SHARE A STORY OF A NEW WAY OF DOING RESEARCH WHICH ENABLED TO ADDRESS A SOCIETAL CHALLENGE

HELIO: DEVELOPMENT OF INDICATORS TO MEASURE THE CONTRIBUTION OF ENERGY SYSTEMS TO ECODEVELOPMENT

Short summary of the story (what happened, what actors were involved…)

HELIO International's story is about the development of indicators to identify, assess, measure and publicise the contribution of energy systems and policies to ecodevelopment (sustainable and equitable development). The purpose was to examine the impact of changing climatic conditions on energy systems and prepare recommendations to help decision-makers climate-proof energy policies. A bottom-up approach was chosen and the process brought together representatives of civil society, academia, local communities, energy suppliers, policy makers, local and national energy agencies, a panel of international experts and representatives of international institutions.

1. WHAT IS NEW IN THE WAY OF DOING RESEARCH IN THIS STORY (AT WHAT STAGE – DURING THE RESEARCH, AFTER THE RESEARCH, DISCIPLINES INVOLVED, …)?

The objective of the approach was not only to develop a set of new tools and indicators but to ensure:

- precise identification of issues while allowing for flexible responses to potential new constraints;
- full ownership by local communities so as to provide guidance rather than transferring pre-formed approaches ill-suited to the local context;
- transfer of a step-by-step process to experts in the South; and,
- comparability and sustainability of national results across countries due to the standardised use of indicators.

2. WHAT WERE THE MOTIVATIONS TO ENGAGE IN THIS NEW WAY OF DOING RESEARCH?

The approach of this work came from observation: that energy's role, while obvious in present and future challenges, is too often neglected when addressing ecodevelopment issues. Moreover, the lack of indicators that define the link between energy and ecodevelopment penalises adopting ambitious policies and mobilising adequate financing when it is needed.

3. WHAT WERE THE RESULTS / IMPACTS / BENEFITS?

This participatory approach has brought together relevant stakeholders during indicators development, information gathering and implementation. The main innovation was to combine scientific rigor with the involvement of concerned people and stakeholders. The concept of "citizen expertise" as a key input to the process, and that this participation was accorded the same importance as that of internationally recognised experts, allowed for a significant knowledge base to be tapped while following a scientific approach. This approach has already been successfully applied in several international projects implemented or currently under way by HELIO International: Sustainable Energy Watch (SEW), Vulnerability-Adaptation-Resilience (VAR), MEDRES EU project, The Participatory Energy Governance initiative (PEG), and TIPEE (methodology development – analysis of information for energy policies and ecodevelopment)

4. WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES / OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED AND WHAT WERE THE KEY SUCCESS FACTORS/ENABLERS?

The main challenge was to widen the traditional approach of dealing with cross-cutting issues between energy and ecodevelopment. One of the key difficulties has been to adapt scientific rigor to a more open and participatory process. That stakeholders were enthusiastic about such exchanges and willing to apply the indicators, are the greatest testimonies to the success of this approach. The fact that this approach meets the expectations of both civil society actors and national and international institutions is further proof of the approach's success. The next step for HELIO International is to find ways to replicate this approach across all countries in order to establish a global observatory that measures the vulnerability and resilience of national energy systems to climatic stress and assess the contribution of energy systems and policies to ecodevelopment.