

GBEP Task Force on Sustainability

Scope and programme of work

The 5th GBEP Steering Committee is invited to consider and endorse the proposed scope and programme of work for the GBEP Task Force on Sustainability as set out in this paper.

Background

At the last meeting of the GBEP Steering Committee on 12 November 2007 the UK agreed to put forward suggestions on where GBEP might focus future efforts to support the sustainable development of bio-energy. The last Technical Working Group (TWG) on 9-10 April 2008 in London considered a UK discussion paper and concluded that sustainable bioenergy provides an important opportunity to meet energy security and economic development goals as well as address climate change and other environmental issues. Furthermore, the TWG agreed that GBEP can play an important role in furthering international discussions and understanding on sustainable bioenergy and its work needs to be undertaken in a way that provides useful outputs and does not duplicate other efforts. To facilitate this work, the TWG agreed that GBEP should establish a task force on sustainable bioenergy.¹

This proposal reflects the outcome of the TWG meeting in London.

Rationale

There is broad international consensus that sustainable bio-energy can make a valuable contribution to meeting energy security and economic development goals as well as addressing climate change and other environmental issues. But concerns over sustainability and perceptions about negative impacts of biofuels in particular are growing and resulting in the closer scrutiny of policies designed to expand bio-energy use. These concerns may pose a significant risk to bio-energy achieving its full potential.

The current international debate on sustainability is taking place in a range of forums and settings, and to date shows little sign of building, or being able to build, an international consensus on achievable and acceptable ways of addressing these concerns. GBEP should be at the heart of the global debate on this key issue and can play an important role in furthering international discussions and understanding on sustainable bio-energy and effective ways of achieving it.

Scope of work

The main aim of the Task Force on Sustainability will be to facilitate a coherent international discussion with a view to broadening understanding of sustainable bio-energy and effective ways of achieving it. For the purposes of this work the scope will cover all forms of bio-energy, including transport biofuels, solid biomass for energy use and biogas/biomethane.

¹ The original UK discussion paper and the conclusions of the TWG meeting are available on the GBEP web site: <http://www.globalbioenergy.org/1439.html>

Working within the consideration that sustainability includes environmental and economic performance as well as social considerations, the Task Force will:

1. Develop an inventory of what is being done internationally on bio-energy sustainability. This will involve identifying current policy/implementation initiatives being undertaken at national, regional and international level on the sustainability of bio-energy, including sustainability standards initiatives, compliance/certification schemes, research and other and studies. The inventory will help inform the analysis and discussions to be undertaken in the second activity. A preliminary version of the inventory is attached to this paper. It will be reviewed and refined by the Task Force once it starts its work;
2. Drawing on the inventory and other available information, identify and discuss commonalities and differences in approaches, and issues requiring further consideration. The Task Force may decide to explore some of the issues requiring further consideration in more depth and/or to develop these into further work streams depending on their value to helping achieve the overall aim of the Task Force;
3. Facilitate the sharing of information, data, experiences and best practices relating to sustainable bio-energy production and use. The Task Force will work to develop a set of global science-based criteria² and indicators³ regarding the sustainability of bio-energy. The Task Force will provide a useful platform for those engaged in current work on bio-energy sustainability to share information, data, experiences and best practices. A further aim of this activity is to identify synergies between the various initiatives and encourage closer joint working and integration where possible to promote greater consistency and reduce unnecessary duplication. The Task Force will also contribute to the dissemination of best practices which interested stakeholders may adopt in accordance with their particular needs and circumstances;
4. In light of the Task Force's findings, make recommendations to the Steering Committee for further work with suggestions for how GBEP should pursue this work and, if not GBEP which international organizations might undertake this work.

Outputs

The main outputs of the Task Force will be:

- An inventory of existing initiatives on sustainable bio-energy;
- At least one workshop to facilitate an effective dialogue on the exchanging of experiences on bio-energy technologies, norms and regulations as well as the sharing of information, and data, experiences and best practices relating to sustainable bio-energy production and use;
- A platform of science-based criteria and indicators to contribute to the sustainability of bio-energy.
- Examples of experiences and best practices⁴ including benchmarks relating to sustainable bio-energy production and use which will be disseminated for interested stakeholders through appropriate GBEP media, including the web site;

² For the purpose of this work criteria are defined as categories of sustainability factors, capacities or processes that are used to evaluate the environmental, economic or social performance of bio-energy production and use.

³ For the purpose of this work indicators are defined as measurable outcomes of a criteria regarding bio-energy production and use; a means for measuring or describing various aspects of the criteria.

⁴ Best practices may refer to a range of nationally appropriate policies and approaches to improve sustainability profile of bioenergy.

- A report summarising the work and conclusions of the Task Force, and any recommendations for further work.

Time line

Hold the first meeting of the Task Force in Rio de Janeiro on 19 June 2008. At this meeting:

- Formally adopt the Scope of Work as approved by the Steering Committee and agree on a provisional work programme;
- Identify potential stakeholders and agree on an outline of engagement and communication strategies designed to maximise their contribution to the work of the Task Force;
- Hold an orientation discussion on the Partner's policies on sustainable bio-energy. Discuss the inventory of sustainability initiatives and consider what provisional conclusions can be drawn about commonalities, differences and issues requiring further consideration;
- Discuss preliminary ideas for a practical stakeholder workshop on approaches to sustainability to be held no later than October 2008.

Hold a stakeholder workshop before the end of October 2008. The focus and content of which will be agreed by the Task Force. The workshop should provide an opportunity for sharing of information, data, experiences and best practices, identifying and encouraging closer synergies between current initiatives, as well as for discussing significant issues of common interest around achieving sustainable bio-energy production and use.

Before the end of December 2008:

- produce a first draft of a report summarising the work and conclusions of the Task Force, and any emerging recommendations;
- compile a shortlist of experiences and best practice examples.

This first draft could be presented in a GBEP side event during UNFCCC COP14 (Dec. 2008)

Finalise the report of the Task Force's work and conclusions by the end of April 2009.

Task Force Membership

Membership of the Task Force will be open to all GBEP Partners. Its work will be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders, including parties engaged in or responsible for work relating to bio-energy sustainability, industry and civil society, and key international decision-making bodies and institutions, such as the UNFCCC and the IPCC, which have a direct interest in achieving sustainable bio-energy development in the context of the wider climate change and biodiversity agendas. Particular efforts will be made to secure the involvement of biomass-producing developing countries and emerging economies.

Working practices

The Task Force will determine its working practices, including the frequency and location of meetings. The Task Force will raise awareness of its work and outputs through appropriate means and communicate progress regularly.

Resources

Participating Partners will provide "in kind" support in the form of staff time and appropriate resources for possible travel to Task Force meetings. Partners may provide financial support for the work of the Task Force at their discretion.