

Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Members of the Diplomatic Corp,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour, and a great pleasure, for me to be here in this opening session of this facilitation workshop and policy dialogue on energy access for the rural poor. I am here to represent the European Union Energy Initiative, and thus to show the continued commitment of the European Commission and the European Union Member States to the sector of energy for development.

Today, I would like to start by re-emphasising the link between access to modern energy services, poverty alleviation and development in general.

Energy plays a critical role in the fight against poverty. Social development can take place only where there is a reliable access to energy sources.

In fact, energy can help to reduce hunger and to improve access to safe drinking water, by allowing cooking and pumping of drinking water.

Furthermore, energy can help to reduce child and maternal mortality, and to reduce diseases by allowing health systems to work properly.

Finally, energy can help to achieve universal primary education, by allowing home study and by enabling the use of educational media and communications in the schools.

But there is also the broader economic development aspect which should be stressed. Currently, the vast majority of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa relies on traditional biomass to meet its residential needs. In addition to the well known environmental impact of these practices, it is expensive in terms of the time it takes, especially for women. Any improvement in the quality of energy and the efficiency of energy services, directly and structurally contributes to improve livelihoods by increasing available time for other economic activities.

There are of course many other reasons which can be mentioned to stress the importance of granting access to modern energy services, but please allow me now to briefly recall the events which brought us here, in the beautiful Maputo.

Some of you may recall the Nairobi Conference, which took place in November 2003. That was the first milestone of the dialogue between the European Union Energy Initiative, and ACP African countries. The dialogue continued, after Nairobi, and things happened. Dialogue is continuing on a country basis, either with the European Commission Delegations or with European Union Member States interested in the sector, such as Denmark in Mozambique.

On this respect, please allow me to thank Denmark for financing, together with the European Commission, this workshop, which is a direct follow up of the dialogue started in Nairobi. There was another similar EUEI workshop, which took place in West Africa in October 2004, which was a success. I firmly believe that this workshop, which gathers countries from Eastern and Southern Africa, will be even more successful.

I would like to conclude this statement by briefly recalling the latest developments which have taken place in the field of energy for development, from a European perspective.

First of all, as I said, the continuation of the dialogue allowed for the inclusion of access to modern energy services in the mainstream cooperation of the European Commission. True, this happened only in very few countries, but we hope that this trend will continue.

Secondly, you will hear from some EU Member States, tomorrow, about a new Partnership Dialogue Facility, which will assist in the continuation of the dialogue between the EU and our African partners.

Finally, last but not least, the European Commission proposed to the EU Member States, the allocation of 250 million Euros, which corresponds to around 320 million US Dollars, to an Energy Facility. The proposal is now before the EU Member States, and we sincerely look forward their approval. On this respect, I would like to mention a similar facility, the ACP-EU Water Facility, which, with a similar budget, launched a call for proposal which ended early this year. They received some 800 proposals, for a requested amount of around 2.5 billion Euro.

The water facility was looking for co-financing of projects. This means that there could be up to 2.5 billion Euro, out there, available to finance good projects in the water sector.

Let's do our best, in the energy sector, to replicate, and improve the water experience. Let's work together to go out there and fetch these funds. The energy sector in Africa desperately needs them.

I wish you a successful workshop.

I thank you for your attention.