Energy is an enabler. It drives human, social and economic development. Despite the availability of technical solutions, two in every five people still rely on wood, charcoal, or animal waste to cook their food and one in five people lack any access to electricity. This is a global technology injustice.

The public health and environmental situation in developing countries is sobering: each year, two million people die from diseases caused by indoor smoke - more than deaths from malaria. A paradigm shift is urgently needed to ensure that the definition and delivery of energy access reflects the energy services that poor people want, need and have a right to.

Traditionally, improving energy access has too often translated into connecting households to the grid. This approach fails to recognise the range of poor people’s energy needs and available solutions, and neglects those living in remote, rural locations where grid connection is not prioritised, nor, in some cases, possible. A grid-dominated approach to delivery will mean that for hundreds of millions of people energy access will be as distant a prospect as it was decades ago.

Poor People’s Energy Outlook series

The energy sector’s focus on infrastructure (kilometres of grid extended or kilowatts of power provided) over people’s real needs prompted Practical Action to produce the Poor people’s energy outlook (PPEO) series.

The series highlights the critical role Total Energy Access plays in reducing poverty. More specifically, the reports re-define what it means to have ‘energy access’ in three key ways:

1. Recognising cooking and mechanical power alongside electricity as important energy supplies
2. Considering energy access for community services and earning a living as equally important for development as household access
3. Focusing on, and establishing minimum standards for, the energy services that people use (lighting, cooking and water heating, space heating etc.), and not just the energy supply they receive
Total Energy Access

Practical Action defines Total Energy Access as when:

Households, enterprises and community services have sufficient access to the full range of energy supplies and services that are required to support human social and economic development

This improved definition of energy access, coupled with the associated need for greater investment in decentralised energy solutions, is beginning to gain traction internationally.

See www.practicalaction.org/totalenergyaccess for further information.

PPEO 2013: Energy for community services

From lighting in streets and in the home, to power for water pumping, cooking, basic processing and communications, access to energy enables people to live better lives. It also transforms health-care provision – enabling vaccines to be refrigerated, implements to be sterilized and diagnostic equipment to be powered.

In many countries, energy access is yet to be given sufficient priority and fails to be acknowledged as a key enabler in improving health, education and other community services.

The third edition of the PPEO focuses on the issue of energy for schools, clinics, public institutions and local infrastructure such as street lighting, encouraging greater investment in, and integration of, this often neglected area of energy provision.

A community micro-hydro system powers lighting, a sterilization unit and incubator at the Nyafaru Medical Centre in Zimbabwe
Generating international attention and action on energy for community services will be vital if we are to address the fact that around one billion people are served by unelectrified health facilities and more than 50% of children go to primary schools without access to any electricity; this affects more than 291 million children in developing countries.

The PPEO 2013 provides clear examples of how energy improves the scope and quality of local services and amplifies development benefits across the community.

Making progress globally

The current profile of energy access is unprecedented. The UN’s Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) Initiative has played a critical role in beginning to bring together government, private sector and civil society on three goals, including Universal Energy Access by 2030. This Initiative and the resulting visibility of energy access in the post-2015 development dialogue represents an important step in the right direction. Yet these efforts need to be channelled effectively if they are to genuinely meet the needs, and change the lives, of poor people.

To help achieve this, Practical Action is working closely with the World Bank on how to define and measure access to energy. One outcome of this collaboration is the development of a multi-tier framework that has been adopted by SE4All to be used as the Global Tracking Framework to measure the Initiative’s progress. It is presented in the PPEO 2013 and builds on work from previous PPEO reports.

Each tier of the framework is defined both in terms of the attributes of supply, and the energy services used, making it relevant to the reality of how poor people experience energy access. It represents a breakthrough – a shift away from the binary “have/have not” approach to energy access. Crucially the framework will shape the definition and delivery of energy access globally and nationally for the foreseeable future.

Energy Access Ecosystem

Practical Action recognises that for progress to be made at the national level on Total Energy Access, the enabling environment needs to be conducive (in terms of policies, finances and the capacities of different institutions and stakeholders). In order to understand this environment better, and to help compare the situation across countries, Practical Action has developed (PPEO 2012) and refined (PPEO 2013) an Energy Access Ecosystems Index. The index is comprised of nine indicators, three each in the areas of policy, finance and capacity.

Visit: www.practicalaction.org/energy-access-ecosystems
Framework for action

To achieve Universal Energy Access by 2030 there is a need to establish and follow a new energy narrative; one which recognises the full range of services which poor people want, need and have a right to.

Practical Action, as a civil society organisation committed to playing our part in this goal, makes the following recommendations:

1. **Promote a service rather than supply-based approach to energy definition and delivery.** We urge SE4ALL opt-in countries to adopt the multi-tier tracking framework and encourage public and private investment and activity to reflect the full range of energy needs, supplies and services that make up a Total Energy Access approach.

2. **Increase financing for decentralised solutions.** To reach Universal Energy Access by 2030, 55% of additional electricity generated for households will need to be through mini- and off-grid solutions. In order to deliver this, National Action Plans and the portfolios of donors, multi-laterals and private sector need to embrace appropriate decentralised solutions.

3. **Encourage an Ecosystems understanding of the energy landscape.** Countries that have opted into the SE4ALL Initiative will be developing Gaps Analyses and National Action Plans to scope out the ways in which they will work towards their 2030 targets. Successful delivery of these National Action Plans will depend on assessing and addressing the deficit in policy, finance and capacity as made possible through applying the Ecosystems Index.

4. **Create the space and support civil society to engage with SE4ALL.** Internationally, SE4ALL now rightly recognises civil society as the ‘third pillar’ of the Initiative, alongside business and government. Given the appetite and expertise of civil society, real engagement, both North and South, could make the difference in ensuring SE4ALL genuinely delivers for poor people. Therefore, a clear and considered programme of engagement with civil society at national and international levels is fundamental. This needs to be supported by the financing to operationalize these plans in both the short and long term.

The PPEO series draws on Practical Action’s experience of more than 30 years of working with communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America to improve their access to energy working on a wide range of issues from household cooking fuels, to electricity generation in stand-alone systems and mini-grids. It highlights first-hand experience of what it takes to make energy investments affordable, appropriate and sustainable. Practical Action have documented and shared this experience in numerous publications and technical advice through our Consulting and Practical Answers technical enquiries services.

Download the full PPEO reports from [www.practicalaction.org/ppeo](http://www.practicalaction.org/ppeo)

Practical Action welcomes engagement from all stakeholders with the ideas put forward in the PPEO series. To provide feedback or discuss the reports, please email: [ppeo@practicalaction.org.uk](mailto:ppeo@practicalaction.org.uk)