ENERGY AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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ABSTRACT

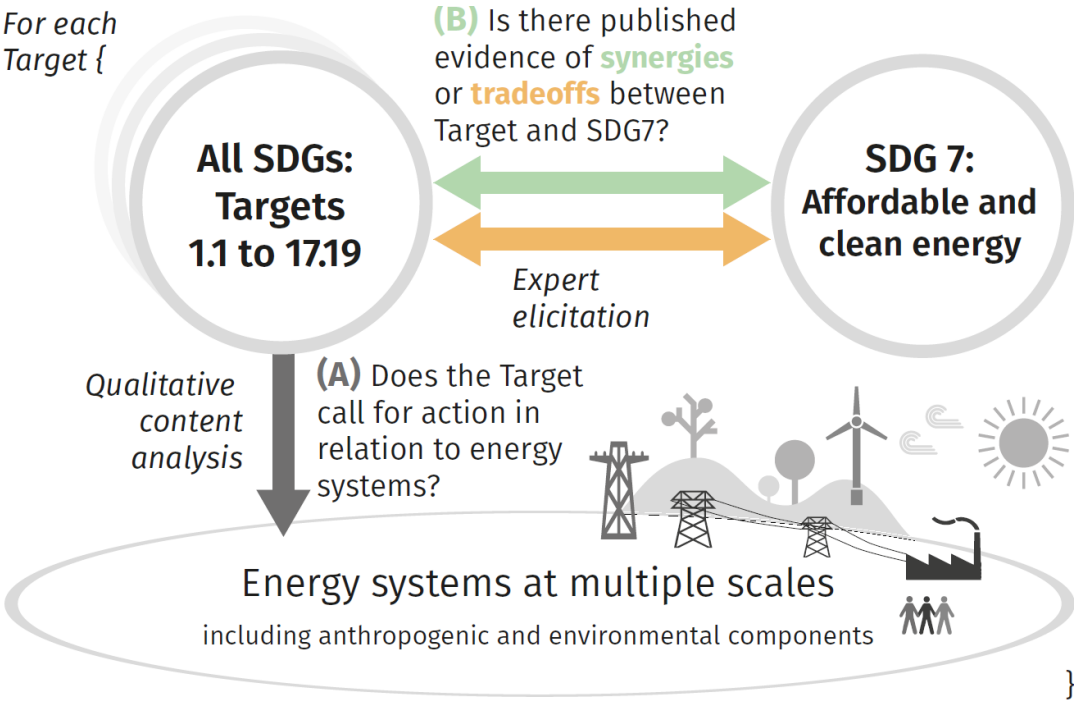
Goal 7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for action to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. Here we characterise synergies and trade-offs between efforts to achieve SDG7 and the delivery of the 169 Targets in the 2030 Agenda. We identify 113 Targets that require actions to change energy systems, and published evidence of relationships between 143 Targets (143 synergies, 65 trade-offs) with efforts to achieve SDG7. Synergies and trade-offs exist in three key domains, where decisions about SDG7 affect humanity's ability to: (1) realise individual and collective aspirations of greater welfare and wellbeing; (2) build physical and social infrastructures for sustainable development; and (3) achieve sustainable management of the environment and natural resources. There is an urgent need to better organise, connect and extend this body of evidence, in a manner that helps all actors work together to achieve sustainable development.

On 5 September 2015, the 193 members states of the United Nations (UN) adopted a new Agenda for Sustainable Development[1]. The 2030 Agenda succeeds the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and features 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets which UN member states have committed to implement by 2030. Energy was not explicitly referred to in the MDGs, and came to be referred to as the 'missing' MDG'[2]. During the operational period of the MDGs and negotiation of the 2030 Agenda, it was increasingly recognised that energy underpins economic and social development, without which it would not be possible to eliminate poverty. This change in status[3] made sustainable energy provision and access one of the central themes of the 2030 Agenda, whose preamble calls for 'universal access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy' and recognises that 'social and economic development depends of the sustainable management of our planet's natural resources'. SDG7 is accompanied by five Targets to be achieved by 2030: ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services (7.1); increase the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix (7.2); double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency (7.3); enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology (7.a), and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology (7.b).

