

Comments for Panel Discussion 1.

**“Sustainable Biomass Production and Utilization:
Potential and Possibilities”**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year in the 1st Biomass-Asia workshop I described the situation of 900 million rural Poor living in Asia and the Pacific, and struggling every day to get a little bit of the energy that other people and other countries recklessly waste, as if our world was not a closed system subject to the inescapable laws of entropy. I insisted then on the constraints the Poor face in accessing energy and on the multiplier effect access to energy may have on their livelihood, their well being and their dignity. These elements are summarised in the slide accompanying this discussion. Today I will focus on three points related to more strategic elements of a pro-poor approach related to biomass and renewable energies.

Use local resources for local development first

Indeed, any other strategy will reproduce the failures of the historical growth pattern that has led to the exploitation of rural areas as a source of cheap raw material, and a source of cheap labour force. While this enabled industry-based high value-adding activities to develop, it also resulted in a dramatic imbalance illustrated by increase in rural poverty share, degradation of natural resources, rural-urban migrations leading in turn to urban poverty.

It is only after the living conditions of the rural population increased that the rural communities have the capacity to become actively involved and partners in outward-oriented industrialisation processes. In short, start with local actions first, and then expand.

Target the Poor in energy-deprived marginal areas

This is where biomass and renewable energy are most needed; it is where there are no other alternatives. It may be an economic non sense to import expansive fuels to be consumed in these areas because they are remotely linked with the markets. But lifting out of poverty nine hundred million people, who represents a potentially huge and captive market for the domestic economy, that is not economic non sense.

However, a very strong policy commitment and political will is fundamental to prioritise biomass AND poverty alleviation at the same time. This is not a domain where medium or large scale private sector enterprises will voluntarily enter. This is clearly the domain of public policies, that is, R&D policies, public investment policies, fiscal incentives, infrastructure, human resource development.

Match technologies with local socio-economic conditions

By nature, agriculture is highly dependent to a set of uncontrollable variables that in addition to the variety of human cultures produce an immense diversity of natural and socio-economic environments. No unique technology may answer this diversity. Just as an example, not only the sources of biomass such as fuelwood, organic wastes, agricultural residues, energy crops, may vary but also their relative local importance or availability, the use that is locally made of them, the values that they are locally given.

Our challenge is to simultaneously know what technologies are available, what the local socioeconomic conditions are, what technologies are locally suitable. Making an inventory, storing, analyzing and sharing information on know-how, knowledge, experience and practices at regional level is crucial, since to succeed in significantly alleviating poverty, quick impact and lasting effects are concurrently needed.

We cannot afford each of us, in our own countries, research centres, universities or ministries to unceasingly repeat experiments that have been done by others. If we are really committed to reduce poverty and hunger by 50% in 2015 we cannot wait, the Poor cannot wait. More coordination is needed, more exchange is needed more collaboration is needed; it is difficult but “Where there is a Will there is a Way”.

Thank you for your kind attention.