEP side-event at the SE4ALL Forum.*

NEW YORK, 19 May 2015 – In the sidelines of the just concluded second forum of the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) forum in New York, the Africa EU Energy Partnership (AEEP), in collaboration with Practical Action, organized an “invite-only” strategic dialogue forum on coordination and harmonization of international energy initiatives in Africa. The goal of the session was to gather high-level representatives from international energy initiatives and European and African Commission representatives to initiate a dialogue and foster coherence among the plethora of Africa energy initiatives to be presented to COP21 and reveal synergies for cooperation.

Moderated by Mr. Simon Trace, Chief Executive Officer of Practical Action UK, the panelists were drawn from a mix of initiatives and institutions which included Aboubakari Baba Moussa, Director, Department of Infrastructure and Energy, Africa Union Commission, Roberto Ridolfi, Director, Sustainable Growth and Development, Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development, European Commission, Daniel Schroth, Coordinator, SE4ALL Africa Hub, Africa Development Bank, Pietro De Martin, Head of Office, DG Global issues, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Kate Steel, Energy Team Lead, US Power Africa.

“To ensure effective coordination of energy initiatives in Africa, principles of discipline, trust and honesty have to be taken on board”, Aboubakari Baba Moussa, Africa Union Commission.

“Inviting the US Power Africa and other multilateral players to this meeting is a clear signal that the EU is keen on coordination” Roberto Ridolfi, European Commission.

During the highly engaging discussions, all panelists and the audience acknowledged that there is a great need for coordination among initiatives and donors as far as interventions in Africa’s energy sector are concerned. At the same time, the difficulty in ensuring such coordination was discussed. This is due to the complex issues of the structure and the mechanisms needed. The two dimensions of coordination need to be borne in mind in promoting coordination.

Some key messages from the discussions include:

1. Although there is an urgent need for coordination of initiatives, the leadership efforts would have to be initiated by the host countries themselves. However, a mechanism for such a coordination to feed into existing regional and continental coordination systems was highly desired to avoid scattered individual state strategies with different partners;
2. The SE4All provides a unique framework for coordination to be fostered and that African countries and donors must take advantage of the systems and mechanism developed under the SE4All to coordinate their interventions;

3. It is important for African countries to have common rules of engagement in dealing with the development partners even though they can still push for individual country interest. In return the panelists agreed that the donors would also need to “bury egos” to allow for coordination and harmonization of initiatives;
4. There is the need to recognize that not all African countries (in fact only a handful of them could afford that at the moment) can insist on donor coordination as they get ‘swarmed’ by the multiplicity of ‘overtures’ from the development partners hence the need for a common rule of engagement for African countries;
5. Good governance is a prerequisite for ensuring coordination and ultimately bringing development in the various key sectors of African economies;
6. It is important for African governments to recognize that although most of the traditional development partners may not be able to compete with the financial ‘muscle’ of China, care should be exercised by African governments before rushing to ‘grab’ the so called ‘affordable’ financing deals being tangled before them by emerging development partners;
7. Development partners recognize that most African countries’ energy policies are not driven by long-term national visions but in most cases by party political manifestos, which is why they are sometimes compelled to accept every energy initiative or financing package that is offered.

In conclusion, the suggested way forward included:

1. The European Commission and the African Union Commission proposed that the Secretariat of the Africa EU Energy Partnership convenes a meeting in July in the sidelines of the Financing for Development conference in Ethiopia to concretize the actions agreed upon;
2. The actors called upon the Africa EU Energy Partnership Secretariat in close liaison with the SE4ALL to support (where realistically possible) the coordination of efforts in the run up to COP21 and feed into the major timelines of the energy events. In this case, the ‘African Hub’ mechanism could be adapted as model for engaging development partners;
3. There is the need for the capacity of African SE4ALL Focal Points to be strengthened in order for donor coordination to be institutionalized in the country engagements with partners;

In addition, Mr. Aaron Leopold, Global Representative of Practical Action, UK, presented a launch of an innovative new framework and publication developed by the EU Energy Initiative Partnership Dialogue Facility (EUEI PDF) and Practical Action. The publication focuses on decentralised energy markets and was created for energy practitioners and policy makers to provide concrete methodologies and guidance on improving coordination across energy markets to increase energy access, investment and growth sustainably and efficiently.

The conclusions of this meeting will feed into the upcoming Addis Ababa Finance for Development summit, SAIREC conference and eventually the COP21.

AEEP Secretariat