By understanding the complex links between the SDGs and their constituent Targets, researchers can better support policymakers to think systematically about interactions between the different SDGs; including how actions to achieve each Goal affect each other within and between sectors[3],[4]. Studies to date[4,5] have lacked a Target-level approach or have focused on only a few of the SDGs[6]. Here we present a formative attempt by an interdisciplinary group of researchers to: (A) identify the full range of Goals and Targets in the 2030 Agenda that call for changes in energy systems, and (B) characterise evidence of synergies or trade-offs between delivery of each of the 169 Targets and efforts focused on pursuit of SDG7 and each of its constituent Targets. The purpose of this Perspective is not to provide definitive answers. Rather it aims to lay a foundation for systematic (and context specific) exploration of the interlinkages between each of the SDG Targets, in the context of decision-making about development and transformation of energy systems[1].

Figure 1 illustrates the methods used to assess the 169 Targets in the 2030 Agenda (see supplementary materials for details). 'Energy systems' were defined broadly to include all components of anthropogenic and environmental systems related to the production, conversion, delivery and use of energy[5]. A systems perspective is crucial to understanding the practical complexity of energy provision and use, and facilitates effective intervention strategies[6]. The normative implications for energy systems of each Goal and Target (A) were identified using a consensus-based qualitative assessment. Evidence of synergies or trade-offs between Goals and Targets (B) was characterised using a consensus-based expert elicitation process, undertaken by the authors as a body of academics from diverse disciplines spanning engineering, natural and social sciences.

Figure 1 Method for assessing each SDG Target's relation with energy systems (A) and with SDG7 (B)

