

# Sustainable Energy for All: Energizing Ambition for Global Energy Transformation

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*A Case Study for the Natural Resources Defense Council*

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In 2012, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon launched the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) Initiative to address the urgent interconnected challenges of energy poverty and climate change. Some 1.3 billion people worldwide do not have electricity, and 2.6 billion still rely on burning wood, dung and other biomass for cooking and heating their homes, with adverse impacts on their health. At the same time, the growing combustion of fossil fuels is warming the planet and disrupting the climate. At the outset of SE4ALL, Ban Ki-moon called for “the development of a Global Action Agenda on the basis of which all stakeholders can make **concrete commitments** and offer **processes for shared learning and accountability- to enable participants to communicate about successes and failures and to ensure that commitments are kept and progress is tracked in an open and transparent way.**”<sup>1</sup>

SE4ALL has three main objectives with a target date of 2030:

1. Ensure universal access to modern energy services.
2. Double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.
3. Double the share of renewable energy in the global matrix from 18% to 36%.

SE4ALL is innovative in its engagement of the full range of stakeholders, including national governments, international agencies, corporations, and non-governmental organizations. Over the last three years, SE4ALL has grown to embrace dozens of networks addressing the various dimensions of the sustainable energy challenge. Recently, it was decided to move the secretariat function for the initiative from the UN to a new SE4ALL Partnership, and a search for a new Executive Director is underway. This case study involved extensive research, including interviews with a dozen individuals associated with the Initiative, and seeks to elucidate SE4ALL’s evolution and efficacy and to provide some recommendations for its strengthening.

## Progress and Challenges

### National Government Commitments

To date, 85 developing countries have joined the initiative and pledged to undertake a process leading to action and investment on sustainable energy. At least 45 of these have undertaken the first step by undergoing Rapid Analysis and Gap Assessments (RAGAs), often with the assistance of regional development banks. RAGAs are an analysis of a country’s energy production and potential for transformation. Unfortunately, the RAGAs are not accessible through the website, and some countries have refused to have their documents published. The RAGAs we reviewed did not follow a common format and varied substantially in depth and quality. Additionally, little information is available about the follow-up steps to the assessments. Investment forums have taken place in some countries, such as Bangladesh, but there is little to no information available as to what action has resulted from these processes.

### Commitment Registry

The SE4ALL website includes a registry of 165 individual commitments, largely made by the private sector actors. However, many of the listed commitments lack specificity of funding, partnering organizations, time frame, and contact information. There has also been no apparent effort to track these commitments and a number of the commitment makers we interviewed said that there was no

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<sup>1</sup> Statement retrieved at

[http://www.se4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/SG\\_Sustainable\\_Energy\\_for\\_All\\_vision.pdf](http://www.se4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/SG_Sustainable_Energy_for_All_vision.pdf)

follow-up from SE4ALL. Furthermore, the commitment registry is full of broken links, making it impossible to search.

### *Increasing Financing for Sustainable Energy*

The Finance Committee of SE4ALL's Advisory Board estimates that a yearly investment of \$45 billion towards energy access, \$320 billion in renewable energy, and a further \$390 billion in energy efficiency is necessary if the targets are to be reached by 2030. The SE4ALL Initiative says that one of its major accomplishments has been to increase the funding of sustainable energy, a point echoed by a number of our interviewees. However, the evidence we found is mixed. Some of the funding commitments were indeed new or expanded. The Bank of America, whose Chair Charles O. Holliday is also chair of the SE4All Executive Committee, made a new commitment of US\$70 billion in funding towards low-carbon business initiatives over 16 years. In many other cases, reported financing pledges were only business-as-usual. One private sector interviewee stated that his company would have proceeded with its commitment regardless of involvement with the initiative, and contacts at the regional development banks stated that the funding target their institutions committed to are the same as the average amount they spend on energy-related projects every year.

### *Transition towards a "Network of Networks"*

SE4ALL apparently has shifted its focus towards the creation of a host of new networked "communities" of stakeholders working on specific energy issues. They are labeled 'High Impact Opportunities (HIOs)' and the Initiative now lists 50 of them. The website currently features six HIOs- Clean Energy Mini-grids, Phase-out of Gas Flaring from Oil Production, and Universal Adoption of Clean Cooking Solutions. A number of these HIOs build upon other networks. Some have rather robust websites, such as Clean Cooking HIO, which provides country profiles, market research, streamlined information on technology, and an investment portal.

## **Recommendations**

1. SE4ALL needs to provide updated status reports on each of the countries that have joined the Initiative. Governments should be encouraged to prepare national agendas and host investment forums. SE4ALL should document what policy changes and investments have been made in each country. SE4ALL also needs to refocus its attention on its commitment registry. Fixing the registry so that it is navigable should be an immediate priority and moving forward, all listed commitments should require more specified information.
2. SE4ALL needs to focus more attention on financing investments in sustainable energy. SE4ALL needs to create a system to track increased funding and investments country-by-country in energy access, efficiency, and renewables. SE4ALL should attract new cross-industry investment by providing more adding value to private sector partnerships and easing the participation process. One suggestion is to develop or connect with a pre-existing investment portal, such as Sustainia, in which potential funders can easily be connected to relevant projects.
3. SE4ALL should review its initial vision and rationalize a structure. The connection between national government commitments, individual commitments, HIOs and other working groups need to be made clearer, and all overlap in activity and subject area should be addressed. Organizational sprawl must be reduced to create a cohesive, operational initiative.

*For a copy of our final report, please contact us at  
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