



## Side-event Summary

### Public Support for Renewables: Why and How



Questions?

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#### Event Summary

Like for many others, we could not meet face-to-face this year at ACEF. But we wanted to make sure that were able to exchange ideas in real-time. REN21 put together a virtual event that blended a presentation, panel discussion and participant interaction to generate a lively discussion around the question: **What do we need to secure public support to increase deployment of renewable energy?**

Why this topic? In 2019, global climate strikes and opinion polls showed a rising public demand for a shift away from fossil fuels. At the same time, opposition from local communities limited the implementation of renewable energy projects in some regions. Technology, costs, environment and social factors all affect the spread and speed of renewable energy use. But public buy-in is just as important. What people think about a technology affects their willingness to support it.

“Public Support for Renewables: Why and How” was in three parts:

1. **Opening Presentation:** What Happened in 2019: *Renewables 2020 Global Status Report*  
[Rana Adib](#) [video](#) | [presentation](#)
2. **Panel Discussion:** What Does Public Support for Renewables Mean in Reality?  
[Geraint Ellis](#) - [Hyunjung Lee](#) - [Athena Ronquillo-Ballesteros](#)
3. **Breakout Groups:** How to Increase Public Support  
All participants

**Moderator:** [Kanika Chawla](#)

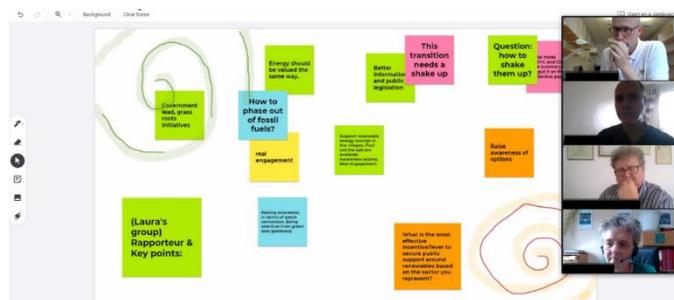
(Speaker bios can be found on page 4)

Rana’s presentation focused on what is, and what is not happening in the renewables sector, drawing on information in the newly launched [Renewables 2020 Global Status Report](#). Growth in renewable power has been impressive over the past decade. But too little is happening in heating, cooling and transport. Overall, global hunger for energy keeps increasing and eats up progress. The journey towards climate disaster continues, unless we make an immediate switch to efficient and renewable energy in all sectors in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Engaging the public can support this shift. Governments have at hand a full range of measures to improve public participation, strengthen regulatory control and share economic benefits with host communities to, in turn, further build citizen support for renewable energy projects. Key among these are awareness campaigns; developing policies and regulatory measures.

Our three panelists, Hyunjung, Athena and Geraint brought specific perspectives about how and where public support can be used to drive renewable energy uptake, bringing viewpoints from the intergovernmental, philanthropic and citizen perspectives.

Hyunjung stressed that renewable energy projects must be managed to minimise negative effects while also maximising community benefits. She pointed out the benefits are typically greater in renewable energy projects than in traditional centralised systems. Athena noted the level of anger in society today with 'business as usual'. “We are seeing an exciting convergence of health, clean energy and air quality advocacy. Citizens are embracing this moment, and hopefully can make change”. Geraint spoke about technologies needing to fit the social context. The energy transition is complex; it’s not just about technology choices. “We need to recognise that this is also a social and political debate” he said. This means that we (citizens) need to engage in the debate about the energy transition as it is more than about technology, it is also political and local.

Drawing on the panel’s points and using *Jamboard* (an online whiteboard) participants discussed the question: “*What is the most effective incentive/lever to secure public support around renewable?*” Participants were divided into small online working groups. Each group distilled their discussion into one “sticky note” detailed below.





Five points emerged from the various discussions, forming a series of conclusions on how public support can help drive renewable energy uptake:

1. Amplify local successes and learnings; show what is possible
2. Communicate the economic benefits of renewable energy to all parties; citizens, investors, governments etc.
3. Increase our sphere of influence; the renewable energy community needs to speak louder than the fossil fuel industry
4. Expand on the climate gains seen during the COVID-19 lockdown; build on the public's appreciation of cleaner air and talk about other benefits of renewables, e.g. creating local jobs, ensuring energy sovereignty, etc.
5. Understand that switching to renewables isn't just technical; it's a political question and the public has the power to ramp up pressure on politicians to make change happen – now!

