



**DESA**



**Global Policy  
Dialogue Series**

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## Speakers' Biographies

### Imagining the Carbon-neutral Future: Transformations in Energy and Transport

**Building a Global Coalition for Sustainability after COVID-19**  
***Session 2 of the UN DESA Global Policy Dialogues for Climate Action***

**Wednesday, 28 April 2021, 8:30-10:00 a.m. EDT**

#### Welcome remarks



**Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif**

Maimunah Mohd Sharif (Malaysia) is the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), appointed at the level of Under-Secretary-General by the Secretary-General, following an election by the General Assembly on 22 December 2017. On 22 January 2018, Ms. Sharif assumed her post at UN-Habitat's Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. She succeeds Dr. Joan Clos of Spain.

Prior to this appointment, Ms. Sharif was the Mayor of the City Council of Penang Island, Malaysia. In 2011, she became the first woman to be appointed President of the Municipal Council of Seberang Perai. As mayor, she led the Municipal Council of Seberang Perai to achieve its vision of a “cleaner, greener, safer

and healthier place to work, live, invest and play.” She is a champion of Gender-Responsive Participatory Budgeting and Planning, integrating gender perspectives into the governance process. During her tenure, the Municipal Council of Seberang Perai was the first Local Authority to implement and achieve six quality-based management ISO certifications.

Ms. Sharif began her career as a town planner at the Municipal Council of Penang Island in 1985. In 2003, she was promoted to Director of Planning and Development, a position she held

until November 2009. As Director, she was responsible for the preparation of structure and local plans and was directly involved in the development management of Penang City's projects and landscape. She also led a team which planned and implemented urban renewal projects in George Town. In November 2009, as its General Manager, Ms. Sharif established George Town World Heritage Incorporated and managed the George Town World Heritage Site, which was inscribed by UNESCO in July 2008.

Born in Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, on 26 August 1961, Ms. Sharif holds a Bachelor of Science with Honours in Town Planning Studies from the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology, UK and a Master of Science in Planning Studies from the Malaysia Science University. She has received several awards, including, "Planner of The Year 2014" by the Malaysian Institute of Planners, the 2016 Global Human Settlements Outstanding Contribution Award during Habitat III in Quito, for her contribution in sustainable planning in Seberang Perai and from the Penang State Government. On 11 January 2018, she received an award from the Malaysia Book of Records recognizing her for being the first Asian woman to be appointed as Executive Director of UN-Habitat. She is married to Mr. Adli Lai and has two daughters.

## Keynote remarks



Ms. Kristen Siemen

Kristen Siemen was appointed vice president of Sustainable Workplaces and Chief Sustainability Officer of General Motors in February 2021. She will help lead General Motors to a future with zero emissions as the company continues to take bold actions against climate change, including GM's commitment to become carbon neutral in its products and operations by 2040.

In her most recent role as executive director, Global Energy Strategy, Certification, Compliance and Test Labs, Siemen led a cross-functional leadership team responsible for setting corporate energy strategies, including the introduction of

fuel economy improvement technologies as well as initiatives aligned with GM's vision of a zero-emissions future. Siemen worked closely with the Sustainability Office to develop GM's aspiration to eliminate all tailpipe emissions from new light-duty vehicles by 2035 as well as the development of the company's sciencebased targets.

In addition to her accomplished technical career, Siemen is also passionate about promoting inclusion and gender equality. She was instrumental in creating GM's career reentry program, "Take 2," serves as GM's key executive for the Society of Women Engineers and is the

co-lead for the GM Women Ally Program. Her work to improve policies and practices effecting change for women earned her the National Association for Female Executives Women of Excellence Activist Award. Siemen also serves on the Board of Advisors for Catalyst and the Oakland University School of Engineering & Computer Science Advisory Board, where she received both her bachelor's and master's degrees in Electrical Engineering. A native of Warren, Michigan, she grew up around the automotive industry with her father, grandfather and grandmother all working in the field.

