



# High-level Dialogue on Energy in 2021 under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly

Concept note<sup>1</sup>

## I. Context

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Paris Agreement on climate change provide a pathway for a more prosperous, equitable and sustainable future for people and the planet. Evidence presented at the SDG Summit in September 2019 showed that, despite considerable initial efforts however, the world was at risk of falling short of achieving many SDGs by 2030. At the same time, while COVID-19 is the most urgent threat facing humanity today, climate change remains the biggest threat over the long term and progress towards dealing with it remains grossly inadequate. We must dramatically step up the pace of implementation during the first years of the Decade of Action to deliver the 2030 Agenda as well as the objectives of the Paris Agreement.
2. Energy lies at the heart of both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7) represents a first-ever universal goal on energy, with five targets to be achieved by 2030 (Box 1). Energy is inextricably linked to climate change and many other SDGs, including poverty eradication, food security, health, education, prosperity, gender equality, jobs, transport, ocean, water and sanitation, and the empowerment of women and youth. The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2019 identified “energy decarbonization with universal access” as one of the entry points that offer the most promise for achieving the transformations towards sustainable development at the necessary scale and speed.
3. Energy can also play a central role in countries’ efforts to recover from the COVID-19 crisis in ways that make them better, stronger and more resilient. Energy services are essential for fighting the COVID-19 pandemic – including for powering healthcare facilities and keeping

### **Box 1: SDG 7 - Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all**

- 7.1 By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services.
- 7.2 By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.
- 7.3 By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.
- 7.a By 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology.
- 7.b By 2030, expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States, and land-locked developing countries, in accordance with their respective programmes of support.

<sup>1</sup> Updated on 25 January 2021.

medicines cold, supplying clean water for hand washing, and powering communications services to connect people, share information, and facilitate education during social distancing. At the same time, the COVID-19 crisis could cause serious slowdowns on SDG 7 progress, depending on the priorities of national recovery efforts. Increased investments in sustainable energy solutions will be crucial to aid countries in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic while also creating green jobs, empowering women, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and advancing other SDGs.

4. Without urgent action, however, the world will fall short of SDG 7 achievement. Concerted efforts in many countries are expanding electricity access, including through off-grid energy systems. Yet, close to 800 million people still lack access to electricity at present. About three billion people remain without clean cooking solutions, causing millions of premature deaths annually, disproportionately affecting women. While the investment in renewables is expected to outpace the investment in fossil fuel power plants by a wide margin notwithstanding the COVID-19 shock, much more is needed as the deployment of renewables is lagging especially in transport, industry, heating and cooling. Global energy efficiency improvements must increase significantly to meet the global target. Meanwhile, energy-related activities remain responsible for over two-thirds of the global greenhouse gas emissions. We must accelerate just and equitable energy transitions including fast-tracking coal phase-out and eliminating fossil-fuel subsidies.
5. Progress has also been largely uneven. Energy poverty is heavily concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, especially in rural areas. Investment is substantially off-track for many, leaving out many developing countries, in particular least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. The overall financing for SDG 7 needs to triple globally, with special attention to these vulnerable countries to ensure no one is left behind.
6. Despite these shortfalls, SDG 7 is still within reach, but only if current efforts are significantly accelerated. Achieving it will require strengthened political will, increased levels of investment and scaled-up multi-stakeholder partnerships. All stakeholders need to step up to achieve universal energy access and accelerate clean energy transitions in support of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

## **II. High-level Dialogue on Energy in 2021**

7. Following the General Assembly resolution 74/225, the Secretary-General will convene a High-level Dialogue on Energy at a summit level during the 76th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2021 in New York, to accelerate SDG 7 action for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change.
8. The Dialogue represents the first inclusive global gathering on energy under the auspices of the General Assembly since the UN Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy held in Nairobi in 1981. It presents a historic opportunity to provide transformational action in the first years of the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs and support the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

