Sustainable Energy for All

10-YEAR REVIEW

MAIN SUMMARY REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2022
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I am pleased, on behalf of Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL), to present the findings of this 10-Year Review, which looked back at SEforALL’s achievements and influence on the sustainable energy movement from our beginnings as a UN initiative in 2011 through the end of 2021. To celebrate our 10-year anniversary, we commissioned this independent review to better understand our value proposition, learn what has worked, and identify where SEforALL can achieve even greater impact towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG7), which calls for ensuring universal access to modern energy services, improving energy efficiency and increasing the share of renewable energy.

This review is an essential step for a young organization that wants to learn, improve and become faster, better and smarter. Together, SEforALL and the global movement working to achieve SDG7 have made significant strides in laying the groundwork for the bold action we are seeing today. We recognize, however, that there is still a long way to go. We continue to be off track for achieving SDG7 by 2030 and while we are proud to see growing momentum and more ambition, it’s still not enough to get us on track for 2030.

Low-emitting, energy-poor countries must provide for the growth, development and aspirations of their populations while also achieving their climate targets. Countries in the Global South, in particular in Africa and Asia have unique challenges that must be considered and addressed if they are to get from where they are today to a clean energy future that leaves no one behind. As agents of change, our interventions must be efficient, effective and informed by data-driven insights into what works. That’s why this review was so important.

Of course, we could not have undertaken this learning opportunity without the tremendous support and dedication of our partners, funders and staff who contributed their feedback through interviews and a survey, all of whom I would like to sincerely thank.

I truly believe in the value of data and evidence to inform continuous improvement, and I am committed to reflecting on the findings of this 10-Year Review in this critical moment in SEforALL’s journey and in this final decade to achieve SDG7.

DAMILOLA OGUNBIYI
CEO and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All and Co-Chair of UN-Energy
Acknowledgements

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Strategy Development Solutions disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the Review team. They do not represent those of SEforALL or of the individuals and organizations referred to in the report.
INTRODUCTION

Since Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) was established in 2011, the organization has moved through three phases, building on its unique position in the sustainable energy sector and developing its strengths to make an important contribution to progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG7), access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. SEforALL plays a key role in the delivery of SDG7 and there is wide consensus among stakeholders in the sector that it has made a significant contribution to the progress that has been achieved so far.

This Review was commissioned as part of an ongoing process to speed the progress of SDG7. It presents SEforALL’s value proposition, its past and present contributions to the sustainable energy sector and its vision for the future. It provides a storyline with milestones and highlights the organization’s major contributions to the sector over the last 10 years. The objectives of the Review are to:

- Provide an external, independent summary of SEforALL’s track record, journey and achievements with the global community.
- Provide information required by donors to support SEforALL’s evidence-based approach of data to inform decisions.
- Provide learning to enable SEforALL to course correct, ensuring it is building on past achievements and responding to current needs.

The Review addresses the following critical questions:

1. Where does SEforALL fit into the sustainable energy sector? What has its role been in the sector? What were the major milestones in its development?
2. What have SEforALL’s major contributions to the sustainable energy sector been in each of its three phases? What outcomes were achieved and for whom?
3. How did SEforALL’s key interventions contribute to those outcomes and how can they be leveraged in the future?
4. How can SEforALL sustain/maximize its influence in the sector, continue to add value and have an even greater impact in the remainder of the decade for action?

The Review takes an Appreciative Inquiry approach. Data and evidence for the review came from interviews with SEforALL staff and stakeholders, a survey of stakeholders and a review of SEforALL documents. Data were then triangulated through process tracing. Quotes from the interviews have been used to illustrate findings. The approach focused on establishing a timeline of successes and major contributions to the sector over the last 10 years, identifying where SEforALL has had the most impact and creating a lens for future priorities.

Full details of the approach, findings and analysis can be found in the Technical Report for this Review.
FINDINGS

Where does SEforALL fit into the sustainable energy sector?

