

Open Letter about the Sustainable Energy for All initiative (SEFA)

by Biofuelwatch
Tuesday, 19 June 2012

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OPEN LETTER: Sustainable Energy for All Initiative- Using poverty and climate change as excuses to increase corporate profits from energy provision

We call on Governments to reject the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative (SEFA).

The SEFA process and Action Agenda are deeply flawed and threaten to further entrench destructive, polluting and unjust energy policies for corporate profit under the guise of alleviating energy poverty, while undermining community rights to energy sovereignty and self determination.

Like the UN Global Compact, SEFA is another attempt to supersede multilateral UN decision-making processes with 'multi-stakeholder partnerships' whose primary mission is to generate profits for private companies irrespective of impacts on people and the environment. Any initiative that seeks to genuinely address the climate crisis and provide access to 'energy for all' must be based on the principle of energy sovereignty rather than on corporate profits.

Reasons why SEFA is inherently flawed include:

1) SEFA is undemocratic, unaccountable and corporate-controlled:

- SEFA, launched by the UN Secretary-General in September 2011, is led by a hand-picked High-Level Panel. Its principal members include energy, industrial and finance corporations that are major investors in the fossil fuel economy and have a clear interest in benefiting from SEFA - such as Statoil, Eskom, Siemens and Riverstone Holdings, while only five government representatives and three NGOs are involved[1]. There was no democratic or transparent process to select group members.

- SEFA's Action Agenda[2], which will be put to Governments for endorsement and support at Rio, has been drawn up by this hand-picked High-Level Panel without any open, public consultation, either with governments or civil society. Subsequent 'civil society consultations' by the SEFA Secretariat have had no impact on the Action Agenda. Neither the Action Agenda nor SEFA's overall process and principles have been put out for any type of consultation.

- SEFA foresees no role for communities other than as new energy consumers, 'recipients' and supporters of private-sector investments. The initiative ignores the principle of free, prior and informed consent as well as all other basic rights, including rights to land and food and the right to self-determination.

2) SEFA's aim is even greater corporate control over energy policies and decision:

- Public-private partnerships designed to favour ever greater corporate investments, expansion and profits lie at the heart of SEFA's vision and strategy. Meanwhile, governments are expected to absorb more of the risks and costs of corporate investments in energy, for example through research and development funding to facilitate subsequent private investment, and through the use of public funds for loan guarantees and risk mitigation. Energy policies are to be drawn up 'in partnership' with corporations and thus for their benefit. Instead of holding corporations accountable for destructive and polluting energy investments and for excluding communities from access to energy, SEFA's priority is to 'create a better investment climate', including for corporations with major responsibility for the current ecological and social crises.

3) SEFA's goals are deeply inadequate:

- SEFA's goals of "doubling the rate of improvement in energy efficiency" and "doubling the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix" by 2030 are entirely inadequate in the face of the climate crisis. The over-consumption of energy in the global North will not be addressed by energy efficiency alone. Furthermore, according to SEFA the goal of 'energy access' in developing countries is independent from the renewable energy and energy efficiency calls. It can thus be met through any type of polluting and destructive energy. SEFA's goals would thus allow for an overall growth in energy use and carbon emissions "including expanding fossil fuel consumption."

4) SEFA promotes dangerous, unsustainable and unproven types of energy generation:

- SEFA explicitly promotes and facilitates new fossil fuel investments, including for example a gas pipeline and processing infrastructure in West Africa[3]. Finance initiatives for oil pipelines are cited as 'examples'[4]. No type of industrial energy generation, however polluting and destructive has been excluded from SEFA's definition of 'sustainable energy' "with at least one government looking at the potential for nuclear power investments to progress SEFA's aims[5]. Waste incineration is listed as a positive example in the Action Agenda.

- SEFA indiscriminately promotes all types of 'modern', i.e. industrial bioenergy, including agrofuels and electricity from biomass, as well as large scale hydroelectric power as 'sustainable' despite well known and well documented negative impacts on communities, ecosystems and the climate. SEFA has already been cited as a justification for new finance for mega-dams (by the World Bank)[6] and for corporate investments in land-grabbing for agrofuels[7].

- Even where a technology could, in principle, improve people's lives and minimise climate change "such as clean and efficient cookstoves" actual investments may offer few or no benefits. For example, cookstoves that are being promoted by a SEFA-supported initiative[8] have already been shown to offer no actual improvement to indoor pollution and thus people's health[9].

