

IUCN's role in the UN Secretary General's Initiative on SUSTAINABLE ENERGY FOR ALL

In 2011 the Secretary General of the United Nations launched a global Initiative to achieve *Sustainable Energy for All*. Energy enables social and economic development from basic needs to advanced industrial activity. At a time when 1.3 billion people do not have access to electricity, when 2.7 billion do not have access to safe cooking facilities, and when a shift to productive, sustainable energy use is imperative to protect the Earth's climate¹ this Initiative is closely linked to all of the key concerns facing humanity.

In order to help him drive this Initiative, the Secretary General established a High-level Group on Sustainable Energy for All in September 2011. Members of the High-level group are 32 individuals drawn from government, business, the intergovernmental system, and civil society. The Group is assisted by technical advisers. IUCN is represented on this group by the Director General, Julia Marton-Lefèvre. Mark Smith², acts as the DG's 'Sherpa' for this activity. IUCN is the only body on the group comprising government and NGO members, and representing the importance of considering nature-based solutions to energy issues.

The Secretary General's Initiative, launched just ahead of the International Year of Sustainable Energy (2012), is intended to serve as an important input to the Rio + 20 Summit and to achieve the following specific objectives by 2030:

- **Universal access** to modern energy services
- Doubling the rate of improvement in **energy efficiency**
- Doubling the share of **renewable energy** in the global energy mix.

In November 2011 the Secretary General issued a Vision Statement on Sustainable Energy for All³ to which the High-level Group was invited to comment, and IUCN's inputs about the need to maintain the health of ecosystems that sustain life on Earth and the role of biodiversity in this effort were maintained in the final text.

The High-level Group is in the process of preparing a Framework for Action to drive progress towards the three goals of this Initiative. The Group is also working on a strategy to mobilise commitments to action by business, governments and civil society. IUCN has been asked to play an important role in this, notably with civil society through our membership and our partners. A communications strategy is also being prepared.

¹ From Executive Summary, Sustainable Energy for All: A framework for Action, draft January 2012

² Director, Global Water and Food Security Programme, IUCN

³ [Click to view and download "Sustainable Energy for All, A Vision Statement by Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General"](#)

Having a seat at this table has allowed IUCN to stress that the vision of sustainable energy for all is a call to action to everybody. All countries, whether in developing, emerging or industrialised economies, will have to play their role for the three goals – access, efficiency and renewables – to be achieved by 2030. The aspiration is that concrete actions and commitments mobilised by this initiative will be instrumental in catalysing even more innovation and investment that will lead to the global energy transition and new economic opportunities that our planet so badly needs.

Sustainable energy for all is important to IUCN in that universal energy access is a priority for development and reducing poverty, and it is essential for justice and human dignity. Our Members are working with communities in countries where there is no access to energy and sustainability is key in ensuring that the benefits energy brings for food and water security and for women's equity can be fulfilled and that energy solutions do not degrade the ecosystem services that especially poor people, but also the wider economy, depend on.

We have referred to the need to always look for energy solutions through a sustainability lense that works equally well for social equity, food, health, water, and nature, and that sustainable development requires that solutions for one of these elements works for them all. This is reflected in the IUCN Programme 2013-2016 which is driven by the assessment that: *'global production and consumption patterns are destroying our life support system – nature – at persistent and dangerously high rates. And people, communities, governments and private actors are under-utilizing the potential power of nature and the solutions it can provide to global challenges in fields such as climate change, food security, social and economic development. IUCN terms these nature-based solutions ⁴* and there is no doubt that sustainable energy solutions will contribute to IUCN's goals in reaching sustainability for all.

We have also stressed that achieving the goal of sustainable energy for all is a profound challenge for the developed world, to change to a new path based on smarter, more efficient and low-carbon energy systems. This is vital, not only to reduce rising temperatures and biodiversity loss, but also to create new, and badly needed economic opportunities. We believe therefore that if the goals of the initiative are met, not only will it change lives for the poorest people, but sustainable energy for all will transform the future of the planet – creating a better future for humanity, for ecosystems and for the climate.

The picture below was taken at a press conference held during the World Future Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi on 16 January, in which the Secretary General of the UN and a few members of the High-level Group announced the goals for the Initiative to the media. The Director General of IUCN is at the Secretary General's left.

⁴ Summary, IUCN Programme 2013-2016, December 2011