

CLUB FORUM

WEST AFRICA AND BRAZIL: ADDRESSING RENEWABLE ENERGY CHALLENGES



organised by the Sahel and West Africa Club
Secretariat (SWAC/OECD);

in collaboration with the ECOWAS Regional Centre
for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency
(ECREEE).

WEST AFRICA'S ENERGY CHALLENGES

The development of the energy sector is a key challenge for all West African countries, oil producing and oil importing alike, and the lack of access to reliable electricity sources heavily impedes the industrialisation process. Nigeria is a particularly striking example. Despite being the region's largest oil and gas exporter, about 60% of the population has no access to the electric power grid (90% in rural areas). Widespread and unsustainable use of wood resources also poses a serious threat to the region; it not only contributes to deforestation and desertification but may also ultimately impact food production and food security. For most countries in the region, over 60% of the total energy consumption comes from traditional biomass, and over 90% of the population uses wood and charcoal harvested from local forests for domestic cooking. In order to address these challenges, many West African countries have initiated power sector reforms geared towards the privatisation of state-owned, heavily bureaucratic electricity companies in the hopes of improving the efficiency of operations and increasing overall access. Countries are also seeking to attract new development partners in order to both benefit from their experience and acquire additional funding sources. So far, only a few countries have established strategies for the development of renewable energy. However, many of West Africa's key energy challenges (i.e. energy access, energy security and climate change mitigation and adaptation) can more easily be addressed regionally.

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PRESS RELEASE

The Sahel and West Africa Club's Forum brings together SWAC Members and all stakeholders – public and private sectors, civil society representatives, development partners and the media – to discuss a priority development issue for Sahelian and West African countries. Pooling together their experiences, ideas and perspectives, it serves as a platform for participants from West Africa and other regions to identify potential areas for consensus-based regional action.

This year's Forum, hosted by the government of Cape Verde, is dedicated to renewable energy challenges within the context of South-South co-operation, in particular with Brazil. The 2011 Forum will also follow-up on the July 2010 ECOWAS-Brazil Summit, where renewable energy and ECOWAS-Brazil partnerships were central topics of discussions.

Drawing on key findings of the African Economic Outlook 2011, the first day of the Forum will focus on West Africa's relationship with "emerging partners". More particularly Brazil and Cape Verde will present their respective visions. The second day will address issues related to renewable energy, and analyse the complex linkages between bioenergy and food security. The development of renewable energy offers new opportunities for addressing West Africa's various energy challenges. Efforts to gradually move away from the unsustainable use of biomass and fossil resources are already underway in certain countries. Cape Verde, for example, has set-up a very ambitious plan for developing renewable energy sources that aims to meet 50% of the country's energy needs with renewable energy sources. Biofuels accounted for 26% of Brazil's energy consumption in 2010 (compared to a world average of 2.3%). West Africa can learn from this experience as it seeks to develop its own regional renewable energy policies.

Ultimately, discussions shall help build consensus among West Africa's regional organisations (ECOWAS/UEMOA/CILSS) on an integrated regional approach to renewable energy. Participants will also discuss ways in which SWAC might contribute to and support the development of a regional renewable energy policy in West Africa.

The Sahel and West Africa Club

The Club is a group of West African regional organisations, countries and international organisations that work together towards the development and integration of the West African region. The Club's mission is to pool together Members' experiences, ideas and perspectives to help build more effective regional policies. Drawing on factual studies and independent analyses, the Club devises strategic guidelines and policy tools for Members and other stakeholders.



The ECOWAS Regional Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE)

ECREEE aims to contribute to the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of West Africa by improving access to modern, reliable and affordable energy services. It also aims to improve energy security and reduce energy related GHG emissions and climate change impacts on the energy system. It is a necessary regional response to the interrelated challenges in the energy sector and the specific needs of ECOWAS Member States as expressed in national and regional policies.