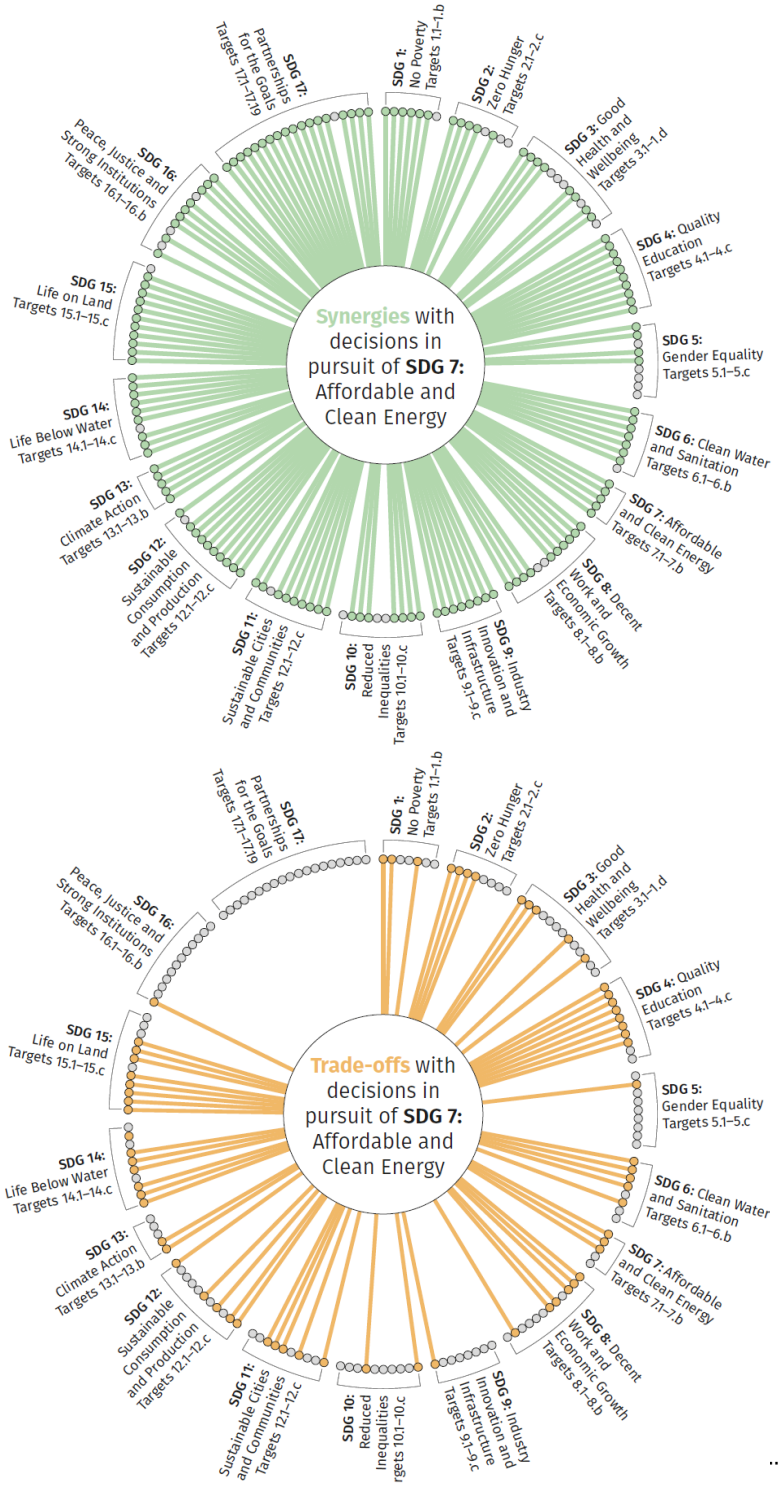


Evidence of relationships between energy systems and development

Results of the linkage exercise for each Target are reported in full in the supplementary material, and summarised in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2 Summary results of the analysis. For each SDG (reported in the circle) the Targets that comply with (A), if that specific Target calls for certain actions in relation to energy systems, are reported

Figure 3 Summary results of the analysis. For each SDG (reported in the circle) the Targets that comply with (B), Is there published evidence of synergies (green, top) or trade-offs (orange, bottom) between the Target, and decisions in pursuit of SDG7?, are reported



We found that 113 Targets (~65%) require actions to be taken concerning energy systems (A). Given the broad definition of energy systems mentioned above, these actions are diverse and include efforts to: address climate change (e.g. Target 13.2), reduce deaths from pollution (e.g. Target 3.9), and end certain human rights abuses (e.g. Target 8.7). This gives a strong indication of the substantial changes needed in global energy systems in order to deliver the SDGs.

We also identified evidence of synergies or trade-offs between at least 143 Targets (~85%, spanning all of the SDGs) and actions in pursuit of SDG7 (B). There are more than twice as many synergies between SDG7 and other Targets, than trade-offs. Nearly all trade-offs relate to the tension between the need for rapid action to address key issues for human wellbeing (e.g. poverty eradication, access to clean water, food and modern energy, etc.), and the careful planning needed to achieve efficient energy systems with a high integration of renewable energy. We did not attempt to map these comprehensively, and indicate only whether or not there was evidence of synergies or trade-offs (see supplementary materials). Our review of evidence suggested that there are likely to be multiple synergies and trade-offs within each Target, and that identification of these relationships is highly context specific. The coarse-grained synergies and trade-offs that we identified can be categorised into three broad domains, where decisions about energy systems affect humanity's ability to: (1) realise individual and collective aspirations of greater welfare and wellbeing; (2) build physical and social infrastructures for sustainable development; and (3) achieve sustainable management of the environment and natural resources. This is consistent with Goal-level analyses done in other contexts[7,8]. The identified evidence concerning synergies and trade-offs (B) is summarised below, together with limited selected examples, and reported in full in the supplementary material.

Individual and collective aspirations of greater welfare and wellbeing

The provision of affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all is vital for ensuring wellbeing. The contribution of energy to this domain is illustrated by this analysis, which identified 58 and 34 Targets with synergies and trade-offs respectively with SDG7 across all Goals.