SEforALL’s close relationship with the United Nations (UN) while also being an independent organization makes it unique. The CEO’s role as the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) grants SEforALL authority and allows access to senior decision-makers. At the same time SEforALL is independent from traditional vested interests and has the freedom to engage widely and secure funding from a range of sources.

“[SEforALL] carries all the good things that the UN offers without some of the bad things… like the bureaucracy and high staffing costs and being a bit stuck [in its ways] in New York or Copenhagen or Vienna or Geneva.”

SEforALL has a unique position as the global champion of SDG7. It is seen as having particular influence as a champion for access to energy and an equitable energy transition.

“There’s nobody [else] really that does the entire SDG7 as a whole…and sees SDG7 in a holistic way [and] all of these [aims] are part of the single point.

These unique aspects together give SEforALL significant convening power.

“I think [the SRSG role] gives it much more legitimacy than just any other NGO in the space and people do listen. And when something is being said by SEforALL, the convening power is larger.”

1 All quotes were provided in interviews with external partners and stakeholders conducted by the report authors. All quotations are anonymized.
What are SEforALL’s key strengths?

This Review identified nine key strengths. SEforALL’s strong relationship with the UN combined with its independence underpin its credibility and the trust that others have it. This, along with responsiveness, creativity and innovation enable SEforALL to persuade, motivate and support a diverse range of stakeholders to work towards SDG7. The passion of the organization to deliver on its mission gives its work an energy and an immediacy that engages others, supporting its quality of persuasion and helping to continue to build trust amongst a diverse range of stakeholders. These strengths are interrelated and interdependent.

1. SEforALL is seen as both a part of the UN system and independent of it. Although this is ambiguous, this inside/outside status is recognized by both external and internal stakeholders as a strength.

“Having that SRSG role [is unique]; if the CEO of SEforALL was just the CEO of SEforALL, having access to ministers, to high-level political decision-makers would have been very difficult.”

2. Stakeholders recognize that SEforALL is independent. It is evidence-led and not associated with or committed to particular technologies or solutions. SEforALL is also recognized as being non-political and independent of particular governments and intergovernmental bodies. This enables it to build trust among both developed and developing countries and to engage more widely and with more diverse stakeholders than would otherwise be possible.

“I felt that SEforALL was both objective and neutral – it wasn’t pushing one solution, but rather elevating all of the solutions that could address the problem and give all of them a place.”

3. Trust in SEforALL stems from its neutrality, honesty and integrity as well as the expertise and skills of its staff and the focus on evidence-based solutions. This is complemented by its collaborative approach and willingness to step back when others are best placed to deliver.

“I think that’s where we think again, come back to the same point, [and see] SEforALL as a trusted entity in this whole energy space... So I think I would say that’s what probably lends credibility.”
4. SEforALL’s **credibility** is supported by trust and comes from its connection with the UN, through its track record during its first decade, and the knowledge, experience and skills of its staff.

“They have a verifiable role and I think their support increases the credibility of announcements or initiatives.”

5. SEforALL is **responsive**, action focused, agile and flexible. This enables the organization to move quickly to take advantage of developments in technologies or enabling environments. External stakeholders value SEforALL’s prompt responses to inquiries and the availability of support at short notice.

“The team itself, the people we interact with, are so great, and really knowledgeable, friendly, super passionate, and really good partners, they respond quickly. That makes them a pleasure to work with.”

6. SEforALL prioritizes **creativity**, particularly in its communications, and its events are particularly engaging. SEforALL’s creativity extends to developing innovative products and presenting evidence in innovative ways to support progress towards the SDG7 targets.

“… with events, SEforALL is the best.”

7. SEforALL is **passionate** about delivering SDG7 and keeping a focus on access to energy and a just and equitable energy transition.

“Honestly, that commitment, that passion, that willingness to just be all in on this was phenomenal.”

8. Building on its passion, the **mission** of delivering SDG7 is at the centre of all SEforALL’s work and is often described by staff as their North Star. Stakeholders particularly value SEforALL’s work to keep the global community’s focus on delivering the SDG7 targets.

“It’s an interesting model of really trying to use every possible kind of role and capability for a common purpose. I think that makes it truly, genuinely unique.”