Sustainable energy must mean a rapid phasing out of fossil fuels. However, this does not mean replacing them with other harmful types of energy generation. Agrofuels, large-scale hydro power, nuclear energy, "more efficient" fossil fuel combustion and more natural gas exploitation will not serve the interests of people or the planet. Energy "access for all" must address both energy poverty and energy overconsumption. It must also address humanity's footprint on planetary systems, given that we are dangerously close to and in some cases clearly beyond various tipping points. Those who are energy poor, including in particular women, need access to energy that really is sustainable and renewable, while those who are over-consuming must reduce energy consumption. This means that the high-energy development model

of rich countries must be changed and must not be replicated in the global South by corporations as SEFA seeks to do. There are many examples of community-driven, genuinely sustainable initiatives that contribute to energy sovereignty for women and men that can be replicated. Far from moving in the right direction, the SEFA initiative is poised to further entrench corporate control of energy policies and investments in polluting, destructive and socially exclusive forms of energy generation.

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Current signatories:

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+ All Nepal Women Association, Nepal

+ Andean Tapir Fund, US

+ Arise for Social Justice, US

+ Biofuelwatch, UK/US

+ Buckeye Forest Council, US

+ Carbon Trade Watch

+ Centre for Civil Society Environmental Justice Project, Durban, South Africa

+ COECOCEIBA - Friends of the Earth Costa Rica

+ Comit  de Derechos Humanos de Base de Chiapas Digna Ochoa, Chiapas, M xico

+ Corner House, UK

+ Dogwood Alliance, US

+ Durham Environment Watch, Canada

+ Earth Peoples-International

+ Econexus, UK

+ Foro Ecologista de Paraná, Argentina

+ Fundación MÃ´ BiguÃ´, CiudadanÃ´-a y Justicia Ambiental, Argentina

+ Global Forest Coalition

+ International Oil Working Group, Canada

+ International Rivers Network

+ Jubilee South - Asia/Pacific Movement on Debt and Development (JSAPMDD)

+ Laklumsal Ixim-Norte Selva (Nuestro Pueblo de MaÃ´-z) Chiapas, MÃ´xico

+ La Liga de Defensa del Medio Ambiente (LIDEMA), Bolivia

+ Market Air Quality Campaign, US

+ Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste, Chiapas/Mexico

+ Nadi Ghati Morcha, Chhattisgarh, India

+ Network of the Indigenous Peoples-Solomons (NIP), Solomon Islands

+ New York Climate Action Group, US

+ Organizaci3n Campesina Emiliano Zapata-Regi3n Venustiano Carranza, Chiapas, M3xico

+ Rettet den Regenwald e.V., Germany

+ Salva la Selva, Spain

+ Sobrevivencia (Friends of the Earth Paraguay), Paraguay

+ Stop Toxic Incineration in Springfield, US

+ terre des hommes - Arbeitsgruppe Schwaebisch Gmuend, Germany

+ Texas Campaign for the Environment, US

+ World Rainforest Movement

+ Viola, Russia

[1] www.un.org/wcm/content/site/sustainableenergyforall/home/members

[2] <http://www.sustainableenergyforall.org/images/content/ActionAgenda.pdf>

[3] Ghana was the first country to enter into a formal SEFA commitment. Investments in natural gas distribution and processing for LPG use expansion is a central feature of their country commitment: www.sustainableenergyforall.org/commitments/single/national-action-plan-for-sustainable-energy-for-all and

[4] An example is the African Development Bank's Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa which includes investments in oil and gas pipelines and which is listed as an example of an initiative that could fall under the SEFA Action Area "Grid Infrastructure and Supply Efficiency"

[5] www.world-nuclear-news.org/NP-Ghana_coordinates_nuclear_planning_activities-1705124.html

[6] www.ief.org/news/news-details.aspx?nid=710

[7] At a SEFA meeting in Brussels, the Swiss Addax ethanol investment in Sierra Leone (<http://www.ief.org/news/news-details.aspx?nid=710>) was cited as a 'positive example'. Furthermore, the Action Agenda suggests that EU biofuel policies, which are a major driver of land-grabs, as a positive example for 'transportation' policies.

[8] Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves

[9] <http://ideas.repec.org/p/ess/wpaper/id4962.html> and <http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/es203388g> .

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further information: Nothing Neutral Here: Large-scale biomass subsidies in the UK and the role of the EU ETS Â

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