## Moderator

### Mr. Jeremy Lovell

Jeremy Lovell has been a reporter for some 45 years, of which more than half was spent with the Reuters news agency in various parts of Europe, Africa and Asia and with environment and climate change a recurrent topic throughout that time — from pollution to habitat and species loss, poverty, population, health, education, transport, energy and lifestyle choices (for those lucky enough to have them) — but becoming increasingly dominant in the past 20 years or so as the physical and scientific evidence became incontrovertible. He also spent nearly a decade editing for the Platts energy news agency and, earlier this century, a year helping the UNFCCC training reporters from developing countries cover the complex and, at times, bewildering international negotiations around climate change.

## Discussion 1: Smart Policies for Enabling Energy Alternatives



Mr. Xiangkun (Elvis) Cao

Xiangkun (Elvis) Cao is a Ph.D. Candidate working on carbon conversion in the Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering at Cornell University, and an incoming Postdoctoral Associate working on carbon capture in the Department of Chemical Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His Ph.D. research on HI-Light, a scalable solar reactor technology for converting CO<sub>2</sub> into fuels, received the \$20K Grand Prize (1/1,150) in the “Create the Future” Design Contest (2017), and was featured in the World Economic Forum’s white paper as an energy breakthrough of the past decade (2020). He co-founded [C2X](#) to reimagine CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as an energy resource through policy engagement and youth empowerment, and [Food2X](#) to divert food waste from landfills for efficient biogas production. For his work in the sustainability sector, Elvis is selected as a

member of the Technical Working Group on Energy Transitions by the United Nations (2021), a German Chancellor Fellow by the Humboldt Foundation (2021), a Young Scientist by Lindau Nobel Meetings (2020), a UNICEF Young Changemaker on Sustainable WASH Solutions (2020), and a Forbes 30 Under 30 in Energy Honoree for North America by Forbes Magazine (2019), among others.



Mr. Adekoyejo Kuye

Adekoyejo Kuye is Project Lead at Manamuz Electric LTD in Nigeria. There, he helps build clean, sustainable energy systems for homes, businesses and communities, by design and deployment of efficient electrical engineering solutions. He is also the winner of the 2021 SEforALL Youth Summit “Troubleshooting for SDG 7” Innovation contest.

Read his blog post for UN DESA on “cool solutions to Africa’s burning problems” [here](#).



Ms. Bahareh Seyed

Bahareh Seyed is a Senior Sustainable Development Officer in the Integrated Policy Analysis Branch of the Division for Sustainable Development Goals within the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). In this capacity, Ms. Seyed provides strategic advice and technical expertise in the areas of sustainable energy and climate change.

MS. Seyed has over 15 years of experience in sustainable energy and climate related issues, including policy and programming design and implementation in Africa, Central America, Arab States, and Asia Pacific. Previous to joining UN DESA, she worked as a global policy advisor on energy and climate change at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). She has also served the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General and UNDP’s Executive Office, providing policy advisory services to UN’s most senior officials on energy and climate change. Prior to her functions at the UN, Ms. Seyed worked as a project manager and research associate in a number of engineering consulting firms.

A Canadian of Iranian origin, Ms. Seyed holds a graduate degree in Electrical Engineering from McGill University in Canada, and post-graduate degree in Climate Change Science and Sustainable Development from De Montford University in the UK.



Mr. Kandeh Yumkella

Kandeh Yumkella is a distinguished development economist and an expert in agricultural economics with more than 30 years of experience. He is founder and CEO of The Energy Nexus Network (TENN), a regional ecosystem hub for sustainable energy solutions. Previously Dr. Yumkella served for almost two decades in the United Nations system including as Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All and founding chief executive officer for the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) Initiative (2013–2015). He also served two four-year terms as Director-General of the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO, 2005–2013). In both capacities, among

other accomplishments, Dr. Yumkella mobilized global consensus for the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals 7 and 9. These deal with ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, and building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation, respectively. Currently, he serves on both the Pan-African Parliament and the Parliament of Sierra Leone while continuing his global engagements as a member of various international advisory bodies, boards, and commissions.