9. SEforALL’s **persuasiveness** comes from its in-depth communications skills, the expertise of the staff and their professionalism. It draws on the organization’s deep understanding of the challenge of meeting the SDG7 targets and the technical, political, financial and social issues involved.

“SEforALL’s ability to really rally the UN and secure cooperation is remarkable. There are no punitive measures – it all comes down to the power of persuasion.”
SEforALL’s unique strengths enable it to work with partners to deliver value in three ways. SEforALL:

- **Provides a platform for diverse voices**, leveraging trust in the organization, its relationship with the UN, its creativity and its independence.
- **Works with partners** to provide reliable, timely and actionable data and evidence. This is based on trust, independence, creativity and being mission driven.
- **Influences the global agenda** through diplomacy and evidence. It is able to do so through its persuasiveness, passion, credibility and responsiveness together with its relationship with the UN.

This value proposition has been central to all three phases of SEforALL and its achievements over the last 10 years.

- In its first phase (“SEforALL 1.0”), the organization influenced the global agenda. It was particularly important in the adoption of SDG7.
- In its second phase (“SEforALL 2.0”), the organization accelerated the establishment of its evidence base through working with partners on initiatives including Energizing Finance and Chilling Prospects, both of which supported progress towards meeting the SDG7 targets.
- Now in its third phase (“SEforALL 3.0”), the organization has increased its focus on action. One example of this is its role in raising the ambition of the Energy Compacts. SEforALL has also focused on providing a platform for diverse voices in this phase, for example, through securing wide engagement in the SDG7 Pavilion at COP26.

SEforALL can play an active role to engage the business world, identify new innovations and amplify the voice of civil society, and I would say, energize us all, now to come together and push all the actions to move forward.
What have SEforALL’s major contributions to the sustainable energy sector been in each of its three phases?

SEforALL 1.0

In its first phase, between 2012 and 2015, SEforALL facilitated the establishment of a broad and strong community of interest, committed to more ambition in delivering SDG7. The community included governments, intergovernmental bodies, NGOs, philanthropists, donors, the private sector and civil society organizations. SEforALL and others have nurtured, encouraged and supported this community over the past 10 years and seen it grow and become more active.

This growth was achieved through events like Rio+20 and the first SEforALL Forum, alongside painstaking diplomacy by the UN Secretary-General and the CEO and staff of SEforALL. This work raised awareness of the importance of SDG7 and brought together diverse actors into a cohesive community.

“…awareness on why it [SDG7] is important and how to achieve it and the benefits that come from that. They’ve been instrumental, I don’t think anybody else would have done it or would have come this far.”

This community of interest along with SEforALL’s diplomacy, evidence and convening efforts were key factors in the adoption by the international community of SDG7 with ambitious targets for energy access, renewable energy and energy efficiency. Without SEforALL’s efforts the targets would not have been as ambitious. Over 95 per cent of survey respondents agreed that SEforALL’s contribution was critical to the adoption of SDG7 in 2015.

“The SEforALL process, that in 2012, 2013, really brought that broad coalition [together] bridging development and climate agendas was essential, in my view, to getting that broad agreement around SDG7.”
In its second phase, between 2015 and 2020, SEforALL intentionally became an independent organization outside of but close to the UN. Being seen as independent and more agile than a UN agency helped SEforALL to build trust with stakeholders and enabled it to continue to nurture and build partnerships within a diverse community of interest.

“... it has this strong connection to the outreach and influence that the UN system has. But at the same time, [it has] the freedom and flexibility to pursue the specific goals that are deemed to be the most powerful lever for the energy transition.”

During this phase SEforALL worked with the community of interest to build an independent evidence base for SDG7 with a range of knowledge products including Energizing Finance, Chilling Prospects and Powering Healthcare. Each of these required working with partners to generate unbiased, reliable evidence to challenge accepted ideas and encourage greater focus on meeting the SDG7 targets. These products are now one of the main sources for the sector and underpin SEforALL’s own advocacy.

