

UN Colloquia – Session 1: Energy: Access for all

By Alicia Prager

Discussants:

- Jens WANDEL, Deputy Regional Bureau Director for Europe and the CIS and Director of the Bratislava Regional Centre, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Marina Ploutakhina, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
- Prof. Samuel SCHUBERT, Head of International Relations Department, Webster University
- Keywan Riahi, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA)

Mr Wandel opened the panel pointing out the need for attention to the question of equality. Inequality is the reason to many problems of nowadays societies. This is not only a question of rich and poor countries but also can be observed within one country, for instance between men and women. Fairness is a crucial aspect considering development. One of the inequalities of today's world is the distribution of energy. 1.4 billion people do not have access to energy. Mr. Wandel stressed the point that the world needs a new behavior, when dealing with energy.

Ms Ploutakhina emphasized the importance of an international framework to cope with the problem of the lack of energy access, from which many people are suffering. Moreover, 2.7 billion people still rely on traditional biomass. In 2009 United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon established the Advisory Group on Energy and Climate Change (AGECC) to advise him on the energy-related dimensions of the climate change negotiations. Ms Ploutakhina expressed her delight about the fact that 2012, as it is the "International Year of Sustainable Energy for All", provides international framework to bring actors and supporters together. "The Sustainable Energy for All" Initiative has three inter-linked objectives: 1. Universal Energy Access, 2. Double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix and 3. Double the rate of improvement in energy efficiency. These objectives cannot be achieved by one nation itself, but need the support of everyone. She also provided the audience with three new UN-Energy knowledge Networks: www.un-energy.org, www.cleanenergysolutions.org and www.sustainableenergyforall.org for further information.

Mr Keywan Riahi highlighted the question, how energy could be transformed into sustainable energy. The fact that modern energy is not included in the MDGs, while it nevertheless underpins ever single one of them, probably shows that people did not pay enough attention to energy access in the past. According to Mr Riahi, the region, which suffers most, is Sub-Saharan Africa, where the population grows a lot faster than electrification takes place. The lack of energy access bears social costs: about 2 million premature deaths each year are caused by indoor air pollution by household use of solid fuels, which they need in order to be able to cook and heat. Also, he points out, that the productive hours of women in the day are limited because they have to spend a lot of time on collecting solid fuels.

Mr Samuel Schubert analyzed the problem from the scientific point of view and asked, as calls himself "the pessimist at the table": "Is energy access for all achievable at all?" To him, the reason why energy is not accessible for everybody nowadays are political choices. The crucial point is the

distribution in society, on a global as well as on a regional level. In his opinion, the problem is therefore not the lack of technical knowledge. Often a lot of important facts are simply being overlooked because it is uncomfortable to think about all the effects. The same happened with the implementation of the internet. Some government did not want all their citizens to have access to it. So in this case too, it was not a problem of the lack of technical knowledge. Mr Schubert also called the attention to other important issues concerning energy access: one must consider the political culture and the missing infrastructure in a region.