
INTERNATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY AGENCY

Fifth meeting of the Council
Abu Dhabi, 24 – 25 June 2013

**Programmatic Discussion II:
Gateway to Renewable Energy Knowledge**

1. The Council's second programmatic discussion relates to IRENA's mandate to provide an authoritative, unified, global voice for renewable energy. This includes consideration of the Agency's growing global presence and need to develop a complementary communication strategy, and existing opportunities to develop an effective, comprehensive strategy for communications and outreach; and a preview of the annual institutional publication to be launched in January 2014.

I. IRENA Institutional Publication

2. An annual institutional publication has been identified as an important instrument to fulfil IRENA's strategic goal to provide an authoritative global voice for renewable energy. The overall goal of the publication is to inform high-level policy-making, as well as key stakeholders, on the key issues and trends facing renewable energy.

3. While policy makers are seen as the primary audience, IRENA's annual publication should also be relevant to other actors, including industry, investors, civil society and academia. It will be forward-looking, conveying a long-term vision for the transition from the existing energy system and infrastructure to ones based on renewable energy sources. At the same time, the publication will lay out a short- to medium-term pathway for what is achievable in the next 5-10 years, identifying, among other issues, major investment opportunities and the scope for more efficient and effective policy intervention. The findings will go beyond the descriptive, be practical, stimulate normative debate, and seek to catalyse government action, rather than merely making broad policy recommendations.

Progress to date

4. The first edition of the publication, currently in preparation, looks at the transformative implications of rapid economic shifts, population growth and the relative income growth of developing countries expected over the next few decades, and the implications in terms of energy demand. It will highlight the value, and the necessity, of a broad array of renewable energy solutions to address these challenges.

5. The publication will offer a compelling narrative on the critical importance of renewable energy, building on the existing literature (from the World Bank, United Nations agencies, International Energy Agency, REN21, etc.) and IRENA programmatic activities (socio-economic benefits, costing, REMAP, cities, grids, etc.), also identifying potential topics of interest for the 2014-2015 programmatic cycle (mini-grids, hybrid solutions, new roles for biomass).

The publication is planned to be divided into three building blocks:

1. Role of renewable energy in economy, environment and development

- By 2030, developing countries will be more populous and affluent than today, with a consequent increase in their global role. Their citizens will want, and will be able to afford, more comfortable lives, implying substantial increases in global energy consumption.
- Delivering this energy in conventional ways would cause irreparable environmental damage and increase many countries' costly dependence on foreign fuel imports. Renewable energy deployment offers a unique opportunity to address such adverse impacts.
- Renewable energy sources are abundant and widely distributed, with at least one type being abundant in every country. They provide environmentally friendly and domestically produced energy and can, therefore, create more democratic and more resilient energy systems.
- Renewable energy solutions also make good business sense in an increasing range of circumstances. They also bring many socio-economic benefits, including positive impacts on economic growth and job creation, and can sustainably improve people's lives in remote regions of the world.

2. New actors and new roles in changing energy markets

- The rise of distributed energy solutions brings a shift in paradigm, redefining the roles of all market players. Consumers are becoming producers, utilities' roles are changing and new financial models are emerging as energy systems are becoming more decentralised.
- Global energy consumption is concentrated in cities and is further increasing with global urbanisation. Integrated thinking about power demand, heating and cooling, industry needs and

transport is essential to benefit from synergies between these sectors and address urban energy needs in a sustainable manner.

- With rapidly falling costs, renewable energy provides a new opportunity to address many energy needs of islands that suffer from physical isolation and limited scope for economies of scale. They can reduce their fuel-import dependency, boost local employment, create value locally and improve their balance of payments by tapping into indigenous renewable energy sources.
- Distributed renewable energy also provides new ways to address rural energy concerns, including clean cooking and heating, and electricity access for all. Grid extensions alone are not progressing rapidly enough to achieve universal access to power. Mini-grids provide increasingly efficient electrification solutions, create local entrepreneurial opportunities and enable numerous productive uses powered by renewable energy.

3. Infrastructure

- Improved transmission, changes in distribution, and the development of storage and smart grids are essential to enable the rise of more distributed energy systems.
- The transformation cannot happen overnight. Gas generation, diesel back-ups and hybrid solutions will still play an important role during the transition in many countries.
- Different levels of complexity and the diverse scope for growth of countries' existing energy systems imply a multitude of possible approaches to the on-going transformation.
- Sustainable renewable energy deployment requires integrated thinking about energy systems as well as integrated management of natural resources, taking into consideration water and land uses from other sectors of economy.

For Council discussion

6. As the first edition takes shape, the Council and Member States may wish to provide comments for the further development and articulation of the outline as well as indications of specific inputs that may be made available.

II. Communications and outreach

7. In the short years since IRENA was established, the focus has been on creating a sound institutional structure, establishing an understanding of the important role the Agency can play, and implementing programmes of work. The Medium-term Strategy 2013-2017 refined the Agency's strategic direction: to become an authoritative global voice for renewable energy by serving as a centre of excellence for

renewable energy, renewable energy advisory resource for countries, and a network hub of country, regional and global programmes. The Agency aims to become a powerful force in advancing the agenda of the widespread adoption and use of renewable energy, with the ultimate goal of safeguarding a sustainable future.

