The challenge of ensuring energy access for all

Access to energy is central to reducing poverty. It promotes growth, ensures long-term sustainable development and is a cornerstone for social development. The United Nations (UN) recognised the importance of enhancing energy access when launching the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) initiative in 2011. Subsequently, the UN General Assembly declared 2014-2024 to be the decade of sustainable energy for all. In September 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development included a target, under SDG number 7, on “ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.”

These initiatives clearly encourage providers of development co-operation to pay greater attention to enhancing energy access for poor people in developing countries. Arab and DAC providers have been supporting developing countries through energy-related infrastructure investments, capacity building and technical co-operation to develop strategies, policies and projects in both the renewable and non-renewable energy sectors. However, significant challenges persist and planned activities and investments remain insufficient, and insufficiently co-ordinated, to deliver full energy access for all by 2030, notably in Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, 70% of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa, or about 600 million people, do not have access to electricity and 80% heat their homes and cook their food using open fires.

The key issues for discussion:

- What conclusions could ACG and DAC providers draw from the experience of working jointly through the Task Force on Energy?
- What would it take to turn the ACG-DAC Task Force’s recommendations into concrete activities and investments in Malawi and Uganda, as well as in other countries where energy access rates are low?
- In what ways can the ACG and the DAC build on the Task Force experience to make such collaboration sustainable or address other challenges critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals?

Possible outcomes:

- Agreement to renew the mandate of the Task Force to study how to enhance energy access in Malawi and Uganda, and expand its activities to other Sub-Saharan African countries.
- Agreement to share more information about each other’s activities and efforts to promote energy access especially in Malawi and Uganda.
- Agreement to promote greater involvement of Arab countries and institutions in ground-level energy-related co-ordination mechanisms in Malawi and Uganda that are led by DAC members.
The ACG-DAC Task Force on Energy

The challenge of ensuring energy access for all thus remains a key concern in the post-2015 era for both Arab and DAC providers. The issue was raised during the 2015 Arab-DAC Dialogue on Development when the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) championed the idea of creating a joint ACG-DAC Task Force to explore how the two communities could work together on broadening poor people’s access to energy. The main characteristics of the approach that the Task Force adopted are:

- Country-level focus – the Task Force looked at ground-level implementation of energy-related activities, and how these aligned with country development plans, in particular through provider co-ordination groups.
- Knowledge sharing – the Task Force brought together different providers of development co-operation and partner countries to discuss ground-level obstacles and challenges.
- Building synergies – the Task Force leveraged the experience and expertise of ACG and DAC members.
- No duplication – the Task Force relied on existing work, operating through a collaborative division of tasks among its members (Netherlands, OECD, OFID and United Kingdom) and contributing to other, existing initiatives, notably SE4ALL and SDG 7.

To demonstrate the potential for achieving concrete results, the Task Force prepared energy mapping exercises in two pilot countries: Malawi and Uganda – two countries where ACG and DAC members have sizeable existing or planned energy-related activities and where energy access rates are particularly low.

Preliminary results of mapping exercises

The Malawi and Uganda mapping exercises were the result of desk analyses complemented by in-country consultations and, for the case of Uganda, a multi-stakeholder workshop, led by the Netherlands. The United Kingdom led preparation of the Malawi case study, building upon the work done for an earlier workshop. The mapping exercises:

- Provided a full picture of energy-related activities in the countries, as reflected in their development plans and strategies, and through interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders.
- Highlighted gaps and identified opportunities for enhancing access to energy for poor people.
- Identified priority areas for energy-related interventions.
- Identified opportunities and areas for possible collaborative actions among ACG-DAC members and other relevant domestic, international, public and private stakeholders.

The results of Task Force mapping exercises fed into a Task Force synthesis report, which will be distributed closer to the time of the Arab-DAC Dialogue. The preliminary recommendations of the report are:

- ACG and DAC members have demonstrated the capacity to work together successfully at the sector level. Such collaboration should be encouraged and scaled up.
- Further collaboration should focus on improving co-ordination within developing countries (e.g. exchanging information and participating in co-ordination groups), as well as building relationships between development funds and banks in the ACG and those of DAC members.
- Task Force activities could deepen in Uganda and Malawi, building on the momentum achieved (e.g. by understanding better how to overcome barriers to energy access affordability in Uganda or ensuring successful energy policy reforms in Malawi).
- Task Force activities could be better institutionalised (e.g. by becoming a Voluntary Initiative of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation) and providing the financial resources for its operations to continue.