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Alliance of Civil Society
Organisations for
Clean Energy Access

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POLICY BRIEF 7

**ENHANCING INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE AND CIVIL
SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN
ENERGY DECISION-MAKING**

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.

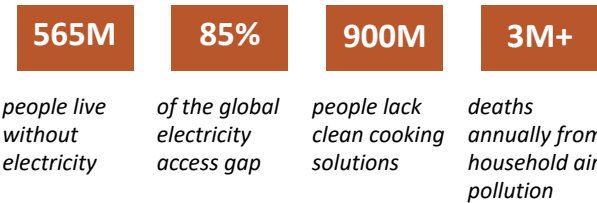
ACCESS's 2026–2030 strategy has four interlinked change areas:

- 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 fourth of these change areas: strengthening the participation and voice of civil society and energy poor communities in energy governance at the national, regional and international levels, while promoting transparency and accountability in investments and policies.

The Case for Change

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 85% of the global population living without electricity, amounting to 565 million people. This share has surged by 50% since 2010 despite decades of energy access interventions. While 35 million new connections were made across the continent in 2023 alone, progress is being consistently outpaced by rapid population growth. Consequently, on current trajectories, an estimated 545 million people will still live in electricity poverty when the Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7) deadline of 2030 is reached.



Cooking energy poverty is even greater. Around 900 million people, the vast majority living in rural areas but also in informal settlements, lack clean cooking solutions and rely on polluting biomass and open fires. [3]

This causes household air pollution associated with over three million deaths annually, while women and girls unfairly bear the gruelling labour and time burden of collecting firewood. [4]

[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-afflicted contexts. Energy use also needs to be understood as a socio-technical practice embedded in, and determined by, wider social and cultural systems.

Delivering sustainable access to energy-poor groups requires financing approaches, service designs, and policy frameworks that respond to their unique 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.

Change area 4: Strengthening civil society voice

This cuts across ACCESS's other three change areas and is a critical component of achieving transformative changes to energy access financing, policies and planning.

Implementing inclusivity

Although inclusivity is embedded in global commitments, energy governance continues to be heavily technocratic and donor-driven. Newer social standards adopted by Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), such as the World Bank's Environmental and Social Standard 10 (ESS10)^[5] have created openings for civil society and community consultation in investment decisions. Yet these mechanisms still fall short of ensuring substantive participation or the co-design of investments.

Instead, communities are often brought in to validate final investments or consulted only on minor project details as a form of tokenism, rather than being granted a genuine opportunity to co-design initiatives or to reject high-risk project components^{[3][4]}. Defining participation around the generalized category of stakeholder risks reducing engagement to a managerial, procedural step. This links to ACCESS's third change area advocating for more inclusive, cross-sectoral planning of investments. Planning electrification and clean cooking programmes without understanding the lived energy use of target groups and their wider context, and without considering how gender, disability, and social inclusion issues can limit energy access, resulting in services without social ownership, which in turn can lead to sub-optimal impacts or failed investments.

The role of civil society

Civil society and local development organisations delivering development services to poor communities can also act as a critical bridge between energy service developers and energy-poor end users through the trusted relationships they have built and their understanding of local contexts.

If CSOs and energy-poor communities have opportunities to participate in energy service design and delivery, through formal mechanisms and participatory processes, apart from providing independent scrutiny and helping to identify risks, their local knowledge can be harnessed for more effective decision-making and build socially responsive investment and in turn enhance energy demand.

^[5]World Bank (2016). Environmental and Social Framework. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/environmental-and-social-framework> (accessed 8 October 2026).

^[6]World Bank (2017). ESF Guidance Note 10: Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/476161530217390609/ESF-Guidance-Note-10-Stakeholder-Engagement-and-Information-Disclosure-English.pdf>; Power Shift Africa (2023). Just Transition: A Pathway to Sustainable Energy in Africa. Nairobi: Power Shift Africa.

A seat at the table means little without the means to hold decisions to account. ACCESS is calling for greater transparency, clearer impact monitoring and evaluation, and greater accountability of energy access investments, including through enhanced public reporting, independent monitoring and enhancement of grievance mechanisms.

Civil society space and capacity

Alongside the introduction or improvement of participation, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, CSOs must have sufficient civic space and adequate capacity to use such mechanisms and participate meaningfully in energy access governance. ACCESS advocates with other partners against restrictions on civic space in SSA countries. We partner with Country Focal Institutions with local legitimacy, supporting them with capacity development if needed.

Mission 300

Mission 300, an initiative by the African Development Bank and the World Bank Group aiming to halve electricity poverty in SSA by 2030, represents a critical opportunity for more inclusive energy access governance.^[7]

Around 30 countries have launched M300 Country Compacts, coordinated through national Compact Delivery and Monitoring Units (CDMUs).^[5] This presents an opportunity to build civil society participation into Mission 300 Compact implementation and monitoring through the CDMUs.

As of October 2026, the World Bank lists 35 countries with National Energy Compacts under Mission 300.^[8] Each is coordinated through a national Compact Delivery and Monitoring Unit (CDMU).^[9] This presents an opportunity to build civil society participation into Mission 300 Compact implementation and monitoring through the CDMUs.

To date, institutionalised mechanisms for civil society and community participation in Mission 300 remain inconsistent at both the global headquarters level and within National Energy Compacts. At the international level, civil society involvement is largely limited to ad hoc advisory dialogues, such as World Bank and African Development Bank CSO forums, rather than formal governance roles. At the national level, while a few countries such as Ghana, Sierra Leone and Comoros have integrated community input or gender-responsive targets into their Compact design, many national implementation frameworks and CDMUs omit CSOs entirely from ongoing oversight. Public access to Mission 300 investment plans is limited and varies widely. There is as yet no clarity on what monitoring frameworks and impact indicators will be used, and whether there will be any independent scrutiny of investment data.

^[7]World Bank (n.d.). Mission 300: Energizing Africa. <https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/energizingafrica> (accessed 8 October 2026).

^[8]World Bank (2026). Mission 300: National Energy Compacts. <https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/energizingafrica/national-energy-compacts> (accessed 8 October 2026).

^[9]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.

What changes ACCESS is calling for

ACCESS calls on the AfDB, the World Bank, other development financiers and national governments in energy access deficit countries to deliver on the following priorities ahead of the 2030 deadline for achieving SDG 7:

- Include structured participation mechanisms for civil society and energy-poor communities in their energy investment design, delivery and monitoring, aligned with standards such as the World Bank's ESS10.
- Strengthen public reporting and independent monitoring of energy access investments and ensure accessible grievance mechanisms.
- Institutionalize formal, accredited civil society participation in Mission 300 Compact governance at headquarters level and in national compacts.
- Ensure public access to Mission 300 investment plans.
- Develop clear monitoring and impact evaluation frameworks for Mission 300 Compacts
- Support civic space and enhanced national civil society capacity to participate meaningfully in energy investment design, delivery and monitoring.

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About the ACCESS Coalition

The Alliance of Civil Society Organisations for Clean Energy Access (ACCESS), founded in 2014, is a network of more than 100 civil society organisations, researchers and practitioners across Sub-Saharan Africa working to accelerate progress on SDG 7 and build socially just energy transitions that deliver wider development impact and poverty reduction.

Contact Information

P.O. BOX 680-00606 Nairobi

Email: Info@access-coalition.org



www.access-coalition.org



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