Energy has a fundamental role to play in efforts to end poverty[9] (SDG1). Provision of modern energy services (Target 7.1) will support the achievement of other Goals. For example, raising living standards through provision of basic services, including healthcare, education, water and sanitation (SDG2–4, 6–7, 9); improved household incomes (SDG8); and resilient rural and urban livelihoods (SDG1, 11). For instance, a focus on SDG4 (education) reveals the multiple synergies between wellbeing, energy and education at local, national and global levels. Target 4.2 requires that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education. Achieving this Target depends on supply of electricity to schools, as well as to homes[10]. There is evidence that electricity access affects educational attainment[11]. Electricity is also vital for provision of information and communication technologies, which underpin adult education and global citizenship (Target 4.6, 4.7)[12]. This will be critical to eliminate local and global inequalities by providing access to information and technology, and empowering the social, economic and political inclusion of all (Target 10.2)[13].

Realising greater welfare and wellbeing cannot be achieved without peaceful societies and equal access to justice (SDG16). There is great potential for justice-based approaches to aid energy decisions[14,15]. Rather than just being an analytical concept, framing energy decisions in justice terms can help to elicit the relationship between individual and public values, map and resolve disputes, and give directional input to make better choices[16]. This is strongly recognised in the SDGs, for example, in terms of delivering improvements in governance of energy systems, including just institutions, strengthened rule of law, greater participation, transparency and accountability, access to information, and the reduction of corruption (Target 9.c, 16.1, 16.3, 16.5, 16.7, 16.8, 16.10, 16.a, 16.b). For instance, development of many large-scale hydropower plants has been mired in social and political conflicts as a result of poor consultation with, and consideration of, livelihood conditions of affected local communities[17]. Similar impacts have been documented concerning the land used to produce biofuels[18,19], and extraction of coal, gas and oil[20]. These examples highlight the vital role of natural resources in securing wellbeing (see below).

Physical and social infrastructure for sustainable development

Physical and social infrastructures link aspirations for wellbeing and welfare with the underpinning natural resources[7,21]. There is published evidence of 109 Targets with synergies and 47 with trade-offs between SDG7 and infrastructures. Energy is a core component of the physical and social infrastructures needed to end poverty and support economic growth (SDG1, 8).

Existing energy infrastructures will need to be significantly upgraded to achieve SDG7[22,23]. Nearly 1.2 billion people in the world lack access to electricity and ~3 billion people lack access to clean cooking facilities[23,24]. A mix of locally appropriate centralised and decentralised energy infrastructures will be needed to achieve universal energy access (Target 7.1)[25]. Infrastructures required for energy access depend on access to financial services and markets (Target 9.3), knowledge (Target 9.5, 9.a), and strong institutions and international cooperation (SDG17). Many Targets are underpinned by energy access (Target 7.1) – energy is needed to power food systems[26] (Target 2.1–2.4), medical facilities[27] (Target 3.1–3.4, 5.6), and water treatment and distributions systems (Target 6.1–6.3). Efficient water infrastructure can also reduce energy usage [23,28] (Target 6.4, 6.5). More broadly, energy in its various forms is needed in cities (SDG11) where the spatial patterns influence the way we use energy, and vice-versa[29].

Energy contributes to the resilience of infrastructure, sustainable industrialisation (SDG9) and sustainable production and consumption (SDG12). For example, resilient and sustainable infrastructures (Target 9.1) require reliable energy systems with limited environmental impacts that mitigate adverse effects of climate change[30]. Climate change can affect the production of electricity from hydropower and thermal power plants in several regions of the world[31]. Achieving sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources (Target 12.2) will require changes to how energy systems use natural resources to minimise adverse impacts[28].