## **General Assembly Mandate**

9. The General Assembly, through resolution 74/225, invited the Secretary-General, with the support of the relevant United Nations system entities, to convene this high-level dialogue in 2021 to promote implementation of the energy-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; support the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All (2014–2024), including the global plan of action for the Decade; and contribute to the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF).
10. The importance of energy for sustainable development has been emphasized by Member States over the last decade. In 2012, the General Assembly adopted resolution 67/215, by which it declared the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014–2024. The General Assembly called for the rapid implementation of the strategic objectives of the global plan of action for the Decade, including in resolution 72/224.
11. In September 2015, the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development setting out 17 goals and 169 targets, including SDG 7 on energy with targets on energy access, renewables, energy efficiency, and means of implementation. In 2018, the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF) conducted the first review of the implementation of SDG 7, calling for scaled-up action to meet its targets by 2030. The HLPF in 2020 also included a session on ‘Sustaining efforts to ensure access to sustainable energy,’ corresponding to its identification as one of the six key ‘entry points’ to accelerate progress across multiple goals and targets in the GSDR 2019.
12. Pursuant to resolution 73/236, the Secretary-General organized a mid-point review of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014–2024 in May 2019 in New York, bringing together Member States and other stakeholders to discuss challenges and opportunities for achieving the SDG7.

## **Leadership Arrangements**

13. As mandated by resolution 74/225, the Secretary-General will serve as the convener of the High-level Dialogue on Energy in 2021. In this capacity, the Secretary-General has also designated senior leadership at the United Nations to serve in various functions for the Dialogue.
14. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Liu Zhenmin, has been designated as the Dialogue Secretary-General to facilitate the organization of the Dialogue. Under his leadership, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through the Division for Sustainable Development Goals, will serve as the Secretariat for the Dialogue and ensure the full engagement of the UN-Energy secretariat during the Dialogue preparations.
15. The UN-Energy Co-Chairs, namely, Mr. Achim Steiner, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, and Ms. Damilola Ogunbiyi, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All, have been designated as the Dialogue Co-Chairs to facilitate substantive content development, multi-stakeholder mobilization and inter-agency support.
16. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All, Ms. Damilola Ogunbiyi, has been designated as the High-Level Champion to drive global advocacy for the Dialogue.

## Objectives

17. The overarching goal of the High-level Dialogue on Energy is to promote the implementation of the energy-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Dialogue should raise ambition and accelerate action towards the achievement of the SDG7 targets by catalysing innovative solutions, investments and multi-stakeholder partnerships in support of the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs and accelerate the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

18. This overarching goal will be supported by a series of objectives including:

- a. Strengthen political commitment to the achievement of SDG7.
- b. Promote green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic through sustainable, decarbonised energy solutions.
- c. Catalyse multi-stakeholder partnerships and voluntary commitments by all stakeholders.
- d. Leverage energy action for advancing other SDGs.
- e. Catalyse finance, investment, innovation, new technologies, capacity building and quality data for SDG 7 acceleration, including maximizing its contribution to combatting climate change.
- f. Strengthen synergies with major intergovernmental processes, including on transport, ocean, biodiversity, gender equality, food systems and climate change.
- g. Accelerate delivery of United Nations support and services for Member States on energy-related issues at all levels.

19. The High-level Dialogue on Energy will focus on five broad themes described below to boost ambition and accelerate action:

### Focus themes

- a. Energy access
- b. Energy transitions
- c. Enabling SDGs through inclusive, just energy transitions

### Cross-cutting themes

- d. Innovation, technology and data
- e. Finance and investment

20. It is anticipated that for each of the themes, there will be Global Theme Champions<sup>2</sup> consisting of representatives from Member States at the ministerial level to spearhead advocacy efforts, working closely with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All in her capacity as the High-Level Champion to drive global advocacy for the Dialogue.

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<sup>2</sup> Further information about the Global Theme Champions is presented in the note for thematic consultations for the Dialogue, available at: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/energy2021>

The details on the high-level global champions will be made available in due course on the Dialogue website.

21. Under each theme, a small number of priority substantive tracks will be identified. Each theme will be supported by a multi-stakeholder technical working group<sup>3</sup>. These groups will provide an opportunity for Member States and other stakeholders to engage in the preparations for the High-level Dialogue by advancing substantive discussions on the theme and tracks. UN-Energy, in collaboration with relevant international organisations and multi-stakeholders, will provide technical coordination support for identifying the substantive tracks and facilitating the technical working groups. The modalities for the technical working groups will be developed with the support of UN-Energy and made available in due course on the Dialogue website.

