

## Social Innovations for Energy Access: Organizing “Sustainable Energy for All”

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**Brief Bio**  
*Session Leader(s)* **Lena Kruckenberg** investigates renewable energy technology adoption and market development through interorganizational networks in Central America. She has recently published an article on renewable energy partnerships in development cooperation in *Energy Policy*.

**Nicholas Loubere** is about to embark on a postdoctoral research fellowship at the Australian National University. He is an expert on rural infrastructure development, rural co-operative organizations and microfinance in China, and is currently investigating the co-operative acquisition and management of renewable energy technologies in Chinese villages.

**Abstract**  
*Short description, including alignment with conference themes and objectives*

Several sessions at the 2014 conference pointed to the importance of social innovation for the adoption of technologies in marginalized contexts. It was concluded that the sustainable adoption of low-carbon technologies is conditioned not only by the technologies themselves, and on how they are provided, but also depends on how processes of technology development, financing, transfer and adoption connect with the institutional infrastructures at the local level. Multi-stakeholder collaboration and participatory engagement are now seen as best practice – but also as difficult and costly. As we witness a shift from technology-driven to stakeholder-oriented initiatives, questions arise as to how a more sustainable uptake of low-carbon technologies can be *organized*.

This session invites participants to discuss the roles of various forms of social organization in enhancing energy access in marginalized contexts, aiming to identify organizational processes and social innovations that open up new avenues for achieving the United Nations’ goal of *Sustainable Energy for All*. Such innovations may relate to different forms of social organization, including multi-stakeholder partnerships, networks, and value chains; innovations in organizational form (e.g. renewable energy enterprises, energy co-operatives) and operational models; as well as policy-making and policy implementation.

**Description**  
*Proposed discussion focus*

The provision of sustainable energy services to those who live at the margins of world society requires the development of innovative organizational and collaborative capabilities supporting the adoption of decentralized low-carbon energy services. Innovative institutional arrangements are currently being explored, as the transfer of institutional technology has yielded mixed results. A large number of papers presented at the last conference testified to the various organizational challenges faced by policy makers, technology providers, intermediaries and users in this field.

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### **Description (Cont.)**

Against this background, the proposed session aims to initiate an interdisciplinary debate on what kind of social innovations may facilitate sustainable energy access. The relatively wide scope of ‘social innovation’ (as opposed to just ‘partnerships’ or ‘business models’) is intentional. Recent research suggests that novel forms of organization, innovations in business and partnerships models, and in network formation and policies, are interdependent. Currently, these issues are addressed in distinct literatures, often on the basis of individual case studies.

This session aims to transcend these limitations in an attempt to identify best practice and potential synergies that open up new ways of addressing some of the challenges associated with the provision of sustainable energy services to marginalized populations.

### **Objectives**

*Justification and expected impact during and after the conference*

Current debates around energy poverty and the ‘productive use’ of energy in marginalized contexts point to the importance of establishing the right organizational infrastructure. A dedicated session on this topic is timely and attractive for academics as well as practitioners from both the social sciences and engineering. By bringing together participants who have identified distinct kinds of social innovations, this session seeks to initiate a debate that transcends disciplinary divisions between business/market-oriented, policy-focused, and technology-driven practice and research. We are confident that our expertise in renewable energy partnerships, multi-stakeholder networks, microfinance, co-operative organizations and sustainable development will allow us to chair an interdisciplinary debate leading to the identification of social innovations and organizational processes that have significant potential for advancing the provision of sustainable access to energy.

### **Target Audience**

The session would target a diverse audience of both practitioners and academics who work in the field of/conduct research on sustainable access to energy for marginalized populations (both rural and urban). We hope to facilitate further exchange and collaboration throughout the conference and beyond.