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POLICY BRIEF

Can Mission 300 Build a Just Energy Transition in Sub-Saharan Africa?

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Executive Summary

Sub-Saharan Africa stands at a pivotal moment. Mission 300 (M300) a joint initiative by the World Bank Group (WBG) and African Development Bank (AfDB) promises to halve energy poverty in the region by 2030. Yet without a radical shift in financing, design and accountability, this promise risks bypassing the very communities it aims to serve.

This policy brief outlines ACCESS Coalition's position on Mission 300 and its potential to deliver a just energy transition in Sub-Saharan Africa. It calls for pro-poor financing, inclusive design and meaningful civil society engagement to ensure that energy investments reach the last mile and uphold development equity.

Drawing on recent data and stakeholder analysis, the brief highlights critical gaps in current energy access financing and implementation, including the exclusion of informal settlements, the dominance of grid-scale investments, and the lack of community consultation. The policy brief proposes strategic recommendations to ensure Mission 300 delivers not just connections, but transformative energy access that enables dignity, development and climate resilience.

Summary of Strategic Recommendations

1. Adopt pro-poor investment approaches, including ring-fencing concessional capital from International Development Association (IDA), Global Environment Facility (GEF), and Clean Cooking Fund (CCF) windows for supply and demand-side financing of M300 energy access investments.
2. Invest in energy safety nets, including creation of a Gender and Social Justice Energy Safety Net Fund to deliver targeted subsidies and conditional cash transfers for basic electricity and clean cooking access to the poorest 10% of households.
3. Adopt a Decentralized Renewable Energy (DRE) Priority Framework into the Africa Energy Program and IDA 21–22 portfolios and channel at least 50% of Mission 300 investments towards DRE solutions.
4. Establish and resource a Local Currency and RBF Guarantee Facility to catalyze domestic finance for DRE enterprises.
5. Adopt inclusive, cross-sectoral design and implementation for M300 projects, with meaningful community consultation along the project cycle.
6. Integrate M300 investments into broader development and climate plans, in nexus sectors including health, education, agriculture and social protection, with (co)finance for non-energy supporting interventions, to maximize their development impact.
7. Formalize a Civil Society Engagement Mechanism across M300 and Just Energy Transition Partnership (JET-P) structures to ensure ongoing feedback and promote transparency.
8. Finance an independent social and environmental risk and impact monitoring mechanism in all M300 projects, with clear performance indicators on how projects promote gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI).

Stalling progress on energy access in Sub Saharan Africa

The global target on affordable, reliable and sustainable modern energy for all (SDG 7) remains severely off track, overwhelmingly due to deepening energy poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The recent Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report 2025 (SDG 7 Progress Report) highlights that while global electricity access has reached 92%, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) remains home to over 600 million people without electricity. The region is also the main location for cooking poverty: [nearly 900 million still lack access to clean cooking](#)^[1]. The pace of electrification is insufficient to outpace population growth and, according to the SDG 7 Progress Report, most of the electricity poor live in remote areas, areas of conflict or violence, and low-income regions.

Finance for energy access remains heavily concentrated in middle-income countries and grid-scale projects, while the solutions that are the most cost effective for reaching the energy poor in SSA - small-scale Decentralized Renewable Energy (DRE) systems—mini-grids, solar home systems, and clean cooking solutions, including e-cooking technologies — receive only a fraction of global clean energy investment. According to the IEA, Sub-Saharan Africa needs USD 190 billion annually in clean energy investments through 2030 to achieve universal access yet currently receives less than 4% of that amount.

The [SDG7 Progress Report](#)^[2] further warns that the types of financing available, predominantly loans and blended debt over concessional and grant-based financing, risk deepening debt distress in low-income and fragile states.

