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UN seeks decade of 'sustainable energy for all'

by Brian Roewe

Eco Catholic

In June, the United Nations officially deemed 2014 the beginning of a 'Decade of Sustainable Energy for All.'

The initiative, first announced in 2012, seeks to catalyze advocacy and action toward making universal access to renewable energy a global priority, at a time when 1.3 billion people lack electricity and 2.6 billion in developing countries use biomass in cooking and heating.

For the first two years of the decade, shorthanded to SE4ALL, the U.N. project intends to focus on energy access for women and children's health.

'It can mean the difference between safety and fear, freedom and servitude, and even life and death,' said Kandeh Yumkella, CEO of the SE4ALL program, in a press release. 'The world must come together to end energy poverty and ensure that the poor can manage their lives and thrive economically.'

At Pax Christi USA, Sharon Wallenberg provides a thorough overview of the initiative, outlining first SE4ALL's three primary objectives: to end extreme poverty; to produce a third of the world's energy from renewables by 2030; and to reduce carbon emissions through such energy sources.

Wallenberg runs through the gamut of various ways energy impacts everything from poverty and agriculture, to education and security. Women, she said, are disproportionately affected by energy poverty.

Contextualizing the impact of energy on health, she writes:

?Health depends on energy. Lack of energy is the number one killer of women and children globally. Health care facilities with no access to electricity cannot refrigerate life saving vaccines, or perform blood transfusions. Hospitals may have doctors, instruments, equipment, and machines, but surgery cannot be performed at night without lights. Two-hundred and ninety million women die annually from childbirth. Maternal deaths in developing nations are usually due to energy poverty. Babies do not wait until sunrise to be born. Death can result when women are turned away from hospitals at night. Babies born by kerosene lantern are often burned upon delivery. No C-sections are performed at night. There are four million deaths annually caused by indoor air pollution from cooking and heating with wood and charcoal, mostly women and children. Half of all pneumonia deaths in children result from indoor air pollution. Solar energy saves lives. Clean cook stoves save lives. The target is for 100 million households to be provided with clean cook stoves during this decade.?

Read Wallenberg's full analysis of SE4ALL and energy issues at PaxChristiusa.org.

[Brian Roewe is an NCR staff writer. Follow him on Twitter: @BrianRoewe.]

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