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How to achieve Global Goal 7

sustainable energy for all - The SE4ALL Initiative

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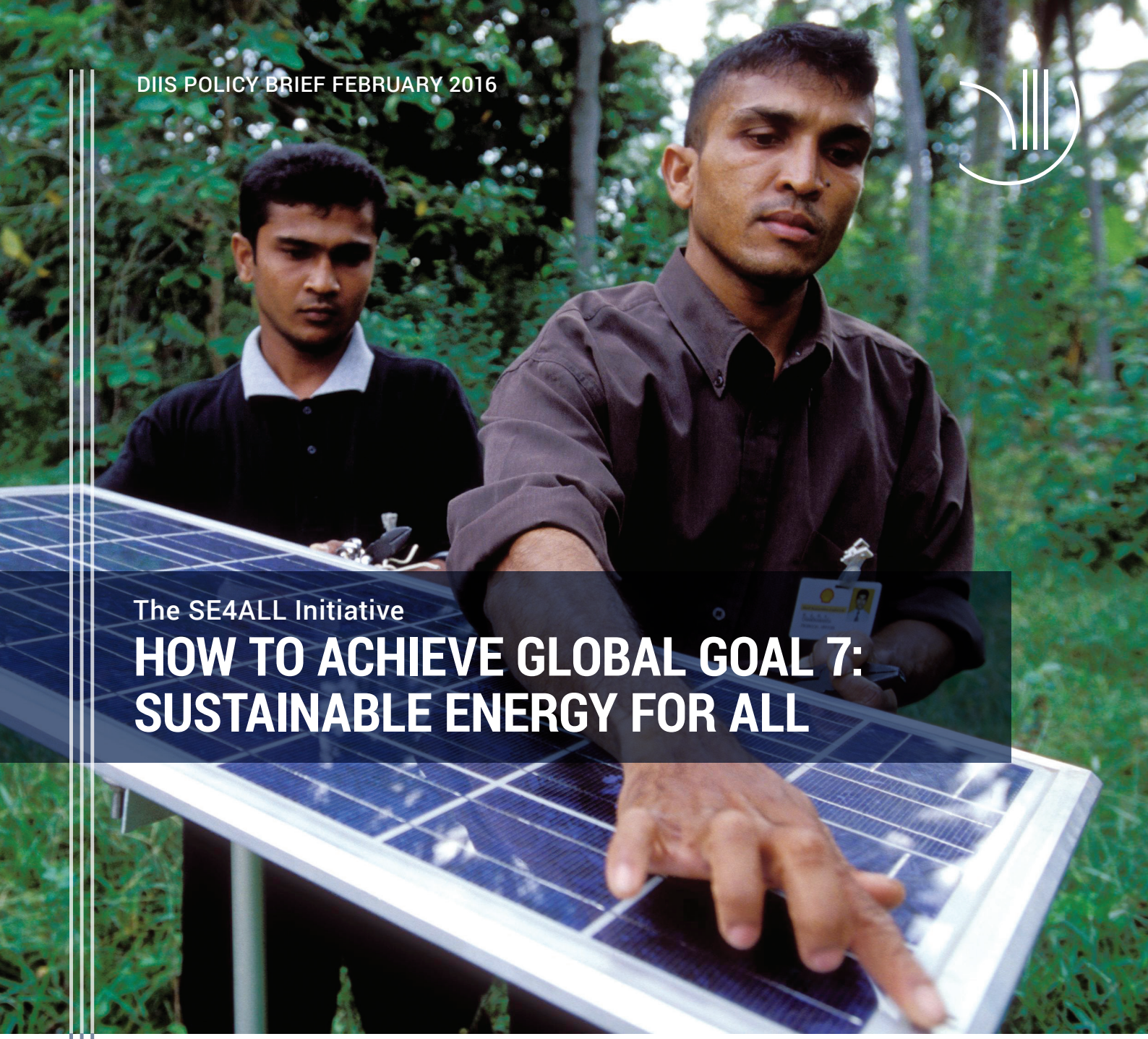

The SE4ALL Initiative

HOW TO ACHIEVE GLOBAL GOAL 7: SUSTAINABLE ENERGY FOR ALL

The Sustainable Energy for All initiative has the potential to stimulate knowledge exchange and investment to promote a global energy transition. To build momentum, a wider range of stakeholders should back its core activities.

Since its launch at the end of 2011, the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative has contributed to advancing the role of energy cooperation as a driver of global poverty reduction. The commitment of the world's governments to promote the SE4ALL goals of ensuring universal energy access, increasing the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix, and increasing energy efficiency as a component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

RECOMMENDATIONS

The SE4ALL Initiative Should:

- Clearly communicate the platform's multi-level and network character to distinguish the roles of the secretariat and implementing partners.
- Prioritize fundraising beyond a small core group of governmental supporters to increase capacity and underline global relevance.
- Outline the expected resource needs beyond the SE4ALL secretariat to expand thematic, regional, and country-level action.

The wide range of activities affiliated with SE4ALL can contribute to a gap between stakeholder expectations and its actual capacities to deliver

To limit the risk of creating unrealistic expectations about what SE4ALL can achieve and encourage stakeholders to remain engaged in supporting its agenda, the organization should clearly communicate its multi-level character and identify its core functions at different levels of action.

provides a sign of the initiative's agenda-setting success. These objectives remain highly relevant in a world where 20 percent of the population lacks access to electricity and 40 percent depend on biomass, charcoal, or coal for cooking fuel. Promoting clean energy provision can contribute to expanding social development and economic opportunities while supporting global commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and phase out a reliance on fossil fuels. This is an ambitious agenda aiming to fundamentally transform the global economy.