“SEforALL picks up the costs [of research] and starts working, and then there is a sort of multiplier effect that can be achieved by partnering, bringing it to the attention of others and partnering with others.”

The knowledge products supported SEforALL’s effective advocacy and communications, working with partners in the sustainable energy community to raise awareness of the importance of meeting the SDG7 targets. Over the same period energy access became widely recognized as a development issue, bringing efforts of the development and energy communities together to work for universal access to sustainable energy. SEforALL is widely thought to have been critical to this change.

“I can’t imagine the focus on SDG7 without SEforALL. I can almost see that we’d be having totally different discussions on the importance of achieving a just transition towards clean energy.”
SEforALL entered its third phase in 2020. Since then the organization and the community of interest have helped to prioritize achieving universal access to energy by 2030 as being central to a just and equitable energy transition and achieving net zero by 2050. SEforALL hosted the SDG7 Pavilion at COP26 and brought wider awareness of the importance of energy access to the climate agenda. Its CEO, Damilola Ogunbiyi, is co chair of the Energy Transition Council, which has enabled the organization to advocate for a just and equitable energy transition.

Drawing on the convincing evidence base and recognition of energy access as a development issue, SEforALL has been able to engage with individual countries at high level. In 2020, it started to offer customized country-specific partnerships and committed to establishing a presence in Africa, starting with Nigeria, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. This customized support has helped to secure increased commitments to meeting SDG7 including Nigeria’s commitment announced at COP26 to net-zero CO₂ emissions by 2060, which was based on the Energy Transition Plan commissioned by SEforALL. Over 75 per cent of survey respondents agreed that SEforALL had made a critical contribution to increasing levels of policy and planning support being delivered to governments.

SEforALL was pivotal in the 2021 UN High-level Dialogue on Energy (HLDE) that launched the Energy Compacts. It played a key role in designing and spearheading the compacts in partnership with other UN-Energy members. More than 200 compacts have now been received from Member States, UN and intergovernmental organizations, foundations and multi-stakeholder coalitions, NGOs, CSOs and youth organizations, local and regional government, the private sector and academia. SEforALL contributed to the number, speed and ambition of Energy Compacts by using evidence, convening power and advocacy to secure wider engagement and faster progress than would otherwise have been possible. These compacts have collectively resulted in investment commitments of more than USD 600 billion for sustainable energy.

“Damilola has been fantastic in elevating the voices of women in the... sustainable energy sector, and does it consistently [and] persistently, with a lot of appreciation for youth voices.”

“The Energy Compacts are a significant development. [SEforALL] isn’t the only protagonist in that, but it’s an essential one. And I think the way it has handled that is really powerful.”

Particularly through the Energy Compacts, SEforALL is helping to facilitate finance flows into sustainable energy at a new scale. One example is the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP) that was kickstarted through investment from The Rockefeller Foundation, IKEA Foundation and Bezos Earth Fund and aims to unlock USD 100 billion in public and private finance. SEforALL played a central role in the establishment of the GEAPP, advocating for its creation and providing evidence for funders to get involved.

“I can say it [GEAPP] would not have happened without the championing of SEforALL and Damilola.”

SEforALL 3.0

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What outcomes have been achieved?

The Review looked for evidence relating to SEforALL’s cross-organizational key performance indicators (KPIs). This was intended to provide data to support the efforts of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) team to track progress rather than act as a comprehensive assessment.

1. Number of gender-specific country-level plans

The Review finds that SEforALL is clear in its commitment to supporting gender equality both within its programmes and in advocating for gender equality to be mainstreamed by others. The People Centred Accelerator and the Women at the Forefront programmes both support women’s equality as a central element of a just and equitable energy transition.

The Review had not expected to find gender-specific country-level plans. However, one regional level plan was discovered. In 2017 the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) approved a directive giving women a bigger role on energy decision-making with support from SEforALL and others.

