

For Clean Cooking, the Time for Action Has Come

To tackle the stubborn challenge of lack of access to clean cooking, “the time has come, and it is now,” in the words of Paul Mbuti of Kenya’s Ministry of Energy.

“The High-level Dialogue on Energy is an historic opportunity to take action on clean cooking, to put forward commitments in the form of Energy Compacts,” affirmed Frank van der Vieuten of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This sense of urgency and critical opportunity brought together an emerging coalition of partners on 8 July during the High-level Political Forum, for a side event on a “Call to Action: Principles for Priority Action on Clean Cooking for All”, organized by Kenya and the Netherlands as Global Champions for Energy Access for the High-level Dialogue, and UN DESA, in partnership with Energia, the World Bank Group, WHO and the Health and Energy Platform of Action. The event built on similar discussions before and during the Ministerial Thematic Forums in June.

Little progress has been made on bringing down the numbers of people (now 2.6 billion) cooking with dirty fuels that produce emissions and kill 4 million each year from indoor smoke. “We’re here to talk about solutions,” said moderator **Minoru Takada**, Team Leader, High-level Dialogue on Energy Secretariat, UN DESA, in framing the discussion, noting that while good progress had been made on electricity access in many parts of the world and use of renewables was on the rise as costs dropped, the numbers of people lacking clean cooking had barely budged over many years of global efforts, even though a target of universal access to clean cooking by 2030 had been agreed as SDG 7.1. “What can we do differently this time?” he asked.

Mr. Mbuti, Deputy Director of Renewable Energy at Kenya’s Ministry of Energy, called for local and international communities to take action and scale up investments. Citing 20,000 deaths each year in his country alone from indoor smoke, he stated that for three decades, improved cookstoves have not been given the same level of investments as electrification.

Noting that only 15% of countries had policies on clean cooking in place, **Mr. van der Vieuten**, Policy Coordinator for Climate, Finance and Energy at the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said the issue deserved much more attention. He asked those working on electrification to “look beyond the television and find the kitchen, where mothers and sisters are trying to put cooked food on the table”, often sacrificing their own health. He cited the top three of the nine Principles for Priority Action: that this is about people and bringing economic and social opportunities for women and vulnerable populations; that clean cooking must be part and parcel of COVID recovery and climate policies; and that more international support is needed.

Calling for more high-level support, **Hans Olav Ibrenk**, Norway’s Special Envoy for Climate and Security, said that more national leaders need to talk about the issue. Generally, electrification is mentioned as a global concern ten times more often than clean cooking, he noted. Although there are different recommendations for the ideal percentage of LPG versus electric cooking, and not all support the use of LPG as an interim fuel, its use will improve CO2 emissions.

“Thirteen deaths every minute,” is how **Maria Neira**, Director of the Department of Public Health and Environment at WHO, characterized the silent crisis caused by dirty cooking fuels. She saw the G20 as a big opportunity to mobilize support, and the Health and Energy Platform of Action (HEPA) as a good mechanism to put this issue on the agenda of developed countries.

Sheila Oparaocha, International Coordinator and Programme Manager for Energia, called for ambitious commitments from Member States and all stakeholders, especially to help countries with the least attractive markets. She said women need to be decision-makers and co-investors, and national and local governments and businesses should start by asking women what they need. She also felt that HEPA’s High-level Coalition on Energy and Health, which met on 9 June, could be a useful platform.

Financing requirements were discussed by **Yabei Zhang**, Senior Energy Specialist, World Bank, who had helped prepare the analysis in the report of the HLDE Technical Working Group on energy access. Mr. Takada commented that the report showed that clean cooking was getting “tiny resources compared to what is really needed”. Ms. Zhang said that the Clean Cooking Fund, which had been announced in 2019 at the Climate Action Summit and became operational in 2020 under the World Bank’s management, had been set up with \$500 million with the ambition to catalyze public and private investment of \$2 billion, though at least \$6 billion is needed overall.

Calling for a fresh perspective and commenting that we can’t keep repeating the same ineffective policies, **Doris Edem Agbevivi**, an analyst with the Energy Commission of Ghana, said the reality is that wood is cheap and abundant in many places, and women who don’t have money feel, why pay for LPG? They were willing to live with indoor smoke in the interest of saving money. In Ghana, LPG prices were subsidized by the government at first, but that could not be sustained and when LPG prices shot up, households stopped using it. She argued that subsidies masked the situation, and called for sustainable business models instead. When the government could not continue the LPG subsidies indefinitely, a market was developed for “clean woodstoves”.

Ms. Aparaocha felt that smart, targeted subsidies – such as cash transfers to poor women, as used in India and Indonesia -- were needed for those who could not afford switching to new technologies and fuels. At her suggestion, Simon Batchelor of Modern Energy Cooking Services explained a “40 x 60 x 30” proposal that was being floated to focus global commitments in the run-up to the High-level Dialogue. By 2030, 40% of those who have access to modern energy would also have clean cooking, and that 60% of those who are using modern energy would use low-carbon sources. All the partners intend to reach out to their contacts among Member States and other stakeholders to drive commitments towards this target, as governments, businesses and others prepare their Energy Compacts for the September High-level Dialogue on Energy.

Another major partner in this year’s mobilization, the Clean Cooking Alliance, is hosting “A Conversation on Clean Cooking” on 20 July, with US Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton, Wanjira Mathai and Dymphna van der Lans.

Those interested in collaborating on an Energy Compact for clean cooking should contact Energy2021@un.org.

For information: energy2021@un.org