

How to use Sustainable Energy Visions

Note by INFORSE-Europe, December 2008

INFORSE-Europe has developed sustainable energy visions for a number of countries and has developed a tool so NGOs can develop their own sustainable energy visions, scenarios and plans within a few months. This notes discusses the crucial question of how NGOs can use such work for sustainable energy.

There are a number of reasons for NGOs to develop sustainable energy visions and scenarios:

- to show how energy supply of a country or region can be covered with less or no fossil fuel and nuclear power, to reach greenhouse gas reduction targets and/or reduce dependence of imported fuels.
- to show that it is possible to make a sufficient energy supply to a country/region with local, renewable sources, to counter the argument that fossil fuels /nuclear power is necessary
- to make an alternative to an official energy plan/scenario or a plan/scenario by a power company or other stakeholder
- to enter into a dialogue with existing planners/modellers
- to increase capacity to formulate policies and proposals for sustainable energy
- as part of a campaign for sustainable energy proposals and/or a sustainable development

Show How a Country can be Supplied less Fossil and Nuclear Energy

Often NGOs are campaigning against expansion of nuclear power plants, coal power plants and increased fossil fuel supply, e.g. gas pipelines. Often the arguments for such investments are that in the future there will be increased demand for electricity and other energy and that the proposed project is the best and/or cheapest solution.

In this case it will strengthen the NGO to have a plan that shows how the country/region can be supplied with sufficient energy in other ways. This plan must have a sufficient quality and in other ways be convincing. It requires at a minimum to have a plan for how to save and/or the supply in other ways the similar amount of energy that will be produced by the fossil/nuclear project.

A stronger tool will be a model that cover the entire energy consumption of the country region to avoid the change of argumentation from the fossil/nuclear project promoters, where they change from an argument of supplying growth to an argument of replacing older plants. It is stronger if the energy model is combined with an economic model that shows that the proposed fossil/nuclear project will be more expensive than the alternatives.

Show How it is Possible to Supply a Country/Region with Local, Renewable Energy

In addition to opposing single fossil or nuclear energy projects, many NGOs are supporting a general change to a sustainable energy system. To work for this aim in a credible way, it is important to be able to show how it can be done, and preferably also the effects of doing it.

In this case it will be a benefit for the NGO to be able to show a plan for how the change can be made with a sustainable energy scenario and preferably also some evaluations of costs/economic effects and environmental effects.

The evaluation of economic effects can include total costs, costs of key investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency, costs compared with fossil/nuclear alternatives, evaluation of effects of consumer energy costs, evaluation of employment and of costs of imports. The environmental effects can be effects on greenhouse gases as well as effects on acid rain, biodiversity on land and in water, water quality etc. It is difficult to evaluate all the effects, so usually the most important ones should be chosen.

Make an Alternative to an Official or Power Company Plan

Often NGOs want a development with less pollution and more renewable energy than official plans and plans from power companies. Then an alternative energy plan is a good tool in discussions of change to a more sustainable national strategy.

Such a plan must show how a more sustainable development can look and must be convincing for the NGO as well as for a broader public. It should in general be able to match the official plan, and should cover at least the same time period; but it can be considerably simpler in many details.

Enter into a Dialogue with Official Planners

The experience from a number of NGOs is that the better skills NGO persons have, the better they can enter into dialogues with official planners. If an NGO has an alternative energy scenario, it increases its skills, and its ability to enter into dialogues with official planners, as the official planners more regards NGO persons as colleagues and are more willing to share., e.g. details of models with them.

This requires that some NGO persons are working with a sustainable energy scenario that is similar to simpler official models, at least in some key aspects.

Increase Capacity to Formulate Policies and Proposals for Sustainable Energy

Even with a simple energy model, an NGO can quickly evaluate how much a proposal that it considers will influence the national energy balance and how many alternative projects are necessary to replace an unsustainable project that it does not want.

This will increase its capacity to formulate policies and proposals for sustainable energy.

For this is needed a simple model that includes key aspects of the energy system of the country/region, including energy balance, electricity balance, development trends, major potentials for renewable energy and energy efficiency. In addition is needed some basic information of costs of various solutions as well as environmental effects.

Model as Part of a Campaign for Sustainable Energy

The presentation of a plan/scenario for sustainable energy development can be an important element of a campaign for proposals and policies for renewable energy and energy efficiency. With such a plan/scenario an NGO can attract media attention and enter into dialogues with politicians and other decision-makers. It can also be used in exhibitions and other campaign tools.

For this is needed a plan/scenario and a presentation that can attract media attention and that cannot be rejected on objective grounds by official planners and other stakeholders.

Own Plan/Scenario or Expert/Academic Plan/Scenario

NGOs can make their own plans and scenarios, but they can also use plans made by experts including academic groups. Both strategies have their benefits and the optimal solution depends on the national situation.

One benefit of a sustainable energy plan/scenario is that it can be used over longer periods with regular updates. To decide to make an own plan or rely on experts, it is important to consider if it is possible to keep the model updated also without much financing, either by the NGO or by the expert/academic group-

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International Network for Sustainable Energy – Europe is a network of 72 NGOs working for a transition to sustainable energy. Read more about the network and its sustainable energy visions at www.inforse.org/europe