2. Number of countries supported by SEforALL

Through its activities, SEforALL has supported over 90 countries in the past 10 years to varying degrees. In its third phase SEforALL is continuing this by working with countries to provide active advocacy and advisory or implementation support; in 2021 it worked with 27 countries, 23 of which were official development assistance (ODA) recipients. SEforALL now offers customized country-specific support in partnership with others and is establishing a presence in Africa, the world’s largest energy access deficit region, starting with Nigeria, Rwanda and Sierra Leone.

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2 During SEforALL 1.0 and SEforALL 2.0, the Review found that the organization supported 70+ countries through the production of either Rapid Assessments and Gap Analyses (RAGAs), Investment Prospectuses (IPs) or Action Agendas (AAs) in collaboration with partners.
3. Number of high-level commitments to implement actions towards SDG7

SEforALL’s processes and fora have led to 461 high-level commitments to implement actions towards SDG7. At the time of this Review, 200+ UN Energy Compacts had been received through the UN High-level Dialogue on Energy (HLDE), of which 163 had been vetted and officially accepted as of the end of 2021. Many of SEforALL’s interventions and activities have contributed to or led to commitments including:

- The Rio+20 Summit and Clean Energy Ministerial in 2012 where SEforALL helped secure USD 80 billion in financial commitments.
- SEforALL Forums in 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019 (Charrettes) and 2022 that secured hundreds of commitments and brought key stakeholders of the community together.
- Support to COP starting in 2015 including organizing the Energy Efficiency segment of the Energy Day during COP21 with partners and hosting the COP26 SDG7 Pavilion in 2021.
- Supporting the establishment of initiatives at the Climate Action Summit in 2019 including The Three Percent Club, The Cool Coalition, the Getting to Zero Coalition and the Climate Investment Platform.
- Co-Chairing the HLDE and spearheading the Energy Compacts.
- Co-Chairing the Energy Transition Council and providing support for countries to transition away from coal to clean energy.

SEforALL reported in 2014 that over USD 70 billion of the USD 80 billion committed at Rio+20 in 2012 had been disbursed. There was insufficient detail for us to be able to check this independently. However, assuming it is correct, this is an encouraging precedent.

This Review identified USD 113.5 million in funds that SEforALL has directly mobilized for its own activities.

4. Number of country-level plans, strategies and policies

The Review identified 70+ countries that had been supported during the first two phases of SEforALL through the production of either Rapid Assessments and Gap Analyses (RAGAs), Investment Prospectuses (IPs) or Action Agendas (AAs) in collaboration with partners. The Review was not designed to assess the impact of this support; however, it did look for evidence of further action building on these analyses, prospectuses and agendas where appropriate. Although there were suggestions that action may have been taken by some of those countries to adopt additional plans, the Review did not find firm evidence of that action. However, it is possible that further action could have been taken that interviewees were not aware of.

5. Finance leveraged

This KPI was challenging to assess. This is because:

- There is overlap between initiatives and some commitments have been announced multiple times, raising the risk of double counting.
- There is considerable evidence of new financial commitments through the Energy Compacts but it is too early to tell whether it will all be spent.

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6. Number of new energy access connections

This KPI mostly relates to the activities of the Universal Energy Facility (UEF) that is only beginning to deliver new energy access connections.
How can SEforALL have an even greater impact in the remainder of the decade for action?

There was a widespread view among external stakeholders that SEforALL should continue to focus on its unique strengths to encourage and support implementation of sustainable energy. They thought that SEforALL should be cautious about delivering implementation operationally through programmes on the ground in partner countries for which they may need to develop additional skills and resources to carry out such programmes effectively. SEforALL’s role in implementation should build on its core strengths:

- High-level advocacy to improve the enabling environment and address systemic obstacles to implementation.
- Using its convening power to bring together stakeholders to build capacity and momentum for implementation.
- Monitoring progress and holding governments and organizations to account for their commitments.

There is a clear commitment to mainstreaming gender equality within SEforALL’s work and it has the skills to do so. However, this work is at an early stage and programmes may need more resources and support.

