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Alliance of Civil Society Organisations for Clean Energy Access
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POLICY BRIEF 6

SCALING INCLUSIVE, CROSS-SECTORAL PLANNING FOR JUST ENERGY TRANSITIONS AND CLIMATE-RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT

About ACCESS

Founded in 2014, the Alliance of Civil Society Organisations for Clean Energy Access (ACCESS) is a network of more than 100 civil society organisations, researchers and practitioners working across Sub-Saharan Africa and developing Asia. Our aim is to accelerate delivery of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7, building socially just energy transitions that support climate-resilient development.

ACCESS's 2026–2030 strategy has four interlinked change areas:

- Transforming the public financing architecture for energy access, with a particular focus on the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the World Bank as the biggest providers of energy finance in Sub-Saharan Africa
- Strengthening national SDG 7 and related policy frameworks in energy access deficit countries
- Scaling inclusive, cross-sectoral planning with energy as an enabler of wider development impact
- Strengthening civil society and energy-poor communities' participation and voice in energy governance at national, regional and international level to ensure transparency and accountability of investments and policies.

This brief addresses the third of these change areas—planning and design of energy investments and programmes. Adopting more inclusive, cross-sectoral planning approaches is linked to the other three change areas.

Energy access when combined with other support, can lead to sustainable SDG 7 national delivery and wider SDG impacts, including for SDG 13 on climate action. Participatory planning promotes social inclusion, enhances demand and can build the financial viability of services, ensuring effective deployment of energy finance.

The Case for Change

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 85% of the global population living without electricity – 565 million people – up from 50% in 2010, despite decades of energy access interventions. While 35 million new connections were made across the region in 2023 alone, progress is consistently outpaced by rapid population growth.[1] On current trajectories, an estimated 545 million people in the region will still live in electricity poverty when the Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7) deadline of 2030 is reached.[2]

Progress on cooking energy poverty is even slower. Around 960 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa, the vast majority living in rural areas but also in informal settlements, cook using polluting biomass and open fires.[3] Household air pollution is associated with an estimated 2.9 million deaths a year, while women and girls unfairly bear the gruelling labour and time burden of collecting firewood.[4]

Energy use must be understood as a socio-technical practice embedded in, and determined by, wider social and cultural systems.

[1]IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank and WHO (2025). Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report 2025. Washington, DC: World Bank. https://www.iea.org/reports/tracking-sdg7-the-energy-progress-report-2025.
[2]IEA (2024). SDG7: Data and Projections. Paris: IEA. https://www.iea.org/reports/sdg7-data-and-projections.
[3]IEA (2024). SDG7: Data and Projections – Access to Clean Cooking. Paris: IEA. https://www.iea.org/reports/sdg7-data-and-projections/access-to-clean-cooking.
[4]WHO (2025). Household Air Pollution and Health. Fact sheet, 16 December 2025. Geneva: World Health Organization. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/household-air-pollution-and-health.

The demographics of energy poverty are deeply tied to social marginalisation and inequality. Those affected typically have low incomes, reside in remote, off-grid locations, or live within fragile, conflict-affected contexts.

Delivering sustainable access to energy-poor groups requires financing approaches, service designs and policy frameworks that respond to their needs and local realities. ACCESS believes that a fundamental transformation of financing, policy and planning is required to deliver on the promise of SDG 7 and build genuinely just energy transitions across Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Scaling inclusive, cross-sectoral energy planning and delivery

The evidence on the "electricity access–development nexus" shows that development outcomes depend on complex, context-specific interactions, particularly when delivering energy access for poor and marginalised groups. Energy services must be combined with other support to be sustainable and lead to development impacts. [5]

Planning effectively for just energy transitions thus requires putting the needs of energy-poor people and their local realities at the heart of designing services. However, most energy planning in access deficit countries uses quantitative modelling approaches that are top-down, technology and infrastructure-focussed, and do not capture spatial variation, informal economies and the socio-cultural factors that are often determining in energy use.

The limits of energy connections alone

Evidence shows that energy access does not automatically translate into socio-economic development. Energy demand is conditioned by, and embedded within, broader socio-economic and cultural systems.[6] This affects the development outcomes from electrification, and even the sustainability of the service itself. Additional support beyond a connection is needed to deliver sustainable development impact, especially beyond household access, when delivering energy for productive activities or community services. This includes support for the operation and maintenance of the energy service itself, but also "non-energy" support, such as access to finance and markets, training, infrastructure, and measures to address policy gaps and barriers in local socio-cultural practices.