The event closed with interested participants staying online to chat and network. Our thanks go to the participants and panelist for their engagement and input. Special thanks go to Kanika, our moderator. We hope to see you all again next year!

## About the Organizers

REN21: RENEWABLES NOW!

REN21 is the only global renewable energy community of actors from science, governments, NGOs and industry. We provide up-to-date facts, figures and peer-reviewed analysis of global developments in technology, policies and markets to decision-makers.

Our goal: encourage and enable them to make the shift to renewable energy happen - now.

[www.ren21.net](http://www.ren21.net)



### Rana Adib (REN21)

Rana is the Executive Director of REN21, the Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century. REN21 is a global public-private multi-stakeholder network on renewable energy headquartered at the United Nations Environment Programme in Paris/France. Previously, Rana was REN21's Research Coordinator developing the international expert community and leading the REN21 *Renewables Global Status Report* series to become an international reference. Prior to REN21 Rana worked in private industry and applied research in the areas of renewable energy, energy access, and waste management. She was also responsible for coordinating the biogas-to-energy research programme of Veolia Environment. Rana holds a Master's Degree in industrial engineering from the University of Wedel in Germany. She has over 20 years' experience in the energy sector.



### Geraint Ellis (Queen's University, Belfast)

Geraint is a Professor in the School of Natural and Built Environment and Director of Sustainable Built Environment at Queen's University, Belfast. He also holds the position of Adjunct Professor, Department of Geography, Western University, Canada. Geraint joined Queen's in 1998, having previously worked for community and environmental organisations in the east end of London (1990-1993), acted as a planning and community development advisor to the Government of Lesotho in Southern Africa (1993-1996) and the Cross River Partnership in central London (1996-1998). His key research interests are in planning and sustainability, renewable energy, planning governance and healthy urban planning. He has published widely on these topics and is a Co-Editor of the Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning and a founding member of the Editorial Board of the new Routledge, journal, Cities and Health.



### Hyunjung Lee (Asia Development Bank)

Hyunjung is Senior Energy Economist in Southeast Energy Division of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and based in Hanoi, Vietnam. She is mainly working for Vietnam as a sector coordinator and preparing and implementing various investment and technical assistance projects in support for power sector reforms (generation auction mechanism and wholesale electricity market development) and clean energy development (pilot floating solar auction, smart and energy efficiency city, green banking and green financing, demand side management program, and grid-connected battery

storage project) for Viet Nam and managing a regional sustainable energy program under Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) cooperation.



#### [Athena Ronquillo-Ballesteros \(Growald Family Fund\)](#)

Athena has many years of leadership and management experience in environment, development and natural resource governance in developing countries with a particular focus on climate change, clean energy and sustainable finance. She is currently director of the Asia program at the Growald Family Fund, a catalytic philanthropy investing in rapid transition to a clean energy future. Prior to joining the fund, Athena was Director of World Resources Institute's Center for Sustainable Finance program. Athena is on the board of various organisations and a policy advisor to the China Council for International Development (CCICED) special policy study on China's role in global environmental governance. Athena holds a Global Master of Arts from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University and bachelor's and post-graduate degrees from the University of the Philippines and the Asian Institute of Management.



#### [Kanika Chawla \(CEEW Centre for Energy Finance\)](#)

Kanika is a policy specialist, working at the intersection of India's two revolutions: in renewable energy and in financial markets. She manages The Council's work on renewable energy policy, markets, finance, and socio-economic benefits. Her current responsibilities include analysing financial risks affecting renewable energy investments in India, decoding market dynamics, managing The Council's periodic surveys on renewable energy jobs, and convening a high-level working group on renewable energy finance. She is actively engaged with private and public enterprises within and outside India to design and develop new financial de-risking instruments and new financial institutions. Kanika is actively engaged in the Council's initiative, Women in Sustainability. She holds an M.Sc. in Economics and Development Economics.