SEforALL’s increased presence in Africa and possible presence in South Asia were welcomed by external stakeholders who felt that this showed SEforALL’s commitment to the Global South and would improve the quality of its understanding of the challenges that developing countries face. Some external stakeholders thought SEforALL could go further and allocate core activities and senior staff to those countries while others were concerned that SEforALL did not have the resources to establish a presence in all the countries where its contribution would make a difference.

Efforts to catalyze Energy Compacts, co-led by SEforALL together with members of UN-Energy, have seen commitments on an unprecedented scale. These commitments are an important step forward on finance commitments needed to achieve SDG7 but significant gaps still remain and work could be done to assess these.

Both internal and external stakeholders would like to see SEforALL lead a concerted effort by the global community to develop an effective strategy for mobilizing finance for energy access. SEforALL is considered to be ideally placed for this as:

- It is trusted by both finance providers and the potential recipients of investment.
- It understands the challenge and has the expertise to lead the process.
- It has the convening power to bring all stakeholders into the process.

Internal funding for the organization has increased year on year and progress has been made, but internal and external stakeholders noted that SEforALL needs a larger, more diverse and even more stable funding base to be able to best use its strengths and deliver its value proposition.
CONCLUSIONS

1. SEforALL is recognized as unique in its role and widely trusted by energy sector stakeholders. The organization is focused on the achievement of the targets set out in SDG7, and both its convening power and the community of interest it has established are key assets in the delivery of SDG7.

2. As a widely trusted, credible organization that is perceived as independent, SEforALL’s activities are highly compatible with other interventions in the sustainable energy sector. SEforALL works in an exemplary way with partners and its advocacy, convening and evidence support action by others across the sector. The crucial issues of energy access and a just and equitable transition would not be addressed with the same authority and focus if SEforALL had not made them a priority.

3. A key challenge in achieving the SDG7 targets will be securing the delivery of the Energy Compacts and mobilizing the associated financial commitments. SEforALL has the potential to play a central role in this.

4. The work with individual governments to secure commitments and develop policies for sustainable energy that has been introduced as part of SEforALL 3.0 is a positive development that has been well received. The approach so far appears to be opportunistic and there would be benefits in clarifying SEforALL’s purpose and how it intends to add value through the country focus.

5. SEforALL is working towards five cross-organizational outcomes:

   1. There is evidence that good progress has been made on Global commitments to implement actions to meet SDG7 and Significant and appropriate finance for SDG7 flowing globally but more work needs to be done to translate commitments into action.

   2. SEforALL has laid the foundations for Enabling policy and regulatory standards implemented for the sustainable energy sector. However, policy and standards have not yet been implemented at the necessary scale.

   3. The other two outcomes – Significant increase in energy connections and energy transitions to meet SDG7 and Inclusive and gender-sensitive action mainstreamed are behind schedule, with the pandemic contributing to delays.

6. Many of SEforALL’s achievements have continued to grow through the work of partners since its initial involvement. SEforALL’s key strengths support the sustainability of these achievements by maintaining global attention and focus on SDG7.
KEY IDEAS FOR CONSIDERATION

SEforALL can now consider whether it would be helpful to:

1. **Develop a clear strategy as part of the 2024-27 business plan** to sustain and build on its key strengths and to maintain and leverage its unique value proposition. Consider also to extend the 2024-27 business plan to cover the remainder of the decade of action to 2030.

2. **Convene and facilitate a process** to explore whether the Energy Compacts have the potential to meet the SDG7 targets and identify actions that need to be taken to address any shortfall, mitigate risks and secure action to meet those commitments. The recently launched Energy Compacts Action Network may be a suitable vehicle for this.

3. **Conduct research to explore whether, how and in what circumstances financial commitments translate into actual spending.** A better understanding of this issue would prove essential to mobilizing the USD 600 billion committed through the Energy Compacts.

4. **Deploy implementation models** that enhance and build on the core strengths of SEforALL while complementing the activities of others in the field and communicate the implementation approach more clearly to stakeholders.

5. **Refine the cross-organizational KPIs to better capture positive outcomes for women.** Expand the scope of KPI 3 - Country-Level plans to include subnational or regional plans and broader energy transition strategies of which it can evidence outcomes in the past 10 years.