

Background Guide

African Union

Topic: The Green Energy Transition



AFRICAN UNION

Prepared by: Caylee Sheaffer

Hood College

Fall 2023

I. Introduction to the Committee

The African Union (AU) is a continental body consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African Continent. It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU, 1963-1999).

In May 1963, 32 Heads of independent African States met in Addis Ababa Ethiopia to sign the Charter creating Africa's first post-independence continental institution, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The OAU was the manifestation of the pan-African vision for an Africa that was united, free and in control of its own destiny. This was put in place by the OAU Charter in which the founding fathers recognized that "freedom, equality, justice and dignity were essential objectives for the achievement of the legitimate aspirations of the African peoples and that there was a need to promote understanding among Africa's peoples" and to "foster cooperation among African states in response to the aspirations of Africans for brotherhood and solidarity, in a larger unity transcending ethnic and national differences." The guiding philosophy was that of Pan-Africanism which centered on African socialism and promoted African unity, the communal characteristic and practices of African communities, and a drive to embrace Africa's culture and common heritage.

The main objectives of the OAU were to rid the continent of the remaining vestiges of colonization and apartheid; to promote unity and solidarity amongst African States; to coordinate and intensify cooperation for development; to safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States and to promote international cooperation. Through the OAU Coordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa, the Continent worked together in forging an international consensus in support of the liberation struggle and the fight against apartheid. The OAU had provided an effective forum that enabled all Member States to adopt coordinated positions on matters of common concern to the continent.

In September 1999, the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) issued the Sirte Declaration calling for the establishment of an African Union. They wanted to accelerate the process of integration in the continent to enable Africa to play a role in the global economy while addressing multifaceted social, economic and political problems compounded as they were by certain negative aspects of globalization.

The work of the AU is implemented through several principal decision-making organs which are: the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, the Executive Council, the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), Specialized Technical Committees (STCs), the Peace and Security Council, and the African Union Commission. The AU structure promotes participation of African citizens and civil society through the Pan-African Parliament and the Economic, Social & Cultural Council (ECOSOCC).

II. Statement of the Problem

West Africa has one of the world's lowest electrification rates according to a 2023 World Bank estimate, with 220 million people in the region living without access to electricity (Climate, 2023). Communities in West Africa also experience some of the highest electricity costs in sub-Saharan Africa, making individuals in the region particularly vulnerable to energy poverty. Energy poverty is defined as a "lack of access to electricity and dependence of the household energy needs on burning solid biomass using inefficient and polluting ways" (Climate, 2023). Researchers have linked energy poverty with poor physical and mental health, respiratory issues, chronic disease, and higher mortality rates. Energy poverty can also limit communities' access to clean drinking water, food security, health care, and quality education. For example, in West Africa, access to electricity is particularly low in rural communities (Climate, 2023). According to a 2022 World Bank estimate, the average electrification rate in West Africa is 42 percent, while in rural areas it is only 8 percent. Low levels of electrification directly correlate to high levels of energy poverty. Again, a 2021 study shows that in Togo, energy poverty levels in rural regions can reach as high as 98.8 percent (Climate, 2023).

African countries have a minimal impact on climate change compared to other regions in the world (AU, 2023). African countries' contribution to the emission of carbon dioxide is ranged between 3 to 5 percent of global emissions; however, despite its low contributions, climate change threatens Africa severely. Climate change poses grave threats to African countries, but especially fragile and conflict-affected states (Azour & Selassie, 2023). Temperatures in fragile states are higher than in other countries, causing extreme heat and extreme weather events. All of this affects human health and the economies of these states (Azour & Selassie, 2023). African countries have the legitimate priority to satisfy the essential needs of socio-economic development and, in particular, the eradication of poverty. Hence, the African Energy Sector Transition Program will help AU Member States transition from using fossil fuels to renewable source of energy (AFREC, 2023).

III. History/Past UN Action

The African Energy Commission is meant to accelerate the African Energy Transition. It provides a clear understanding of transformations of the energy system needed in the short, medium, and long term to achieve the energy transition by identifying frameworks to support the development of sectoral and technological detailed, policy-relevant and country-driven strategies consistent with the national development agenda and the Paris Agreement goal (AU, 2023). The program is envisioned to transform energy development in Africa, driven by AU Agenda 2063, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Agreement on climate change. Access to affordable clean energy for productive uses and households in Africa can be achieved mainly by

introducing and implementing comprehensive policy tools that can transform the African Energy Sector to mostly be based on renewable resources through an integrated approach that develop synergies whilst maximizing co-benefits and trade-offs (AU, 2023). The African energy transition program is the main umbrella under which all AFREC programs are developed and implemented. It aims to fully mobilize Africa's own energy resources and potentials; bringing energy to the top of national and regional agendas; and taking approaches that put Africa directly on to innovative, low carbon energy development pathways, avoiding the fossil fuel lock-in now facing most industrialized and emerging economies (AU, 2023).

