

PRESS RELEASE

Sindh Govt, public representatives express willingness to work with civil society to address concerns about climate impacts of energy projects

KARACHI, Nov 28—While sharing the string of efforts to revolutionize the province's electricity infrastructure, Energy Minister Sindh Nasir Hussain Shah agreed with the need for the government to engage civil society to develop a climate-informed and representative energy policy for the Sindh province.

The Minister was speaking at the Sindh Energy Dialogue, jointly organised by The Knowledge Forum and NED University of Energy and Technology at a local hotel Wednesday. The Dialogue brought together experts, government officials, public representatives and the energy department to spotlight and critically examine the Sindh Government's energy-related policies and actions with a climate change and energy justice lens.

"There is an immense need for a regular and concerted dialogue on the energy policy and direction of the country, as these policies and actions impact common citizens and local economies," said Dr Noman Ahmed, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Sciences, NED University of Engineering and Technology, in his opening remarks.

In his brief address to the participants, Sindh Minister for Energy Syed Nasir Shah shared the government's ambitious initiative of renewable energy including establishing solar parks and providing home solar for the population that is currently underserved by the national grid. He linked the coal development plans of the Sindh Government as a response to the rising prices of energy in the country.

"The Sindh government is determined to provide affordable electricity for all. Civil society should get connected with institutions and experts and work together with the Sindh Government for inputs on the government's energy plans."

Mahfooz Qazi, Director of Alternate Energy, Government of Sindh highlighted that the Sindh government is making strides in public sector energy transformation, as government buildings are being solarised and in the next phase government hospitals and schools will be solarized.

The Dialogue threw light on Sindh's energy landscape, critically examining the state of affairs with regard to energy access and availability. Experts consistently pointed out that the fossil fuels-reliant national grid remains unaffordable and unstable, calling for a comprehensive fossil fuel phase-out strategy.

"Coal mining's environmental consequences continue to be a major concern, with researchers distinguishing between the impacts of local and imported coal extraction methods," said Muhammad Badar Alam from the Policy Research Institute of Equitable Development.

Research and visual documentation were presented to highlight the impact of load shedding on low-income residential consumers and businesses. Hanmad Ali of Renewables First and Tanveer Bari of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry stressed the need for rationalising the cost of KE electricity and turning to renewable energy generation to stabilize electricity supply to the industry so that the industry could contribute to the economy.

MPA Marvi Rashid commented on the submissions made in the second session, Developing a Clean Energy Roadmap, featuring Dr. Khalid Waleed from SDPI, who highlighted the need to phase out coal in light of emerging opportunities for climate finance and CBAM which may affect Pakistan's exports produced from the fossil fuels based energy. She noted the importance of civil society's input in shaping energy policies. She vowed to present the community's concerns around emissions and land utilization for energy projects in the provincial assembly.

Marvi Rashdi also responded to legal expert Abira Ashfaq's presentation on a critical assessment of mineral mining and its impact on communities and the economy. "Sindh is experiencing an increasing number of climate events including sea intrusion, floods and heatwaves. Public representatives have a critical role to play in protecting public interest. Experts and civil society should stay connected with Members of Parliament and Provincial Assembly to guide them on concerns and voices of common citizens with regard to infrastructure projects."

The third session, titled The Renewables Boom, featured a presentation by Mr. Basit Ghauri of Renewables First, who examined the causes behind Pakistan's growing solar energy adoption. He noted that while electricity costs are rising, consumers are increasingly turning to alternative sources of energy on self-help basis rather than relying on the national grid.

Dr Noman Ahmed, Dean Faculty of Architecture and Sciences, NED University of Engineering and Technology further emphasized the importance of sustainable urban planning to benefit from renewable energy expansion.

"However, issues such as increased consumption and emissions from the use of electric equipment such as AC owing to renewable energy access needs to be checked." He also pointed out that access to social services is a critical driver behind increased rural urban migration, emphasizing the need for rationalizing service delivery in non-urban areas.

The final session, Path to Power: Central Decentralization, began with Mr. Mohsin Aman, who discussed the challenges of centralization in the energy sector. He stressed the need for strong leadership and reduced influence from international financial institutions to create an energy system that is affordable, reliable, clean, and sustainable.

Speaking about the decentralization of the grid, and global trends emphasizing sustainable, decentralized energy systems, energy expert Abubakar Ismail highlighted the importance of strong grid networking and collaboration between stakeholders to maximize the benefits of emerging opportunities in grid modernization. Dr Niaz, an energy expert also highlighted the importance of producing local expertise to lead the ongoing rapid developments in energy systems.

Badar Alam, Director, PRIED concluded the session by saying that the legal framework around centralization has changed because of the 18th constitutional amendment. "This also highlights that the impact of the energy policies – whether in the form of emissions or affordability is very much local. We can no longer disregard the climate in our policy-making. It needs to be front and centre in all debates, as it affects local populations, environment, and climates." he said.

Ms. Zeenia Shaukat, Director of The Knowledge Forum conducted the dialogue.