



Press release

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A change of focus in energy policy needed to promote bioenergy worldwide

Conclusions from the MEXIREC Conference in Mexico City

Between 11th and 13th September 2017, the International Renewable Energy Conference (MEXIREC) took place in Mexico City, organized by REN 21 and the government of Mexico. MEXIREC offered an excellent opportunity to compare the global development of the energy transition with the targets defined by COP 21 climate conference held in Paris in 2015.

Impressive growth in renewable electricity, but other sectors lag behind

In the last years, the generation of electricity from wind and solar showed impressive growth, in terms of cost reduction and new investment. The share of renewables in the global electricity generation is now 26% and grows with one percent by year. On the other hand, since Paris almost no progress or minimal progress is visible in the fields of renewable heat and transport. In total, the energy transition is far too slow and the world is moving towards a global warming of almost 3°C, far above the targets defined in the Paris conference.

Many energy experts put their main focus on the electricity generation and argue that the fast growth of renewable electricity is the key to solve the climate problems. Yet, this concept cannot be successful. At present, the share of renewable electricity is 26% of the total electricity generation and electricity comes up at 23% of the total final consumption (TFC) of energy. In other words: at present, renewable electricity covers 6% of the global final energy consumption. Even if in the distant future, renewable generated electricity could cover most of the energy needs, it would take far too much time to reach this phase as compared to the urgency to reduce global CO₂ emissions towards zero before 2050.

In addition, the low oil and gas prices improve the competitiveness of fossil fuels in the heat and transport sector and as a consequence, the interest for improved efficiency in buildings and replacing fossil systems by renewable declines.

Change in focus for policy needed – Bioenergy as optimum solution

The Paris Agreement requires that all countries speed up the development of all renewable sources not only those for electricity generation but also those that deliver renewable heat and transport. In this context, a new focus of the policy makers and the international institutions such as IEA (International Energy Agency) and International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) on the development of sustainable bioenergy solutions is needed.

Globally, tremendous amounts of unused biomass are available. In many countries straw, corn stalks, bark, saw dust, organic waste of the urban agglomerations, other kind of residuals of agriculture, the food industry residues, the forest and wood industry residues are not used but dumped, burned on fields or just put away to rot, thus emitting greenhouse gases like methane. In the last years, the technologies to convert biomass resources efficiently to heat, power and transport fuels have improved considerably. Examples to mention: pellet production technologies, efficient biomass combustion boilers of all sizes, biogas plants, technologies to produce traditional and advanced biofuels, biomass gasification units, pyrolysis technologies etc.

What is needed now is a stable framework set up by policy makers to make it profitable for the private sector, households and companies to implement bioenergy solutions. Such a successful government policy for bioenergy deployment includes a number of measures such as: phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, carbon pricing, blending rules for biofuels, investment grants, education, training and teaching programs, technology transfer programs in the areas of biomass procurement, of heat, transport fuels and cogeneration of biomass.

The impressive development in renewable electricity generation in terms of cost reduction and new installed capacity was one of the very positive messages of MEXIREC. But the conference also made clear that this is not sufficient to reach the needed energy transition in time. Countries need also a fast greening of the heat and transport sector. And this will only be successful with a new policy to foster the development of bioenergy – says Dr. Heinz Kopetz, Senior Consultant, WBA

During the MEXIREC conference, several speakers coming from Mexico informed about the unused potential of biomass in Mexico. In many other countries of Latin America, the situation is similar. The better use of this potential is essential in Latin America to comply with the targets of Paris agreement.

A more detailed report will be available for members only.

For more information, please contact: World Bioenergy Association (info@worldbioenergy.org)

About the WBA

The World Bioenergy Association (WBA) is the global organization dedicated to supporting and representing the wide range of actors in the bioenergy sector. Its members include national and regional bioenergy organizations, institutions, companies and individuals. The purpose of WBA is to promote the increasing utilization of bioenergy globally in an efficient, sustainable, economic and environmentally friendly way. Since its foundation in May 2008, WBA has been working to address a number of promising issues including certification, sustainability, standardization, bioenergy promotion and debates about bioenergy's impact on food, land use and water supply.