The environment and natural resources

Natural environments are the foundation of human wellbeing and development – they are comprised of biotic and abiotic stocks of natural resources, which provide flows of valuable, and in some cases irreplaceable, goods in addition to ecosystem services[32,33]. Energy systems are underpinned by, and profoundly impact upon, these environmental stocks and flows[34]. There are 46 environment-related Targets with synergies, and 31 with trade-offs, with SDG7.

At a global scale, energy systems produce ~60% of total anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases[35], and is consequently a core focus of urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (SDG 13). Investment in low-carbon energy systems (Target 7.2, 7.a) will be fundamental to achieving the 2ºC/1.5ºC mitigation goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change[30]. Reliable energy services underpinned by research, technology and infrastructure (Target 7.1, 7.a, 7.b) can contribute to climate change adaptation, natural hazard reduction and resilience (SDG3, 9, 13). Use of natural resources by globalised energy systems (e.g. for fuel, raw materials) has impacted on ecosystem services that underpin food and water security (SDG2,6), and human health[33] (SDG3). The need to increase energy supply responding to growing demand, must be reconciled with the need to protect and restore critical ecosystems that support development in other sectors. This will depend on technology, behaviour and policy changes that dramatically decrease the natural resource-intensity of energy systems (Target 7.3, SDG 12) as part of broader efforts to decouple adverse environmental impacts from economic growth[36] (Target 8.4).

There are complex trade-offs between the natural resource dependencies of energy, food and water systems, and environmental threats including biodiversity loss, climate change and localised air/ water

pollution[37,28,38]. Water quality and sanitation (SDG6, 14–15) are fundamental to social vulnerability (SDG1) and healthy lives (SDG3). Energy is needed to restore water-related ecosystems (Target 6.6, Goal 14–15), sustainably manage irrigation in food systems (Target 2.4), increase water efficiency (Target 6.4, 9.4, 11.b)[23,39], access and mobilise natural resources to end poverty (Target 1.4), and increase food production (Target 2.3, 2.4)[40,41]. Lack of access to modern energy services can drive ecosystem loss and degradation (Target 15.2) – for example any deforestation and forest degradation associated with use of fuelwood[42,43].

Energy systems can have direct (e.g. local pollution, competition for space with energy infrastructure) and indirect (e.g. ocean acidification, climate change[44]) impacts on conservation, restoration and enhancement of marine and terrestrial ecosystems and other natural resources (SDG9, 14–15)[45,46]. SDG15 is intertwined with the nature of energy transitions, especially where livelihoods are dependent on ecosystem goods and services[47]. Energy systems that fully account for these interdependencies including the multiple benefits and values of the environment (Target 15.9, 17.9) can minimise adverse impacts of energy use on ecosystems and biodiversity[48] (Target 12.2).

Empowering action to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Our analysis highlights how energy systems are a foundation of social and economic development, and affect delivery of outcomes across all SDGs. It is also not possible to deliver SDG7 – ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all – without understanding how energy systems affect and depend on wellbeing, infrastructure and the environment. The SDGs represent a new framework for examining these linkages and making decisions that balance them effectively. Our analysis represents a first step towards mapping relationships between energy systems, SDG7, and other Goals in the 2030 Agenda. It reveals the tremendous complexity of links between energy systems and wellbeing, infrastructure and the environment, which means that SDG7 cannot be achieved in sectoral isolation. We have shown that all SDGs and ~65% of Targets require action to change energy systems.

We found evidence of synergies between 143 Targets and efforts to achieve SDG7, meaning that ~85% of 2030 Agenda Targets are mutually reinforcing with SDG7. We also found evidence of trade-offs between SDG7 and ~35% of the 2030 Agenda Targets. Many of these trade-offs relate to tensions between the need to rapidly expand access to basic services, and the need for efficient energy systems underpinned by renewable resources. These synergies and trade-offs will manifest differently in different settings, and the impacts for different social groups will need to be understood and accommodated. Considerations of rights, justice and equity must be integrated into the exploration of solutions for these complex energy dilemmas,[16] to ensure we leave no one behind. Every Target counts, and no single Target should be overlooked in efforts to achieve SDG7. This will be a challenging task which will require collaboration between diverse actors across every domain.