## Discussion 2: Sustainable and Resilient Approaches for Moving People and Goods



Mr. Arturo Steinvorth Álvares

Arturo Steinvorth Álvarez is a transport planner with an environmental engineering background and is currently working for the SLOCAT Partnership in research analysis and engagement. He has worked in several Central American and Caribbean countries linking transport and energy through international programs such as the Global Fuel Economy Initiative and the Partnership for Cleaner Fuels and Vehicles with technical analysis and capacity building. Arturo is also well-known for his stakeholder engagement work as Coordinator for Mobility and

Sustainable Transport at Centro para la Sostenibilidad Urbana in Costa Rica. Moreover he is Member of Costa Rica's National Technical Committees on fuel quality, pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure, as well as the Programa Bandera Azul Ecológica for Sustainable Mobility; a national award that incentivises the uptake of sustainable mobility in public institutions, private sector and other venues. He has also supported UNEP in projects regarding the electrification of public transport fleets in the San Jose Metropolitan region in Costa Rica.



### Ms. Stefanie Holzwarth

Stefanie Holzwarth is an Associate Specialist in the Urban Mobility Team at UN-Habitat. She is trained in urban planning and has been working on sustainable mobility projects for more than 6 years, providing technical advice, knowledge and advocacy to governments around the world. In her work, she supports broad consultation processes of stakeholders to develop mobility strategies that are adapted to local needs, avails international expertise and best practices, and is also involved in capacity building, training events and city-to-city exchanges. Previously she worked in an urban development project at GIZ. Stefanie is a passionate cyclist and regularly participates in Open Streets Activities or Critical Mass Events to create awareness of pedestrians' and cyclists' rights to shared urban roads.



### Mr. Daniel Platz

Daniel Platz is an Economic Affairs Officer in the Financing for Sustainable Development Office of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, where he currently leads the technical assistance and capacity development work on infrastructure asset management for local and national governments in developing countries. He has over 20 years of experience with UN intergovernmental processes, research and analytics and technical assistance in support of the implementation of the UN development agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals. He has published widely in the area of development finance, municipal finance and infrastructure finance. Mr. Platz holds a Ph.D. in Economics and an M.A. in Global Political Economy and Finance from The New School University. He received Bachelor degrees in Political Science and Economics from Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany.



### Ms. Kalpana Viswanath

Kalpana Viswanath is a researcher and practitioner on gender inclusive urbanisation. She is the co-founder and CEO of Safetipin, a social enterprise that uses technology and data to advocate for inclusive urban spaces and mobility and works in more than 25 cities. She is part of Delhi government's Women's Safety Committee and has worked as a consultant with UN Women and UN Habitat. She is a member of the Advisory Group on Gender Issues at UN Habitat, Board member of SLOCAT, ICPC and Jagori. She has published widely, co-edited a book on Building Gender Inclusive Cities and has been a regular columnist.

## Closing remarks



### Ms. Damilola Ogunbiyi

Damilola Ogunbiyi is the CEO of Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL), Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All and Co-Chair of UN-Energy. She is also a Commissioner for the Global Commission to End Energy Poverty and the Co-Chair of the COP26 Energy Transition Council. She is a global leader and advocate for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG7), which calls for access to reliable, affordable, sustainable and modern energy for all by 2030, in line with the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Prior to joining SEforALL, Mrs. Ogunbiyi was the first female Managing Director of the Nigerian Rural Electrification Agency where she was responsible for successfully negotiating the Nigerian Electrification Project which is a USD 550 million facility (World Bank USD 350m and African Development Bank USD 200m) to rapidly construct solar mini-grids and deploy solar home systems across Nigeria to close energy access gaps. She also conceptualised the Energizing Economies Initiative, which provides sustainable and affordable off-grid power solutions to economic clusters, including markets and industrial clusters in Nigeria, that is estimated to impact 1.2 million SMEs. Mrs. Ogunbiyi previously worked as the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Power and Head of the Advisory Power Team in the Office of the Vice President of Nigeria. She was responsible for the Power Sector Recovery Programme, which is a series of policy, operational, governance and financial interventions to be implemented by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN).

Mrs. Ogunbiyi is one of the Commissioners for the Global Commission to end energy poverty which is an initiative driven by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and The Rockefeller Foundation. She is the Co-Chair of the COP26 Energy Transition Council aimed at driving action to accelerate the shift to clean energy ahead of COP26 and to bring together leaders in the power sector across politics, finance and technology to speed up the transition from coal to clean renewable energy in developing countries. She is also a member of the Development Advisory Council of the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), member of the clean cooking alliance advisory board and a member of the Advisory Board of the University of Oxford – Future of Cooling Programme