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ENSURING A PEOPLE-CENTERED ENERGY TRANSITION IN AFRICA THROUGH CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

NIGERIA NATIONAL PROJECT LAUNCH AND WORKSHOP ON RENEWABLE ENERGY

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1. Background

Sustainable energy access is a crucial variable in addressing material and structural poverty. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is now home to the largest concentration of people without access to energy. Currently, around 580 million in the region, roughly 75% worldwide, have no electricity (IEA, 2019). And a staggering 80% of the population (about 800 million people) lacks modern energy and relies on biomass products such as wood, charcoal, and dung to cook. In Nigeria, less than 30 per cent of the 200 million population have access to uninterrupted electricity based on a national grid system. It is primarily unreliable and has yet to reach many communities. As a result, energy demand outstrips supply.

This acute energy poverty negatively affects many developments and environmental outcomes, notably health, household income, quality of life, access to modern services such as ICTs (Morrissey, 2017), human capital development, productive land use, and sustainable development forest management. Across the continent and in Nigeria, it prevents women and children from leading more productive lives, expanding inequality gaps and inciting many social injustices. It lowers the region's chance of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (Corfee-Morlot, et al. nd) and Africa's Agenda 2063.

Access to clean, sustainable and modern energy services is vital to meet basic human needs and economic and social development across Africa. Increased access to energy can unlock sustainable economic growth, improve human health and well-being, and enable women and children to lead more productive lives. Beyond direct economic and social benefits, clean energy access will raise human security, build resilience in states and communities, and accelerate SDG attainment, Agenda 2063 goals and climate commitments under the Paris Agreement (OECD, nd).

Renewable Energy Initiatives (REI) are lining up to drive renewable energy (RE) uptake on the continent. The number of these initiatives has grown to at least 58 (Kirsten et al., 2020), most of them since the conclusion of the Paris Agreement in 2018. The more prominent REIs include the Africa-EU Renewable Energy Cooperation Program (RECP), EU-Africa Green Energy Initiative, Africa Power Vision, Africa Clean Energy Corridor, and the African Energy Transition

Programme (AFRETRAP). Bilateral actors, notably China and India, have also entered the African RE space.

Across Africa, national political will is also growing and presents opportunities for a sustainable energy transition. Of the 53 submitted NDCs, all but Botswana's NDC mention renewable energy contributions, with quantitative figures in 46 of them. Nigeria's NDCs contain rural electrification with standalone PV systems and mini-grids or sustainable use of biomass. Nigeria generated millions of Euros through its Green Bond fund for rural electrification and the provision of renewable energy solutions. Even though these are laudable initiatives, they rely on a business model that requires short-term returns on investment and leaves out the most vulnerable groups that cannot afford market rates and tariffs. In addition, they push African civil society groups and community energy cooperatives outside the sphere of influence of these REIs. The limited role of the CSOs has led to poor accountability and weak monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) frameworks as envisioned in the Paris Agreement.

2. Challenges

The expansion of the RE playing field, however, also presents risks. The many REIs in Africa and Nigeria lack coordination and transparency and often exclude important stakeholders, particularly the CSOs. This leaves room for unnecessary, redundant efforts, programmes, and project duplications, a narrow focus on specific RE solutions and countries, and the absence of independent monitoring and tracking of performance. In turn, these shortcomings undermine the effectiveness of these otherwise laudable REIs in delivering transformative and sustainable energy access, especially for the bottom of the societal pyramid.

3. Way Forward

CSO and community engagements are crucial for facilitating and leveraging these REIs as the main drivers of an African energy transition that is sustainable and people-centred. CSOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) participation can ensure buy-in, prevent external interests from hijacking these REIs, and ensure future REI developments are designed and calibrated with a thorough understanding of the local context and social norms, values, and customs. Building a critical mass of non-state actors that will interrogate RE investments against a set of minimum criteria and ensure that REIs prioritise decentralised small-scale RE investments that meet the needs of the people is vital.

For decades, African CSOs and CBOs have worked on the climate crisis and energy sector. However, they need updated technical capacity to sufficiently engage with a rapidly evolving energy policy development to ensure maximum impacts on the ground and expedited

achievement of their overarching objectives. In addition, a continent-wide civil society coalition focused on renewable energy, closely following REIs and renewable energy-related NDC commitments on the African continent is lacking. The Nigeria PACJA-ACSEA platform will contribute to this process and ensure people-centred just energy transition and civil engagement.

The Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) and GermanWatch are implementing a project entitled ***Ensuring People-Centered Energy Transition in Africa through Civil Society Engagement.*** The project aims to strengthen the roles of CSOs and CBOs in promoting and implementing sustainable energy transition initiatives and renewable energy-related NDC commitments in (5) African countries, including Nigeria. The project will equip CSOs and CBOs with updated skills, knowledge, and tools to engage in renewable energy policy development and program implementation monitoring and strengthen their voice at the local, continental, and global levels. The project will also ensure that CSO and CBO engagements are more coordinated under an empowered **African Coalition for Sustainable Energy Access (ACSEA).**

An inception workshop will hold on April 19 and 20, 2022, in Abuja to launch the project.

4. Key Objectives

The objectives of the Inception Workshop, which will serve as a platform to launch ACSEA, are;

- Reach consensus on what the project is hoping to achieve via collective understanding among project CSOs/CBOs beneficiaries and other stakeholders
- Inauguration of a vibrant and functioning national coalition platform on REIs to increase the visibility of actions at national, regional and international levels
- Develop and launch a National Advocacy and Engagement Strategy that will inform national contexts and influence the regional and continental advocacy strategies.

5. Expected Outcomes

- Mapped stakeholders and strengthened capacity for a common understanding of REIs and the relevance of focusing on a just energy transition that is sustainable and people-oriented, achieved
- Advocacy and policy engagement platform with policymakers on REIs established
- **A c**ritical mass of non-state actors like CSOs and CBOs built.
- Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) initiative that could track Nigeria's NDC, SDGs implementation and SE4LL (Green Bond Initiative and rural electrification) established

6. Conclusion

The empowerment and strengthening of the African Coalition for Sustainable Energy Access (ACSEA) via the Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) and GermanWatch sponsored project entitled ***Ensuring People-Centered Energy Transition in Africa through Civil Society Engagement*** will strengthen the roles of CSOs and CBOs in the promotion and implementation of sustainable energy transition initiatives as well as renewable energy-related NDC commitments in (5) African countries including Nigeria as a pilot. This will also equip CSOs and CBOs with updated skills, knowledge and tools to engage in renewable energy policy development and program implementation monitoring and strengthen their voice at the local, continental and global levels. Furthermore, the project will also ensure that CSO and CBO engagements are more coordinated under an empowered and strengthened **African Coalition for Sustainable Energy Access (ACSEA).**