



PRESS RELEASE

The Mano River Union Renewable Energy and Clean Cooking Conference Concludes with the Adoption of the Freetown Declaration Underscoring the Centrality of Energy Access

November 19, 2019

FREETOWN – The maiden edition of the High-Level Multi-Stakeholder Conference on Renewable Energy and Clean Cooking has successfully ended in Freetown following robust deliberations on the centrality of energy access for socio-economic development, the health and economic benefits of Clean Cooking in the Mano River Union and the continent at large.

Participants at two-day conference formally endorsed the adoption of the **Freetown Declaration** below:

1. We, the Ministers of Energy, Parliamentarians, Civil Society Organizations and Private Sector Players working on renewable energy, have gathered at the Radisson Blu, Mammy Yoko Hotel in Freetown, Sierra Leone for the maiden edition of the Mano River Union Multi-Stakeholder Conference on Renewable Energy and Clean Cooking from the 18th to 19th November 2019.
2. We reaffirm our confidence in the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (Agenda 2030), and the timely and full realization of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets adopted in September 2015 at the 70th UNGA in New York, USA, and reiterate our commitment and determination to ensure delivery on the Energy Goals of SDG7 – Affordable and Clean Energy and related energy objectives of the AU Agenda 2063.
3. We recognize that access to energy is a significant concern for the Mano River Union (MRU) Governments (Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone). We also recognize that energy access is a serious challenge and a major development constraint in the sub-region. We reiterate that energy is a crucial enabler of economic development and other social priorities, such as poverty alleviation, food security, improvements in health and education, access to clean water and sanitation, economic



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empowerment, especially for women, and meeting climate change targets and environmental standards.

4. We recognize that current global developments and specific circumstances in the sub-region require that we urgently build consensus on renewable energy. Therefore, we resolve to work on a harmonized policy and regulatory framework, and facilitate efforts aimed at building a common sub-regional market for the scale up of off-grid solar systems and mini-grids, where appropriate. In so doing, we will endeavour to take concrete actions to attract the best companies to the sub-region, and to help our respective market players and local entrepreneurs operate more seamlessly across our sub-region's borders. We will also dedicate ourselves to scaling up innovative finance mechanisms (for off-grid solar businesses and customers) and take joint action to tackle market barriers and support entrepreneurs across the sub-region

5. We recognize the vital importance of an effective MRU sub-regional mechanism, in accordance with international laws, to support progress in the areas of renewable energy access and clean cooking solutions and the interconnected challenges and threats confronting the sub-region. We resolve to facilitate policies and regulations that build on local circumstances, especially last mile communities, and ensure adequate intervention in the energy nexus with health, clean water and sanitation, education, agriculture, manufacturing/industry, and small and medium enterprises;

6. We recognize that there has been a tendency for clean cooking to be treated as a separate sector rather than an integral part of the wider energy system, resulting, for example, in the lack of interest in cleaner alternatives. We endorse targeted market research, including modelling of regional or national trajectories for maturing the energy sector as a matter of urgency, to understand the scale of the issue and to provide data analysis that could inform future policy interventions, tailored to the specific opportunities and challenges in each country.

7. We recognize the severity of clean cooking problems in the wider African region. We resolve to cooperate with the Global Alliance for Clean Cooking, and the Health and Energy Platform of Action (HEPA), the Clean Cooking Fund, the Coalition of Leaders that were recently launched at the UN Climate Summit at the 74th UNGA in September 2019, given the importance of the issue and related social and environmental impact in each of the four countries. We pledge to facilitate determined actions on clean cooking at the highest political level. We believe that



through demonstration of clear leadership and increased coordination, the MRU can help to incentivize new ECOWAS-wide political commitments and projects required to turn the tide on Clean Cooking.

8. We reaffirm our commitment to sound policies, good governance at all levels and the rule of law, and to mobilizing domestic resources, attracting international flows, promoting international trade as an engine for development, increasing international financial and technical cooperation for development.
9. We acknowledge the vital role the private sector can play in generating new investments, employment and financing in the energy sector. Therefore, we resolve to encourage greater public-private partnership for direct investment, including foreign investment in the sub-region to support the energy development initiatives and to enhance the benefits they can derive from such investments.
10. We reaffirm that each country must take primary responsibility for its own development. Nevertheless, we recognize that national efforts should be complemented by supportive sub-regional initiatives on renewable energy and clean cooking, while taking into account national conditions and ensuring respect for national ownership, strategies and sovereignty.
11. We commit ourselves to take immediate action as a follow-up in the following areas:
 - i. Work together to harmonize policies for renewable energy and off-grid solutions across our four countries under the leadership of the MRU secretariat;
 - ii. Seek technical assistance from international development partners to undertake relevant technical studies regarding status of clean cooking solutions;
 - iii. Establish an MRU association of private sector actors in renewable energy and clean cooking solutions;
 - iv. Commit ourselves to enhance cooperation amongst our legislators in the fields of energy, energy regulators, and ministries of energy;

- v. Undertake the development of a roadmap for regional energy market integration and implementation of the recommendation from this first ever high-level conference on renewable energy and clean cooking;
- vi. Work with the MRU Secretariat for technical and financial support on a sub-regional energy strategy;
- vii. Coordinate to strengthen a business enabling environment to attract private investment to the energy sectors of the sub-region;
- viii. Explore and pursue, wherever relevant, opportunities for cross-border trade amongst MRU member states;
- ix. Commit to have this platform as a regular international event that will be held in the sub-region annually.

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