Review II: Energy Poverty and Access Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of Regionalism

By:

Denis Gyeyir

November 4, 2020

Access to energy is an important part of the everyday survival of modern humankind. However, not all energy forms are healthy for humans and the environment. Given that different countries have various degrees of endowment in energy resources and varied energy needs, cooperation is important for addressing the individual challenges of nations. This is particularly important for Sub-Sahara Africa as the region has a relatively substantial gap to fill in the provision of clean energy to its citizens. While energy access, energy poverty, climate change and regionalism may have individually seen some attention in the literature, a unique contribution to the discourse has been a blend of these subjects in the African context.

An interesting contribution of the book is the in-depth review of the renewable energy potential in SSA while highlighting the basic requirements for tapping the full potential of these sources (Page 122-123). At the same, the challenges

with each of the renewable sources are adequately analyzed as it applies to SSA, including their comparative pros and cons and interactions with the climate. Also worth mentioning are the global lessons it provides, notably the deployment of renewable energy in Spain (pages 124-126). It clearly brings to the fore, the efficiency benefits of renewable energy technologies and the multiplier effects on economic development, climate and environmental sustainability. It further discusses an important subject of energy efficiency, and its relation to emission reduction, carbon taxes and climate change, as applicable in domestic and industrial energy settings. It highlights the progress by countries in SSA, including South Africa, Ghana and Namibia in achieving energy efficiency (Page 130). The challenges with energy efficiency in the unique SSA context, including lack of locally trained workforce, poor regulatory environment and governance, and lack of access to financing for energy efficiency projects have also been largely discussed.

In analyzing energy protocols among blocs in the SSA region, the book reveals an urgent need for a review of these protocols to address contemporary issues in energy efficiency, clean energy investments, technology advancements in clean energy and energy cooperation. While observing some notable provisions in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) energy protocols ahead of that the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the lack of prioritization of renewable energy in all the protocols call for attention (pages 132-135). However, it is refreshing to note the enactment of other regional instruments to address the gap. For instance, the book cited the Energy Sector Plan (ESP), under the auspices of the SADC Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plan, intended to address four key strategic objectives including ensuring energy security, improving access to modern energy services, tapping the abundant energy resources, and achieving financial investment and environmental sustainability. Several regional institutions have also been set up to actualize the adoption of clean energy while addressing the access gap including the Renewable Energy Centre in West Africa, the East African Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (EACREE) and the Regional Electricity Regulatory Association (RERA) of SADC. The role of regional infrastructures such as oil and gas pipelines and power grid interconnections with legal backings from their respective blocs as well as specialized institutional structures are commendable steps to

addressing energy access.

In contextualizing the discussion on the role of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as provided for in Article 20 of the 2015 Paris Agreement, the book raises some significant concerns about the effectiveness of regionalism particularly in the SSA terrain (pages 117-118). Importantly, it highlights the need for recognition of the level of integration possible among countries within the regional blocs and how important this can be in whipping countries in line in terms of regional targets at reducing emissions.

The book adequately discusses the impact of various energy sources and their contribution to the energy mix in SSA (pages 93-97). It further analyses the sectors that will drive growth in energy demand in the medium to long term, noting in detail the roles of industrialization, urbanization, transport and domestic demand as well as the major transitions expected (pages 98-100).

While the Author seeks to highlight the climatic effects of less clean energy sources and discourages same, it makes proposals that seek to promote investments in the use of fossil and other carbon-intensive energy sources including the establishment of more refineries in Africa (page 96). It also seeks to suggest that the exploitation of abundant fossil fuel and coal resources in SSA is the surest bet to eradicating poverty and improving energy access in SSA (pages 116 and 123). This flies in the face of earlier analysis, which situates the discussion on climate change and energy access in the context of technological advancements in mitigating the emissions from fossil fuel energy sources and in developing renewable energy to address the twin problem of access and poverty. While the book sought to highlight the negative effects of fossil fuels in the SSA, the case study on Nigeria and the focus on gas flaring and oil spills (pages 101-106) dwarfed other important issues of greenhouse gas emissions in SSA associated with the use fossil fuels.

Despite the omissions, the book makes an excellent read, captures various angles of the energy and climate debate while spicing the debate uniquely with aspects of regionalism drawing from global examples. It is recommended for academics and practitioners within and beyond the energy space.

View online: [Review II: Energy Poverty and Access Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of Regionalism]

Provided by Afronomicslaw