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Institute for Natural Resources in Africa

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Greening the COVID-19 recovery for a sustainable future for Africa and beyond.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, nations and leaders are determined to use lessons from a once in a lifetime global crisis that has left economies bruised and battered and resulted in abounding casualties and loss of lives.

A United Nations University (UNU) side event at [the 2020 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development \(HLPF\)](#) will discuss the risks and opportunities associated with transitioning away from fossil fuels in Africa. Speakers include **H.E. Shinjiro Koizumi, Minister of the Environment of Japan**, and **Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin Okyenhene, King of Akyem Abuakwa of Ghana**, who will be joined by experts from three UNU institutes, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA), and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

The event will explore the socio-economic impacts of decarbonisation for African countries, and consider how green transitions may be affected by COVID-19. This includes new opportunities for addressing climate change while ‘building back better’ after the pandemic. The event will highlight regional perspectives as well as the importance of multilateralism.

“In fact, multilateralism and the need to change behaviours is at the heart of the ‘build back better’ narrative says,” [Dr. Zita Sebesvari](#), Officer in Charge of UNU-Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS).

The forthcoming HLPF event provides a unique platform for traditional leaders, such as Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin Okyenhene, to add their voices to a global debate, emphasizing the importance of joining the dots from local to global. As the King of Akyem Abuakwa asserted in [a recent op-ed](#) “As with the coronavirus pandemic, climate change is a threat multiplier. It makes existing problems worse, creates new ones, makes a mockery of boundaries whilst striking with great force in rich and poor countries alike”.

Beyond Ghana, another country heavily dependent on fossil fuels (especially coal) is Japan, and the government is setting a good example by accelerating its climate ambition in the wake of the pandemic.

“We should first reaffirm that economic recovery must not leave climate action behind. A virtuous cycle of environmental protection and economic growth will be a core part of the recovery strategy,” Minister [Koizumi announced](#).

For many African countries, still energy poor and far behind on achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially those related to poverty, hunger, health and education, there is a perception that wholesale decarbonisation will impact on export earnings and undermine local industrialisation and development plans at the expense of economic transformation and human development. However, the urgency of the climate crisis is now more apparent than ever, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have illuminated the dangers of unsustainable commodity dependence.

Indeed, as Dr. Jean Paul Adam, Director of Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resources Management at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA), affirms Africa can gain from taking advantage of its huge and impressive natural gas reserves to fuel its development, precisely because natural gas, as a transition fuel, does not come with the challenges related to the other fossil fuels and can widen energy access to more than 600 million Africans without access to electricity.

During the upcoming HLPF side-event, speakers will discuss how to manage [stranded assets](#), which stand the risk of losing their value before their economic lifetime – and how these risks

could be turned into new opportunities that will give Africa greater leadership in managing its development aspirations.

Africa will be a key driver in the fight against climate change, with countries in the region holding high potential for sustainable energy generation, especially solar and wind, and owning large endowments of minerals for the 4th industrial revolution. In building back better from COVID-19, African countries can restructure their economic systems towards greener trajectories.

“Africa could become the custodian of a new sustainable development world order if it is able to change course and adopt a green transition given the size of its current and future population and the inevitability that its economies will eventually grow beyond the current rate,” said Dr. Fatima Denton, Director of UNU Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (UNU-INRA), during a recent webinar on COVID-19 and fossil fuels.

Yet, green transitions in poorer countries will require financial, infrastructural, technological and knowledge support. UNU places science and knowledge sharing at the centre of sustainable development.

Professor Yamaguchi, Director of UNU-IAS stresses that decarbonisation of economies need to go hand in hand with evidence based scientific research and innovations that will underpin decisions and enable effective policies. This is precisely what UNU as a knowledge institute is excited about – bring solutions to complex problems.

Join the online HLPF side-event on Friday 10th June, hosted by the UNU Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (UNU-INRA), the UNU Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS), the UNU Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), UN ECA, and UN DESA.

[Register here.](#)

UNU-INRA HLPF 2020 SIDE EVENT

Managing “Stranded” Assets Risks and Opportunities

July 10, 2020 | 12:00 pm to 1:30 pm EDT

Chair
Dr. Jean Paul Adam
Director - UN ECA
Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resources Management

Dr. Fatima Denton
Director - UNU-INRA,

Dr. Zita Sebesvari
Acting Director - UNU-EHS

Professor Shinobu Yume Yamaguchi
Director - UNU IAS

Dr. James Murombedzi
Coordinator - UN ECA (ACPC)

Dr. Minoru Takada
Team Lead - UN DESA,

H.E. Shinjiro Koizumi
Minister for Environment - Japan

Keynote Speaker
Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin Okyenhene
King of Akyem Abuakwa of Ghana

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Economic Commission for Africa

United Nations
Department of Economic and Social Affairs