8. Growing global recognition of the potential of renewable energy has led an increasing number of governments to engage in the development and deployment of renewable energy. As the business case for renewables strengthens, it has attracted private sector interest and investment. Further to this, numerous renewable energy initiatives, NGOs, and institutions are becoming active and increasingly vocal in promoting renewable energy globally. For IRENA to position itself as the main global agency entrusted with the promotion of the sustainable use of all forms of renewable energy will require strong, effective and engaged global communications and outreach.

9. With the experience of implementing successive work programmes and a growing body of work to be disseminated, the Agency has taken effective steps to establish the substantive basis for achieving greater global recognition. This provides a platform on which to build greater awareness of the Agency's expertise and the role it has been established to play. While progress has been made over the last two years in introducing the Agency and its work to stakeholders globally, it is recognised that these efforts need to continue, and to increase exponentially, as previously noted by IRENA Members and the Secretariat on numerous occasions.

10. Effective communications and outreach are necessary to help IRENA achieve its overall organisational objectives, engage effectively with stakeholders, and demonstrate the success of its work. IRENA is now in the process of defining a comprehensive communications and outreach strategy for the Agency's work, activities and publications, that includes embedding communications and outreach systematically in all programmatic activities, with a view to enhancing the Agency's public visibility as well as enhancing global recognition of the role of renewable energy and the Agency's wide-ranging activities to promote its uptake globally. Furthermore, consideration is being given to partnerships with other relevant actors in communicating a message on renewables.

Progress to date

11. Progress in making the case for renewables and Agency outreach has been made in a number of areas. Publication views continue to increase, as do the cross references and quotes from IRENA's work and findings in technical and scientific publications. Further, media coverage of IRENA's products, events and activities, whether in print, on the Internet, or on television and radio, is steadily increasing and expanding in geographical scope. IRENA's third Assembly and related Agency activities attracted considerable international media attention, confirming the rise in pre-eminence of this annual gathering.

12. Since 2011, IRENA's Director-General and staff have been invited to contribute to, and to showcase the Agency and its work at numerous events around the world. These include events with a regional focus, such as the Middle East North Africa Renewable Energy Conference (MENAREC) and the Pacific

Island Forum, as well as events with a more global perspective, including Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week and the World Future Energy Summit, the Vienna Energy Forum, and Singapore International Energy Week, among others. The thematic scope of these events spans renewable energy, energy more broadly, and sustainable development. IRENA has also organised and co-hosted over 80 conferences, workshops, and activities in numerous countries. The Agency has utilised these events to communicate key messages and explain its work, and to develop partnerships with a broad range of stakeholders across the globe. The geographical spread of IRENA's presence through activities, workshops, events and participation is continuously increasing. For details on progress in IRENA outreach and communications, please refer to C/5/CRP/5.

13. Membership involvement is crucial across all levels of the Agency's work, including communications. Therefore, the Agency strives to regularly update the membership on progress, and to engage and communicate across all levels in capitals and at headquarters. To aid this, the Secretariat has developed a Bulletin which is released throughout the year and contains information, including relevant staff contact details, on both the past and upcoming activities and events of the Agency. As a further step, an Internet-based portal called REmember will be launched, facilitating the flow of information and feedback between the Secretariat and the membership.

14. IRENA's website is updated regularly, but requires more systematic updating of its content in real time. Plans are also underway to re-design it to a more attractive and user friendly interface that places emphasis on showcasing IRENA's numerous initiatives, publications, activities and events. The Agency's social media presence has grown to include Facebook pages and Youtube channels, enabling the Agency to target a broader audience.

15. The host country-sponsored "Voice of Renewables" project is under implementation, aimed at creating, developing and promoting a strengthened identity for IRENA and raising awareness on renewable energy across the host country, the region and globally. An example of this outreach is the Agency's work in the United Arab Emirates to raise awareness about renewable energy, the workings of international organisations and the value of IRENA's presence and work. Under "Voice of Renewables", the Agency will be able to build on the current in-house communications efforts by engaging external communications support to develop a strategy that will enhance IRENA's position.

16. While work on 2013 deliverables is progressing, it is also necessary to consider a longer-term view of the Agency's communications and outreach functions reflecting the programmatic plans for the upcoming biennium. Communication efforts need now to be consolidated and a more strategic approach put in place. In designing a future communications strategy, it will be vital to take a realistic approach at available resources to ensure systematic communication and outreach to match the ambitious work programme and meet the increasing expectations of Members and other stakeholders.

17. IRENA has limited communication resources compared to other entities and groups. Even with the fully staffed current communications component, it would be unrealistic to expect a major improvement within the current staffing structure. Additional resources are necessary to offer professional

communications support to programmatic staff to devise compelling messaging for their substantive work products and activities, ensure consistency across the organization and conduct outreach campaigns.

For Council discussion

18. One of IRENA's greatest attributes is its broad convening power and the active engagement of the Agency's membership. An important opportunity exists to partner with the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders, to create a collective global voice to make the case for renewable energy. Collective efforts and mutual support for each other's work can communicate the benefits and dispel the myths around renewable energy more effectively.

19. The same holds true for closer involvement with the membership focal point network. A better understanding of how this network could systematically disseminate the Agency's products, and embed IRENA's messages at the country and regional levels, would inform the future communications strategy. The establishment of the Renewables Club shows the willingness of the membership to take mutual responsibility for promoting renewables, and this could act as a model for broader future engagement.

20. A strategic discussion and guidance on communications at Council will help to set the priorities in IRENA's work programmes and budget for 2014-2015 and beyond. Other entities involved in renewable energy have also been invited to contribute to the discussion on coordinating efforts towards reaching joint communications and messaging on the broader agenda of renewables.