Enlightening the Migration Debate: The Importance of Sustainable Energy Access

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On Tuesday 31 January 2017, the EUEI PDF hosted the Discussion Forum “Enlightening the Migration Debate: The Importance of Sustainable Energy Access”.

The forum brought together more than 80 experts from the field, including members of the EU Commission, EU member state representatives, energy policy actors and development/humanitarian aid practitioners. The gathering aimed at raising awareness towards topics such as the role of energy in the migration debate, the link between humanitarian aid and development cooperation, the role of partner countries, the private sector and civil society. Practical examples and ongoing projects were presented throughout the day, both in the panel and group discussions as well as in the parallel breakout sessions, as presented below.

Panel discussion I:
Tackling the root causes of migration – what is the role of sustainable, clean and affordable energy access?

Given that 89% of people in refugees camps have less than 4 hours of access to lighting and 80% have little or no access to cooking facilities, as explained by Daniel Werner, Programme Manager EUEI PDF and Event Chair, the discussion moved forward presenting an example from the field: the EU Bêku Trust Fund Project for production, distribution and use of substitution fuel in refugee camps and the village of Kentzou in Cameroon. To date, the country hosts about 11484 refugees with a local population of 5000 people, with the subsequent pressure on natural resources. “The value of the project is that enables to implement development and resilience where the partners almost failed. It has been created in order to create conditions for peace and sustainable development and, at the same time, ensuring access to resources, reconciliation and job creation”, Rodrigue Djakou Yopo, Water and Social Infrastructure Expert for Hosts and Refugees Populations Central African Republic explained during his presentation.

The link between humanitarian aid and development cooperation has been also central in the discussion where representatives from the EU and EU countries have discussed the role of sustainable, clean and affordable energy access within migration. Panellists identified lack of energy as one of the root causes of migration, underlining that energy access is a prerequisite for poverty alleviation. Among them, Felice Zaccheo from the European Commission, Head of Unit DEVCO C6, Sustainable Energy and Climate Change, called for new policies, highlighting the central role of the EU and EU-Africa energy relations along the big challenges and opportunities the EU is managing within the energy and climate change sector. According to Mr Zaccheo, implementing long-term
plans is fundamental. “It is time to switch policies: we need to rethink the way we do development”, he highlighted in his speech.

Hans Olav Ibrekk, Director of Energy at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called instead for a new way of looking at the role of the private sector, given the importance of the cooperation between public and private. Mr Ibrekk acknowledged that “Energy has to be brought into discussion” emphasizing that its importance is sometimes overlooked. “Energy should be part of agriculture and water programs. The integration of this sector within other areas should be stronger in all levels”, he recalled. In the same vein, Shukri Ahmed of FAO pointed out the positive impact that renewable energy access can have in different fields, having the potential to prevent environmental degradation which often acts as a main cause for out-migration. Tosca Barucco of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed the link between energy access and education and, in this regard, reminded that “all stakeholders should play a part.”

**Group Discussion II**

**Sustainable energy access for refugee settlements and host communities - benefits and challenges**

The second panel was focused on the opportunities and challenges of implementing long-term planning when providing sustainable energy access to displaced populations. In this regard, several good practices were presented. To begin with, Owen Grafham, Programme Coordinator, Energy, Environment and Resources Department at Chatham House, introduced the Moving Energy Initiative, a consortium of organizations, that in his words “is trying to change the way the humanitarian system deals with energy” testing new approaches and improving energy access for refugees and internally displaced persons in Kenya and Burkina Faso.

As another way of boosting development and creating opportunities, Mohamed Badran, Project Coordinator at GIZ, is working towards promotion of trainings to improve efficiency in the water and energy sector in Jordan. This programme has qualified refugees at their disposal in the area of water and energy efficiency, and thus is “generating economic opportunities for Syrian people”, as he emphasized. Jordan has committed to provide jobs for Syrian refugees in upcoming years.

On the other hand, Daniel Clauss, Policy Officer DG ECHO at the European Commission, highlighted the importance of working on long-term projects.

On the whole, panellists agreed on the importance to include the private sector (even though the relation between public and private seems to be still quite complicated), as well as local stakeholders and small enterprise approaches, in the search for new ways to look at the issue and create new development models.

**Parallel break-out sessions on sustainable energy access and effective approaches in humanitarian settings**

In the breakout sessions attendants discussed a wide variety of issues. A comprehensive transition from aid to development was deemed important to help build local energy markets and enable
people to create livelihoods rather than keeping them dependent on humanitarian aid. Local communities should be at the centre of this paradigm shift, being able to make their own choices. The role of new and efficient technologies was also discussed yet it was also pointed out that training direct beneficiaries on its use is also fundamental.

The role of the private sector was of great importance during the whole discussion as well as the role of good partnerships when thinking about effective approaches in humanitarian settings. Participants highlighted what works and what does not in the process of planning and implementing projects. Among positive approaches are local ownership, local partnership, market assessments, dialogue, rules and regulations. On the other hand, lack of energy expertise, degrading local markets and isolation are among those approaches that should be avoided.

Overall, the conference has raised important issues and topics in the new and developing debate on energy access in humanitarian settings, asking experts, politicians and technicians from different countries and bodies to share views on the ongoing discussion.

New approaches are seen as inevitable in the current situation, putting public and private sector together aiming at finding the best solutions to develop tools for host and migrant communities in a world that is continuously changing and asking for new ideas. The EUEI PDF with identified partners will keep supporting the integration of sustainable energy solutions into national, regional and local development strategies and policies.