In order to implement the transition, they need to build the energy infrastructure for economic and social development. Beginning with agriculture, they will be able to do this since it is the largest share of the population (AU, 2023). Again, development of the renewable energy sector in alignment with the Paris Agreement; this is to exploit Africa's great potential for solar, wind, hydropower and other renewable sources, and build African capacity for developing these technologies (AU, 2023). The program will have energy efficient programs for buildings, industry, and transport, which will include local manufacturing, as well as regulatory and behavioral interventions (AU, 2023). It will also identify and develop frameworks, plans and methodologies to support the development of "sectoral and technological-oriented, policy-relevant and country-driven strategies in line with the national development agendas and the 2015 Paris Agreement goal" (AU, 2023). This information will notably help reveal key enablers of the transition needed and inform decisions that would support sustainable energy transition in Africa while creating inclusive socio-economic opportunities.

In July 2022, the African Union adopted the African Common Position on Energy Access and Just Transition, which is a comprehensive approach that charts Africa's short, medium, and long-term energy development pathways to accelerate universal energy access (UN, 2022).

IV. Latest Developments

The African Climate Summit occurred in September 2023, and the Summit proposed a new financing architecture responsive to Africa's needs including debt restructuring and relief and the development of a new Global Climate Finance Charter through the United Nations General Assembly and the COP processes by 2025 (UNECA, 2023). African leaders stressed the importance of decarbonizing the global economy for equality and shared prosperity (UNECA, 2023). The Africa Climate Summit (ACS) brought together global leaders, intergovernmental organizations, Regional Economic Communities, United Nations agencies, private sector, civil society organizations, indigenous peoples, local communities, farmer organizations, children, youth, women and academia to discuss Africa's climate change challenges and formulate sustainable solutions (UNECA, 2023). All of these leaders expressed concern that many African countries face

disproportionate burdens and risks from climate change-related, unpredictable weather events and patterns.

To ensure the realization of its objectives and the attainment of the Pan African Vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, Agenda 2063 was developed as a strategic framework for Africa's long term socio-economic and integrative transformation. Agenda 2063 calls for greater collaboration and support for African led initiatives to ensure the achievement of the aspirations of African people (AU, 2023).

Many organizations, like the IMF, are stepping up to support fragile states in dealing with climate challenges through policy, financial assistance, and capacity development (Azour & Selassie, 2023).

V. Problems a Position Paper and Resolution Should Address

The green energy transition has numerous positive benefits including addressing energy poverty in many African countries as well as mitigating the impact on regional and global impacts of climate change. A resolution should address the issues of climate change and how each country is helping smaller countries. It should provide clear initiatives to slow climate change and aid African countries in energy transitions and away from reliance of fossil fuels.

Guiding Questions:

1. What are some statistics regarding energy poverty in Africa?
2. What are the current energy consumption patterns in Africa?
3. How are those consumption patterns expected to change by the end of the century?
4. What role does Africa's energy transition play in addressing global climate change?
5. Are there examples of countries embracing energy transition to renewables? Pros and cons?
6. Are oil-rich countries in Africa less likely to embrace energy transition?
7. How does the clean energy transition impact education, healthcare, and the economy?
8. How are girls and women disparately impacted by energy poverty?

VI. Helpful Sources

African Energy Transition Program: <https://au-afrec.org/energy-transition-programme>

Energy poverty in African: <https://www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/mobilizing-clean-energy-address-energy-poverty-west-africa>

“A Just Transition”: <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/november-2022/just-transition-renewable-energy-%C2%A0africa>

References

African Union. (2023). *African Union*. AU-AFREC. <https://au-afrec.org/>

Azour, J., & Selassie, A. A. (2023, August 30). *Africa's fragile states are greatest climate change casualties*. IMF. <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2023/08/30/africas-fragile-states-are-greatest-climate-change-casualties>

The Climate Reality Project. (2023, July 10). *Mobilizing clean energy to address energy poverty in West Africa*. The Climate Reality Project. <https://www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/mobilizing-clean-energy-address-energy-poverty-west-africa>

Ighobor, K. (2022, October 31). *A Just Transition to Renewable Energy in Africa | Africa renewal*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/november-2022/just-transition-renewable-energy-%C2%A0africa>