SDG 7 will only be deliverable with a paradigm shift where energy investments are designed, financed and implemented to meet the needs of the low-income and marginalised communities living in rural areas and informal peri-urban settlements. In Sub-Saharan Africa, [more than half the population lives in these settings](#)^[3]

Mission 300: halving the number of energy poor in Sub Saharan Africa by 2030

The Alliance of CSOs for Clean Energy Access (ACCESS), a network of over 100 African and global civil society organizations welcomes the ambition of the World Bank Group (WBG) and the African Development Bank (AfDB)'s Mission 300 (M300). M300 recognises the scale of the problem in the region. It represents an unprecedented opportunity to close the SDG 7 gap in the region, including by integrating eCooking loads into electrification projects, leapfrogging to clean cooking while enhancing demand and benefiting utilities.

However, its success will be measured by whether it succeeds in delivering affordable, reliable and sustainable electricity to the last mile populations it aims to reach. To do this, M300 investments must target the right groups - underserved and poor groups living in the “last mile” - with the right electricity solutions and financing models to build sustainable electricity demand and to enable their wider development needs.

As of September 2025, twenty-nine country compacts had been registered, pledging to deliver new or improved electricity access to more than 800 million people. [While they contain large financial pledges \(reported at \\$1.6 trillion\), most of the deployed finance is private sector investment in renewable power generation \(large-scale transition projects\), rather than dedicated funding for last-mile energy access.](#)^[4]

[1] <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/94cda685-2495-4b1d-926a-147424f98f5d>

[2] <https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/sites/default/files/download-documents/sdg7-report2025-0620-v6-highres.pdf>

[3] <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.SLUM.UR.ZS>

[4] <https://www.seforall.org/system/files/2025-09/energycompacts-annual-progress-report2025.pdf>

It is concerning that none of the M300 country energy compacts include targeted energy access programmes for informal settlements.

Overall, to date, there is no clarity on how these investments will be designed and implemented, including how the target communities, will be meaningfully consulted to ensure that proposed projects meet their needs for energy services. This lack of clarity is particularly concerning given that the World Bank's Environmental and Social Standard 10 (ESS10) which requires inclusive stakeholder engagement and ongoing consultation with affected communities throughout the project lifecycle. It remains unclear how the impacts of the investments will be measured and whether community feedback will inform monitoring and evaluation processes.

To address these gaps, ACCESS Coalition is calling on the WBG Directors and M300 Leadership to take the following three steps:

Policy Recommendation 1: Adopt pro-poor investment approaches and scale concessional and grant finance and energy safety nets to leave no-one behind

The prevailing energy access finance architecture access in Sub-Saharan Africa continues to overlook structural barriers such as exposure of local enterprises to foreign currency risk, the shallow depth of domestic credit markets, and the high upfront costs of modern energy technologies for low-income households. To deliver on the promise of SDG7 and Mission 300, the WBG must take decisive steps to de-risk local finance and mandate investment approaches and financing instruments that explicitly target the poorest and most underserved communities.

Specifically, the WBG should ring-fence concessional capital from International Development Association (IDA), Global Environment Facility (GEF), and Clean Cooking Fund (CCF) windows to provide, on the supply side, direct grants and results-based financing for DRE developers and e-cooking innovators working in fragile and low-income contexts. In addition, greater provision of demand-side financing support is needed to ensure the affordability of energy technologies and services for poor consumers. This includes ensuring sustainable and affordable electricity access through lifeline tariffs, subsidies, or appliance discounts, alongside public awareness and behaviour change campaigns to boost demand and adoption. We also support Sustainable Energy for All ([SEforALL's recommendation to use social assistance mechanisms to close affordability gaps for the poorest groups](#))^[5]. To this end, we propose the creation of a Gender and Social Justice Energy Safety Net Fund, to deliver targeted subsidies and conditional cash transfers for basic electricity and clean cooking access among the poorest 10% of households, putting social justice at the heart of the continent's clean energy transition.

A Local Currency and Results-Based Financing (LC-RBF) Guarantee Facility could unlock domestic capital and encourage commercial banks to lend to DRE and clean cooking enterprises. This could include support at scale for eCooking through electrification projects such as grid transmission and distribution improvements, and off grid solar and mini grid projects. Such a facility would help mitigate exchange rate volatility, lower borrowing costs, and catalyze local investment in energy projects.

