

Thirteenth session of the IRENA Assembly

Side Event

15 January 2023, 13:00 – 14:30 GST

St. Regis Hotel, Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi

Scaling-Up Renewable Energy in Mano River Union Region

Background

The Mano River Union (MRU) comprises of four countries – Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone – with a combined population of over 53 million or about 13% of the West African region. The MRU region is rich in natural resources and has large amounts of mineral reserves. As the region recovers from the Covid-19 crisis, the countries are faced with the need to devise inclusive growth trajectories that tackle the multitude of socio-economic development priorities, including economic diversification, poverty alleviation, job creation and local industry development, alongside fiscal challenges and rising climate impacts.

Access to reliable, affordable and sustainable energy supply will play a crucial role and underpin the region's growth and development. Yet, the region is faced with a significant energy deficit. Over 25 million people remained without electricity access and 45 million relied on traditional fuels for cooking as of 2020. The energy sector also faces affordability and resilience challenges. Hydropower accounts for about half of total installed capacity in the region increasingly susceptible to climate variability. Meanwhile, several countries relied on expensive oil-based generation to meet more than half of their needs. In fact, countries in the Mano River Union have electricity tariff rates that are among the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Energy demand is projected to grow at 5% annually in the region, and abundantly available renewable energy resources offer an opportunity to meet demand in a more inclusive, affordable, secure and environmentally sustainable manner. Hydropower capacity has more than doubled since 2011, reaching 1.9 GW in 2021. Non-hydro renewables (mainly solar PV and wind) registered the fastest growth, collectively accounting for over 68 MW in 2021. Put together renewables were responsible for 39% of the electricity mix in 2020, rising from about 29% in 2010.

Regional interconnections, particularly with the commissioning of the Côte d'Ivoire-Liberia-Sierra Leone-Guinea (CLSG) interconnection project as part of the wider West Africa Power Pool, are increasing electricity trade, and in the long-term with enabling regulations, will play a crucial role in reducing electricity costs, increasing supply and resilience and enable countries in the region to become net exporters.

All countries in the region have set renewable energy targets as part of the National Renewable Energy Action Plans. Renewable energy, alongside energy efficiency, also features prominently as a key mitigation measure for the energy sector in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement of the UNFCCC. Beyond mitigation, renewables are also highlighted as adaptation solutions in the energy sector. Guinea's NDC, for instance, sets adaptation targets in the energy sector including diversifying the energy matrix for a more resilient power system, risk-mapping of climate vulnerability of energy infrastructure, maximising opportunities for improving livelihoods and diversifying income sources in rural areas through small-hydro installations.

Scaling-up renewables adoption in the region will require dedicated policies tailored to different applications and end-use sectors, coupled with improved access to financing for projects, enterprises and consumers. Development finance will play a particularly important role in building the enabling conditions, de-risking private capital into the sector, and bridging the affordability gap for consumers.

To link renewables adoption with the broader national development and industrialization objectives will require a comprehensive policy framework that also addresses education and training, local industry development and regional and international cooperation.

To strengthen the investment framework for renewables in the MRU region, IRENA and the Mano River Union Secretariat signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2022. The first outcome of the MoU is the development of the “Scaling-up Renewable Energy in the Mano River Union Region” report that leverages IRENA analytical work and tools to provide insights on the current status of the energy sector, highlighting the role of renewables in the national and regional energy mix and the policy and investment landscape to meet set targets. The report, being developed in partnership with The Energy Nexus Network (TENN), contextualizes the energy transition within the broader social and macroeconomic priorities in the region, including economic transformation, industrialization, job creation and local value creation.

Objectives

The session will showcase IRENA's engagement in the MRU region as part of its broader regional engagement in West Africa and the continent at large. Preliminary findings from the regional market analysis report will be presented, and member states, development partners and financing institutions will be invited to provide feedback and share perspectives on recent developments in the renewable energy landscape of the region. The outcomes of the meeting will inform the Agency's further work in the region aligned with the MoU with MRU Secretariat, as well as prevailing challenges facing the growth of the renewables sector.

Associated Publications

[Renewable Energy Market Analysis: Africa and its Regions](#) (2022)

[Planning and prospects for renewable power: West Africa](#) (2018)

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