For the research community, this task depends on transdisciplinary collaboration. This includes understanding the interactions between disciplines and diverse actors, and will require generation of, and access to, data and knowledge on energy and other sectors. Current knowledge concerning energy and sustainable development is isolated in many different institutions, locations and disciplines. The isolation is compounded by the fact that many people, in all countries, cannot or have not been empowered with skills needed to access this knowledge. To address this, the evidence on the linkages between energy systems, SDG7 and other Goals need to be organised and connected in a manner that informs and enables efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Our analysis provides a useful framework for researchers and decision-makers to design and evaluate specific interventions in energy systems to achieve sustainable development. However, this needs to be done as an inclusive, collaborative and

open-access initiative to link energy research back to specific Targets and Goals. Such collaboration is already taking place in other contexts, for example the Future Earth Knowledge Action Networks[49].

For decision makers in public and private sectors, the 2030 Agenda highlights that wellbeing for all can only be realised by transforming vertical silos and current modes of resource use, and by paying proper attention to supporting infrastructures and the natural environment. To this end the complexity of interrelationships between SDG7 and other Goals challenges conventional structures and processes of decision-making in government and private entities. Decision makers can no longer think in silos, and will need to find ways of widening participation, creating collective ownership and building consensus. In practice, this will require a transformation in the structure of decision-making, including the integration of vertical and horizontal planning and a long-term perspective. This requires strong local and national visions that are sensitive to the need for global collaboration. Given that energy cuts across all SDGs, structured analyses such as the one presented here can help to ensure that actions to achieve SDG7 are compatible with local and national development priorities. In so doing, this type of analysis can help the design of policies that balance synergies and trade-offs across wellbeing, infrastructure and environment in specific settings.

Policy makers responsible for energy matters need to collaborate with colleagues in other portfolios and vice-versa, and establish governance structures to enable and sustain such coordination. However, the principle of working across sectors and disciplines does not come naturally as it challenges entrenched institutional and sectoral behaviours. Cross-sectoral conversations on these institutional challenges will help advance this integrated agenda. The approach presented here can help policy makers to review existing institutional architectures and sector-specific policies to determine whether they are compatible with delivery of the 2030 Agenda. *International organisations, including development banks,* have an important role to play by coordinating action, measuring progress, facilitating dialogue and providing finance[42,50].

Finally, *each and every actor* has a role to play to achieve sustainable development. For SDG7, there is a tension between the need for action required to rapidly address urgent energy-related issues (e.g. energy access), and the careful planning of complex energy systems which underpin long-term development outcomes. Balancing these needs will require new skills and capacity to build country-specific and regional strategies. A more level playing field across actors and countries is required recognising that developing countries will need to build further capabilities around production, transmission, distribution and energy consumption. The research community can help build and provide the knowledge and capacity needed for other actors to operationalise SDG7 at national and sub-national levels. This includes developing and sharing flexible and appropriate tools. We envisage that applications of this approach to specific contexts can help identify key gaps in knowledge – where collaboration between actors may help to address knowledge gaps and to structure action. A strategy that brings all actors together to craft appropriate policies that balance synergies and trade-offs between SDG7 and the other Goals is essential.

We encourage all actors to contribute to this discussion – by enriching our analysis with additional evidence, and applying it to energy policies, programmes and projects so that their design accounts for the complexity of the 2030 Agenda. Our analysis is intended to serve as a basis for dialogue and iterative action to deliver SDG7, in a manner that realises wellbeing through provision of key infrastructures, and conservation, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment and its resources.

Author Contributions:

F.F.N. coordinated inputs from other authors, designed and contributed to the expert elicitation process, and wrote the paper. J.T., B.M., L.S.T. and Y.M. designed and contributed to the expert elicitation

process, and wrote the paper. I.B., P.P., M.B., A.B., C.S., V.C.B. and G.A. contributed to the peer-reviewed expert elicitation process, and writing sections of the paper.

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