**Background Note**

**High Level Dialogue Energy – Ministerial Thematic Forum**

**Side event: Renewable Energy Transitions in Africa**23 June 2021

6:00-7:00 Eastern Standard Time (ET) / 14:00-15:00 Gulf Standard Time (GST)

**Background**

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed the stark worldwide inequalities in access to reliable energy and health care, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, and has highlighted the urgent need to expand energy access to help populations mitigate the effects of the crisis. While renewable energy has demonstrated remarkable resilience during the pandemic, the unfortunate fact is that gains in energy access throughout Africa are being reversed. According to estimates, the number of people lacking access to electricity is set to increase in 2020, making basic electricity services unaffordable for up to 30 million people, who had previously enjoyed access. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the access rate was 46 percent in 2019, and 570 million people still did not have access to electricity.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Africa’s estimated potential to generate renewable energy from existing technologies is 1,000 times larger than its projected demand for electricity in 2040, which means that the continent has more than enough renewable energy potential to serve its future demand. Furthermore, renewable energy – including green hydrogen – could replace African exports of coal, oil and gas. This potential is far from fully harnessed at this point and is well-below the global trend in the deployment of renewables, with only 1 percent deployments on the continent of 260 MW new capacity added globally in 2020. As such, Africa risks a lock-in in outdated and polluting options.

In March 2021, Germany's KfW Development Bank, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), developed the *Renewable Energy Transition in Africa* report[[2]](#footnote-3), which explores how the international community can support Africa to accelerate the clean energy transition and identifies four areas of action:

* Promote access to energy;
* De-risk and promote private sector investments;
* Strengthen and modernise the grid; and
* Support systemic innovation.

The study also explores the transformational potential of the electricity sector in five Africa countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Morocco, Rwanda and South Africa and show the real-life applicability of power sector transformation and demonstrates how countries can:

* Take advantage of the abundancy and competitiveness of renewables;
* Align ambitious renewable targets in energy and climate plans;
* Continue supporting the development of regional markets;
* Leverage renewables and distributed energy resources to achieve universal energy access;
* Develop tailored power sector transformation plans based on a systemic innovation approach;
* Build on policy frameworks for just and inclusive transitions.

**Objective**

The side-event, to be held during the Ministerial Thematic Forum for the High-level Dialogue on Energy, will offer participants an opportunity to exchange views, experiences and strategies on accelerating the realisation of the national and regional energy objectives on the continent.

It will also provide an update on work undertaken to date in cooperation with African countries, including analysis reflected in the *Renewable Energy Transition Africa* report and the on-going Continental Electricity Sector Masterplan (CMP) development - an initiative under the African Union, which IRENA supports as the modelling partner and profiling initiatives that can be leveraged for rapid progress. The outputs of this meeting will provide an important framing for future analysis and feed into IRENA’s contribution to the CMP process.

**Format**

The meeting will be a moderated 60-min discussion and will include presentations from external and IRENA experts.

**Agenda**

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| 6:00-6:10 | Introduction and Opening Remarks  Heike Henn, Director for Climate Policy, Energy, Urban Development and Environment and Commissioner for climate policy and climate financing, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| 6:10-6:55 | **Moderated discussion**  Moderator: **Elizabeth Press**, Director, Planning and Programme Support, IRENA |
|  | **Tichakunda Simbini,** Energy Infrastructure Expert, Africa Union Development Agency - New Partnership for Africa’s Development (AUDA -NEPAD) |
|  | **Safiatou Alzouma Nouhou**, Director of the Independent Delivery Unit, Africa Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI) |
|  | **Asami Miketa,** Senior Programme Officer, Power Sector Investment Planning, IRENA |
|  | **Interactive Discussion** |
| 6:55-7:00 | **Closing**  **Elizabeth Press**, Director, Planning and Programme Support, IRENA |

**Guiding questions**

* What do you see as the most pressing challenges and opportunities where support from external partners may be most useful?
* How can African countries avoid lock-in in polluting options and more effectively switch to sustainable forms of energy?
* Are there anticipated improvements of the system that can be introduced to further serve the needs of African countries?

1. IRENA, IEA, UNSD, World Bank, WHO,[*Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report 2021*](https://irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2021/Jun/SDG7_Tracking_Progress_2021.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. IRENA, [*Renewable Energy Transition in Africa*,](https://irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2021/Jun/SDG7_Tracking_Progress_2021.pdf) 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)