### **Outcomes**

22. A major outcome of the Dialogue will be a forward-looking statement calling for concrete actions to further accelerate the SDG 7 implementation in support of the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs and climate action. The statement would not be a negotiated document.
23. A comprehensive report of the Dialogue will also be compiled based on the discussions during the Dialogue and informed by the preparatory processes and relevant background materials.
24. Efforts will be made, with support of UN-Energy, to further elaborate voluntary commitments from Member States in the form of “Energy Compacts” that will detail key outcomes, milestones and implementation timelines with clear tracking frameworks towards 2030. Other stakeholders including those from the private sector, subnational authorities and other actors will also be invited to make voluntary commitments under their own “Energy Compacts”.
25. New multi-stakeholder partnerships and voluntary commitments will be mobilised and launched. This would complement existing efforts, including the SDG Acceleration Actions and the 2019 Climate Action Summit follow up process, as relevant.
26. It is expected that the Dialogue outcomes will inform forthcoming intergovernmental processes including the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, the HLPF and UNFCCC Conference of Parties, as well as follow-up actions from the Global Sustainable Transport Conference, the UN Ocean Conference, the Biodiversity Summit, the Food Systems Summit, the Gender Equality, as relevant.

### **Organisational Process**

#### High-level Dialogue on Energy at a summit level

27. The Dialogue will be held at a summit level during the 76th session of the General Assembly in September 2021 in New York, for a duration of up to a day. The Dialogue will bring together world leaders from Member States and other stakeholders at the highest possible level from all regions and all sectors. The official programme would be complemented by informal off-site side events. Details will be announced in due course and made available at the Dialogue website. UNDESA would also convene regular briefings to the Member States.

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<sup>3</sup> Further information about the technical working groups is presented in the note for thematic consultations for the Dialogue, available at: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/energy2021>

### Ministerial-level Thematic Forums

28. The Dialogue will be informed by inclusive, far-reaching preparatory processes and meetings at various levels in the course of 2020 and 2021. Considering the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, initial meetings may be held virtually. The possibility for in person meetings will be assessed on a continuing basis, depending on the situation regarding COVID-19.
29. Ministerial-level Thematic Forums<sup>4</sup> will be organised to gain insights on priority issues under the five themes and provide inputs into the Dialogue. The Thematic Forums will be fully inclusive, designed to enable Member States and diverse multi-stakeholders to share experiences, showcase their partnerships and consider a way forward towards the SDG 7 achievement. A summary of the Thematic Forums will be prepared to inform the Dialogue. UNDESA, as the Dialogue Secretariat, will provide organisational and other support for the Thematic Forums in partnership with host governments/entities as well as UN-Energy, UN Regional Commissions and other relevant partners.

### Technical inputs and consultations

30. The preparatory processes will be supported by robust and independent technical inputs. Initial consultations may commence virtually, while in person meetings would be considered at a later stage depending on the situation regarding COVID-19.
31. A multi-stakeholder advisory group will be convened by the Secretary-General to support the Dialogue preparations, with a focus on identifying and mobilising game-changing partnerships and commitments.
32. UN-Energy, under the leadership of the Co-Chairs and in collaboration with relevant international organisations and multi-stakeholders, will provide technical contributions and inter-agency support, by leading the organisation of expert consultations structured around the themes and tracks and developing summaries of such consultations as inputs for the Ministerial-level Thematic Forums.
33. An inter-agency report on accelerating SDG 7, covering individual themes and substantive tracks, will be prepared with the support of UN-Energy in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders as a substantive background material for the Dialogue. Such work should build on and complement existing efforts including, but not limited to, the annual SDG 7 Energy Progress Report by the global custodian entities for the SDG7 indicators and the annual SDG 7 Policy Briefs by the multi-stakeholder SDG7 technical advisory group, convened by UNDESA.
34. In addition, other reports and papers by Member States, international organizations and other stakeholders, will also be made available as relevant.
35. The Development Coordination Office will also be leveraged to involve UN Resident Coordinators for relevant country-level engagements leading up to the dialogue and follow-up activities, as needed.

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<sup>4</sup> Further information about the Ministerial-level Thematic Forums is presented in the note for thematic consultations for the Dialogue, available at: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/energy2021>