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How the G20 Can Advance the Global Energy Transition

IASS Researchers Call for a Halt to Investment in Fossil Infrastructure and an Ambitious Expansion of Renewables



Subsidies for coal, oil and gas can hamper the growth of green energy. Photo: Wind turbines (Germany) © IASS / Norbert Michalke

Hosted by Germany, this year's G20 Summit will take place in Hamburg on 7 and 8 July. Alongside the prevention of financial crises, climate and energy policy will also be on the agenda of the world's twenty leading industrialised and emerging economies. The first steps the G20 has taken towards a sustainable energy supply fall far short of the fundamental transformation of infrastructure that is required. The G20 needs to be more ambitious. But what would a sustainable energy agenda actually entail?

In cooperation with the Think 20 (T20) Network, researchers at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) in Potsdam have developed recommendations for the future energy policy of the G20 in several policy briefs. The political scientists Rainer Quitzow and



R. Andreas Kraemer, social scientist Sonja Thielges, and environmental scientist Sebastian Helgenberger are available for interviews on the G20's policies on energy and Africa.

An ambitious energy agenda for climate protection and financial stability

More than three quarters of global demand for energy comes from the members of the G20, and they are also responsible for 80 per cent of the world's CO₂ emissions. As an alliance, they bring a huge influence to bear on the World Bank and other international organisations. "The G20 could play a decisive role in setting the course for the global energy transition – even if the USA sways from this course under the Trump Administration," claims IASS energy expert Sonja Thielges.

In order to limit global warming to well below two degrees Celsius, as agreed in Paris, the energy system has to be completely overhauled and the exploitation of many coal, oil, and gas deposits must stop. "Investment in fossil energies doesn't just put our climate at risk, it also threatens the stability of our financial system," explains Rainer Quitzow, who studies the transformation of energy systems at the IASS. If there is a move away from fossil energies like coal in the future – a highly likely scenario – then the fall in the value of those resources could destabilise international financial markets.

The Potsdam researchers are calling for a decisive exit from fossil energies. As Sonja Thielges points out, "The German government in particular could set an example by phasing out subsidies for fossil energy carriers and move this issue higher up on the G20 agenda."

For IASS Senior Fellow R. Andreas Kraemer, sustainable development is all about tackling challenges like climate change and energy poverty together: "G20 members should aim for an ambitious, affirmative agenda and bring renewables to places where people still lack access to electricity."

Renewables create jobs and viable business models

Sebastian Helgenberger, who heads a project on the social and economic co-benefits of renewables at the IASS, suggests that by taking concerted action towards the global energy transition, the G20 could send a clear signal about the ecological and economic opportunities of renewables for society and the economy: "The turn to wind and solar energy is creating jobs and viable business models, improving air quality, reducing the pressures on our health systems, and boosting local value creation as a result of fast access to self-produced energy."



For more background information on this issue, see:

- [G20 Summit in Hamburg: IASS and Partners Publish Policy Recommendations](#)
- [IASS Policy Brief: An Ambitious Energy Agenda for the G20](#)

Focus on Africa: supporting the sustainable development of an emerging region

IASS experts are also urging G20 countries to lend more support to sustainable development south of the Mediterranean. After all, the most important bilateral donors in energy-sector development assistance – Germany, Japan, France and the USA – belong to the G20. China has also become a major player in the African energy sector, with around one third of investments in energy on the continent flowing from Chinese firms. “The African continent offers huge potential for solar, wind and hydropower, but that potential has barely been tapped into,” says IASS researcher Rainer Quitzow, who, together with the T20 network, has written a paper with recommendations for the future engagement of the G20 in Africa.

In that paper the researchers show that subsidies for fossil energies in Africa are presenting major obstacles to the costly construction of sustainable infrastructure. As Rainer Quitzow explains, “The people who are emitting greenhouse gases and thus contributing to climate change are frequently even being paid to do so. The members of the G20 should support African states in phasing out subsidies for fossil energies and creating appropriate incentives for renewables via carbon pricing.”

For more background information on this issue, see:

- [T20 Policy Brief: The G20's role in improving quality of life through sustainable energy and urban infrastructure in Africa](#)
- [IASS Policy Brief: Advancing an International Energy Transition Policy in North Africa and Beyond](#)

IASS Experts:

Rainer Quitzow worked in international development cooperation with a focus on environmental and trade policy before joining the IASS. At the World Bank in Washington he carried out policy impact analyses for development programmes in Latin America and Africa. The political scientist is currently investigating sustainable innovation and industrial policy in the context of the energy transition.

Sebastian Helgenberger has led various IASS projects on the international dimension of the energy transition and the opportunities for ambitious climate action with renewable en-



ergies since he joined the institute in 2014. An environmental scientist, Helgenberger wrote his doctoral thesis on business planning in the age of climate change.

R. Andreas Kraemer is the founder and Director Emeritus of the Ecologic Institute and a senior fellow at the IASS and the Canadian Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI). He also teaches political science at Duke University and studies the practices of global institutions with regard to the environment, resources, climate, and energy.

Sonja Thielges is a research associate at the IASS, where she focuses on the international dimension of the energy transition, in particular the G20 energy agenda. Before coming to the IASS, she carried out research on climate and energy policy in the USA. Sonja Thielges studied North American studies, political science and modern history and is currently working on a PhD on climate policy discourses in individual US states.

Sonja is only available for interviews on 6 July.

To arrange an interview or for further information, please contact

Eva Söderman / Anja Krieger
Press & Communications

Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies e.V. (IASS)

Berliner Straße 130, 14467 Potsdam

Tel. +49 (0)331 288 22-340/479

Fax +49 (0)331 288 22-310

E-mail eva.soederman@iass-potsdam.de / anja.krieger@iass-potsdam.de

www.iass-potsdam.de

Funded by the ministries of research of the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Brandenburg, the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) aims to identify and promote development pathways for a global transformation towards a sustainable society. The IASS employs a transdisciplinary approach that encourages dialogue to understand sustainability issues and generate potential solutions in cooperation with partners from the sciences, politics, the economy, and civil society. A strong network of national and international partners supports the work of the institute. Among its central research topics are the energy transition, emerging technologies, climate change, air quality, systemic risks, governance and participation, and cultures of transformation.