National mini-grid programmes, for instance, often do not integrate productive use of energy (PUE) or community service (health, education) components. Holistic approaches could include support for appliance financing, agro-processing, cold storage, irrigation, training on

[5] Riva, F., Tognollo, A., Gardumi, F. and Colombo, E. (2018). Long-term energy planning and demand forecast in remote areas of developing countries: classification of case studies and insights from a modelling perspective. Energy Strategy Reviews, 20, 71–89. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esr.2018.02.006.

good agricultural practices and business development, along with targeted affordability support to enhance demand for mini-grid energy while building local livelihoods. Rwanda's approach to PUE is one example, combining electrification with support for income-generating activity, appliance financing and agro-processing, and treating energy as an input to livelihoods rather than a standalone service.[7]

Coordinating this type of investment requires energy planners and project developers to work across sectoral ministries and service providers, as well as other finance and delivery partners. Cross-sectoral and cross-agency coordination can often be more effective at sub-national level, where local governments and stakeholders are also well placed to identify community needs and align investments with local realities. However, they often lack the mandate, data and resources to plan energy services that reflect and deliver local priorities. One example where cross-sectoral, inclusive planning approaches have been used is County Energy Plans in Kenya,[8] for instance in developing the Meru County Energy Plan (2023) under an EU–Ministry of Energy technical assistance programme.[9]

The importance of inclusive, needs-based design

Because energy use is a socio-technical practice, how services are designed and implemented is critical for their effectiveness, sustainability and social inclusion. Estimating energy demand around end-users' development needs, rather than as a static quantity, and planning services as cross-sectoral enablers rather than in silos, can produce more cost-effective technology choices, better-aligned investment and budgeting, and more sustainable demand.

Mission 300 - an opportunity to design energy investments differently

Mission 300 (M300), the joint AfDB and WBG initiative launched in 2024, is the largest financing commitment to African electrification in years, aiming to halve electricity poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2030.[10] As of October 2026, the World Bank lists 35 countries with National Energy Compacts under Mission 300.[11] Compact Delivery and Monitoring Units (CDMUs) in each country are responsible for implementation.[12] This is a genuine opportunity to move beyond siloed planning to transformative programme design by combining electrification investments with wider support to deliver sustainable development impacts across PUE sectors and community services such as health and education.

30

countries have finalised National Compacts

2030

target year for delivery

[6]SDG7 Technical Advisory Group (2026). SDG7 Policy Briefs in Support of the UN High-Level Political Forum 2026. New York: UN DESA. https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2026-06/2026_policy_briefs_in_support_of_the_high-level_062526.pdf.
[7]World Bank and SEforALL (2024). Energizing Rwanda's Development: Opportunities and Strategies for Catalyzing Productive Use of Energy. Washington, DC: World Bank.
[8]Garside, B. and Perera, N. (2021). Energy Services for Local Development: Integrated and Inclusive Planning for County Governments in Kenya. London: IIED and CAFOD.
[9]County Government of Meru (2023). Meru County Energy Plan 2023–2033. Meru: County Government of Meru. https://maarifa.cog.go.ke/sites/default/files/2026-07/MERU%20%20COUNTY%20ENERGY%20PLAN%20%282023-2033%29.pdf.
[10]World Bank (n.d.). Mission 300: Energizing Africa. https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/energizingafrica (accessed 8 October 2026).
[11]World Bank (2026). Mission 300: National Energy Compacts. https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/energizingafrica/national-energy-compacts (accessed 8 October 2026).
[12]AfDB and World Bank (2024). Mission 300: An Africa Summit to Connect 300 Million People to Electricity by 2030. Abidjan and Washington, DC: AfDB and World Bank.

The changes ACCESS is seeking

ACCESS is calling on the AfDB and WBG as the largest public financiers of the energy transition in Sub-Saharan Africa, along with other DFIs and national governments, to change planning approaches and scale up the use of more inclusive, cross-sectoral design and delivery of energy investments, combining them with non-energy support to enhance development impact, social inclusion and service viability. All of the following actions should be initiated, demonstrably advanced, and delivering results ahead of the 2030 deadline for achieving SDG 7.

Specifically, ACCESS is calling for the following:

- Mission 300 Country Compacts in at least three focus countries to design electrification investments that integrate complementary livelihoods and community service support, with clear articulation of intended development outcomes.
- AfDB, WBG and other DFIs to provide dedicated resources and technical assistance to Compact Delivery and Monitoring Units (CDMUs) in at least three focus countries, enabling development needs-based, cross-sectoral design of M300 investments.
- Governments in at least three focus countries to develop or strengthen sub-national planning frameworks that promote inclusive, cross-sectoral energy planning, integrated with wider development planning processes.
- National governments in at least three focus countries to establish institutional mechanisms; such as inter-ministerial coordination between energy and key development ministries (health, education, agriculture, rural development), to institutionalize cross-sectoral energy planning.

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