

Summary of Side Event ‘Change You Can See: The Sustainability and Intersectionality of Providing Solar Lights to Off-grid Filipino Communities’:

30 Jan 2024, 8:00 PM - 9:15 PM UTC+8 (Manila time)

Background on the event

More than 2.4 million households or 11 million Filipinos live in energy poverty. Energy poverty is characterized as a lack of regular access to reliable energy sources. Many of these Filipinos who live in energy poverty rely on baseline technologies such as kerosene lamps for their energy. The use of kerosene lamps and other baseline technologies impede the economic productivity of the workers as it is an unreliable energy source and does not emit as much light needed compared to the effort required to produce energy from it. These lamps are also harmful to the health of the communities and the environment as it emits gases such as carbon dioxide and black carbon, damaging the lungs and the ozone layer. One Million Lights aims to provide solar light to impoverished, disaster-stricken, off-grid communities. As it is an organization, One Million Lights also wants to explore different ways on how to electrify the Philippines sustainably. In this side event, a moderator-led panel discussion occurred where panelists from the Asian Development Bank, the Philippines Department of Energy, and volunteer workers in the energy sector discuss ways to bring clean energy into the country. This includes the ways at which public policy, development banking, the private sector, and grassroots efforts work together to achieve not only clean energy but intersect with other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Key Issues discussed

- Sustainable development is slowed down due to a lack of the basic infrastructure needed to support it. Energy is included as one of the basic pieces of infrastructure required for people to have access to opportunities such as education and jobs. Since there is still a gap in the energy sector of the Philippines, sustainable development is impeded.
- The geography of the Philippines is an archipelagic country makes it much harder to reach and electrify off-grid places. The Philippines being made up of thousands of islands makes it more difficult to reach remote and far-flung places. Not only is it more difficult transport-wise, it is costlier to bring the materials for electrification there as well.

- The country lacks the funding to provide complete energy infrastructure to all its citizens. The goal is total electrification by 2028 but that is hard to reach since this goal requires a hefty sum. The government has money to provide for some communities but this is not enough for total electrification. The money still leaves behind underserved and unserved off-grid communities.
- Many communities are unserved but there are also quite a few that are underserved in terms of energy. In the previous point, it talks about how the money is able to provide for some but not all the communities. To expand on that, this simply means that while the energy sector is providing to some communities, this may not be enough to serve every individual in that community. This is why underserved communities still exist along unserved ones.
- It is hard to establish large-scale energy infrastructure in a set period of time. Total electrification is not an easy feat and it requires meticulous planning and the correct execution to be done properly. With many moving parts working together for electrification, this requires a certain number of years. While the target is total electrification by 2028, this goal is left to be tested.

Key recommendations for action

- Private-public partnerships: The private sector should be encouraged to work along the public sector to provide clean energy in the Philippines. It was the panelists' belief in the side event that by having public-private partnerships (PPPs), everyone will be benefited since this development will translate to economic and social growth.
- Incentivize the private sector to contribute working towards the SDGs: To encourage the private sector to work for sustainable development, they need to be reminded that this allows the citizens of the Philippines to engage more with the economy, benefitting the private sector. They can be incentivized through measures such as but not limited to bidding for projects and the government ensuring policy continuity on the plan towards electrification.
- Establish policies promoting solar energy and sustainable development: Businesses are disincentivized to join the journey towards sustainable development partly due to high risk of their investments not giving returns. To aid this, the government should show its

dedication towards the policies they create that are geared towards helping the energy sector and sustainable development. Once trust is established between the private and public sector, the two can cooperate for the common goal of bringing off-grid communities out of energy poverty.

- Start dialogue between the off-grid communities and the energy sector: Many of these off-grid communities wish to be heard by the government and the energy sector. By having conversations that involve these groups, the collaboration can boost morale and efforts for electrification and reaching the 2030 Agenda.
- Grassroots work: Small acts, big changes. Organizations like One Million Lights have shown that volunteer efforts do create an impact that can be seen. Many grassroots efforts, although small at first, have grown in scale and have left a significant impact in the lives of the communities that are helped.