[5] <https://www.seforall.org/system/files/2020-02/ESN-SEforALL.pdf>

Complementing this, M300 could adopt a Decentralized Renewable Energy Priority Framework (DPF), requiring all Bank-supported Compacts to include clear, measurable targets to promote DRE systems such as mini-grids and solar home systems that serve unelectrified, low-income zones (for example, at least 50% of new connections).

Policy Recommendation 2: Institutionalize inclusive, cross-sectoral investment design and implementation with meaningful community input

A just and sustainable energy transition cannot be achieved without the meaningful participation of energy poor groups and civil society organizations (CSOs) who represent marginalized communities who are most affected by energy poverty. World Bank Environmental and Social Standard 10 (ESS10) requires community consultation in projects but to date there is no detail on how this will be operationalised along the M300 project cycle. This is critical given the projects are aimed at meeting the needs of marginalised, energy poor communities.

In addition, energy access is a foundational enabler of sustainable local development and climate resilience, and evidence shows that energy infrastructure and technology investments alone, for instance in Productive Uses of Energy (PuE) do not deliver sustainable demand or socioeconomic development impact without additional support. Yet planning and delivery models continue to treat energy projects as standalone infrastructure investments. To maximize co-benefits and ensure sustainable development impact, M300 should aim to integrate energy access investments into broader development and climate plans, in nexus sectors including health, education, agriculture and social protection, and provide (co)finance for non-energy supporting interventions.

One way of doing this would be to require all M300 country proposals to use inclusive investment design and implementation approaches, in line with ESS10, and to include co-benefits indicators that link energy access to broader development outcomes. This could be supported by dedicated technical assistance and capacity building across sectoral ministries and local government and other project developers. These approaches should be embedded into Energy Compact reporting and Mission 300 monitoring frameworks.

Policy Recommendation 3: Ensure meaningful community consultation and structured civil society engagement in investment decision-making processes

Despite widespread acknowledgement of the critical role played by civil society in a just energy transition, current multilateral development bank (MDB) engagement frameworks often treat CSOs as peripheral stakeholders, rather than as core partners in shaping, implementing, and monitoring energy projects. This approach limits transparency, weakens accountability, and raises the risk of maladapted and suboptimal projects unaligned with the realities of the people the investments are meant to serve.

One measure to address this would be to institutionalize structured, resourced, and permanent mechanisms for CSO engagement in the Africa Energy Program, M300 platforms, and Just Energy Transition Partnership (JET-P) frameworks. Such a mechanism would create space for ongoing dialogue, technical input, and joint problem-solving between CSOs, government counterparts, and WBG teams across all stages of the project cycle. Another measure would be dedicated financing for independent third-party monitoring of the social and environmental impacts of M300 investments, including tracking the impacts on Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) impacts of projects.

This is key to identifying and mitigating project risks, promoting GEDSI, strengthening performance tracking and enabling responsive course corrections during implementation, while reinforcing trust between target communities and financing and implementing agencies.

Conclusion and Call to Action

Mission 300 has the potential to be a historic success, but success cannot be measured solely by the number of connections. It must be measured by the depth of poverty reduction and the equity of the transition.

ACCESS Coalition calls on the World Bank to channel investments to the marginalized, energy-poor communities through decentralized, affordable, and inclusive energy systems. By scaling concessional finance, institutionalizing participatory governance, and embedding energy access into broader development and climate strategies the World Bank can demonstrate that its evolution truly delivers on global development equity. A just energy future for Africa depends on whether today's financing and planning decisions prioritize not just megawatts, but people and the systems that sustain them.

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About the ACCESS Coalition

The Alliance of Civil Society Organisations for Clean Energy Access (ACCESS Coalition) is a global coalition of over 100 civil society organisations delivering energy services to poor and marginalised communities. We work with our members to advocate for access to safe, reliable and affordable energy and for environmentally sustainable and efficient energy systems globally.

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