SE4ALL is a young initiative with a still-evolving organizational structure. To extend its achievements beyond a global agenda-setting role and strengthen the agenda's implementation, the platform needs to focus on two core areas: clearly defining the roles of the initiative and its partners at multiple levels of action and developing a diversified funding strategy. This will enable the initiative to assume a catalytic role in promoting a sustainable energy transition globally.

The many faces of SE4ALL

Activities related to SE4ALL are currently broad in scope. They include thematically-oriented action linked to High-Impact Opportunities (actions such as phasing out gas flaring or introducing modern cooking appliances with significant potential to address SE4ALL goals) and country-focused activities organized around national governments and development cooperation structures. Across different dimensions of the initiative, SE4ALL seeks to bring diverse stakeholders together and generate new commitments for action. To implement the various elements of its work program, SE4ALL relies on support from a small secretariat (primarily its Vienna-based Global Facilitation Team) and the capacities of thematic hubs such as the Copenhagen Centre on Energy Efficiency or geographic hubs based at the regional development banks. Beyond these partners, a broad array of multilateral organizations, governmental actors, and other stakeholders undertake actions aligned with the SE4ALL agenda and contribute to advancing its overarching goals.

Although SE4ALL can be considered an outgrowth of core multilateral institutions given the role of the UN Secretariat and World Bank as its co-conveners, its reliance on varied hubs and governmental and non-governmental stakeholders as implementing partners highlights its network character. The network approach can be considered an advantage in expanding the reach of an initiative with a minimal organizational apparatus at its core, but also creates a challenge in maintaining transparency. With many different entities around the world implementing activities linked to SE4ALL, it is difficult to directly attribute outputs to the SE4ALL initiative itself. This can lead to an accountability deficit for a platform benefiting from its association with the UN system.

Beyond this potential governance problem, the wide range of activities affiliated with SE4ALL can contribute to a gap between stakeholder expectations of how the initiative can address sustainable energy goals and its actual capacities to deliver. In this sense, the visibility of the initiative around the world can cut two ways. On the one hand, the proliferation of SE4ALL-branded activities can be viewed as a demonstration of the global relevance of its energy cooperation goals. On the other hand, this wide reach can convey the impression that the small SE4ALL Secretariat is responsible for successes and failures that do not directly relate to its core tasks.

Clearly defining levels of action and functions

To limit the risk of creating unrealistic expectations about what SE4ALL can achieve as a platform and encourage stakeholders to remain engaged in supporting its agenda, the organization should clearly communicate its multi-level character and identify its core functions at different levels of action. In its self-presentation of added value, SE4ALL lists several key functions. It aims to fulfill a convening role to encourage stakeholder collaboration, a knowledge brokerage role to promote the development and dissemination of best practices, and a facilitation role to support changes in the framework conditions influencing the potential for private investment in sustainable energy.

These functions each reflect large work programs in their own right and may individually best be adapted to different levels of action:

- At the global level, the convening and stakeholder outreach role is relevant in securing commitments from governmental, private sector, and civil society actors to align their activities with the normative reference framework that SE4ALL provides and to identify opportunities for joint action in advancing the agenda.

- At the regional or thematic level, the knowledge brokerage role builds on existing capacities of inter-governmental organizations to analyze trends across countries, monitor progress toward the achievement of SE4ALL goals, and provide guidance on policy shifts and cooperation models that can address sustainable energy deficits.

- Country-level facilitation efforts are essential in order to promote investment. Emphasizing the distinct responsibilities of SE4ALL stakeholders at these different levels of action can contribute to improving accountability in the implementation of the SE4ALL agenda.

An ambitious resource mobilization strategy

The funding needs for the realization of SE4ALL's goals of universal energy access, the expansion of

Family in Bariadi, Tanzania, using a solar lighting kit © DFID - UK Department for International Development

renewable energies, and improved energy efficiency are estimated to require a tripling of current sustainable energy investments to reach USD 1 trillion annually. Rather than serving as a vehicle for channeling funding to sustainable energy on its own, SE4ALL as a platform has the potential to act as a catalyst by encouraging public and private actors to identify and implement relevant solutions to address sustainable energy deficits. To assume this role, financial and human resources are needed to undertake activities such as conducting targeted outreach with important funding sources, organizing stakeholder dialogues, and generating and disseminating knowledge on innovative approaches to closing sustainable energy gaps.

Like other global multi-stakeholder initiatives, SE4ALL aspires to mobilize resources from diverse sources. However, the initiative's organizational development to date has largely been dependent on the contributions of a small number of bilateral aid providers that have traditionally been key supporters of the multilateral system. Diversifying the resource base for the initiative to obtain backing from UN member states beyond its limited circle of patrons from the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) is necessary not only to expand capacities but also to demonstrate that SE4ALL's political agenda has broad support. China and India have for example made significant progress in advancing sustainable energy development domestically, signaling that a more active contribution from these states in the work of the global platform would be valuable. Increased private sector support to expand the capacities of the platform would be consistent with the goal of promoting a new model of global cooperation that does not simply replicate state-centric formulas of the past.

In addition to prioritizing efforts to strengthen the initiative's convening capacities at the global level, the SE4ALL platform needs to explicitly outline what resources are needed to enable its various hubs and country-level partners to carry out activities supporting the agenda. In the absence of a strategy for resource mobilization reflecting funding needs across multiple levels of the initiative, there is a risk that new financing for SE4ALL-focused activities will be limited and momentum for the transformative agenda will stall.

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Cover photo: Solar panel used for lighting village homes in Sri Lanka © Dominic Sansoni/World Bank

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