

August 10, 2022

Will African Countries Declare the Acceleration of Natural Gas Development at COP27?

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According to media reports, African nations may express as a group at COP 27 that they need to use their own oil and gas resources regardless of the impact on climate change. COP is hosted in turn by the five UN regions. This year, it will be convened in Egypt, which lies in the African region. Egypt, holding the Presidency of COP27, has so far named adaptation, loss and damage (addressing the loss and damage associated with the impact of climate change), and climate finance as its top priorities; will the acceleration of natural gas development now be added?

Let's turn back the clock.

At COP26 held in November 2021, 34 countries (excluding China and Japan) and five development banks committed to end new direct public support for the international unabated fossil fuel energy sector by the end of 2022.

Opposing this statement, at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in Dakar, Senegal at the end of that month, Senegalese President Macky Sall stated that this pledge made at COP26 would prove a “fatal cost” for emerging economies. At the summit, China and 53 African countries signed a joint statement that vowed to “support qualified gas-to-power,” alongside renewable energy.

In June of the following year, 2022, the African Union stated in their technical paper that “in the short to medium term, fossil fuels, especially natural gas will play a crucial role in expanding modern energy access in addition to accelerating the uptake of renewables,” and that the decisions at COP26 to phasedown unabated coal power and phase-out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies “le[ft] Africa in a disadvantaged position to use specific energy resources to accelerate access,” and “Africa will need an ‘energy development space’ to keep pace with its ambitions for universal access” as was reported in the media.

Changes were also observed among developed countries due to the energy crisis brought about by the invasion of Ukraine. At the G7 Summit at the end of June, a commitment was made to end new direct public support for the international unabated fossil fuel energy sector by the end of 2022, except in limited circumstances. With a view to accelerating the phase out of our dependency on Russian

energy, the G7 stressed the important role increased deliveries of LNG can play, and acknowledged that investment in this sector is necessary in response to the current crisis. They also stated that in these exceptional circumstances, publicly supported investment in the gas sector can be appropriate as a temporary response, subject to certain conditions.

Amid such circumstances, at the meeting of the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from August 2 to 4, the Executive Council of the African Union proposed that AGN adopt the following as the common position of the African Group at COP27: “Africa will continue to deploy all forms of its abundant energy sources including renewable and non-renewable energy to address energy demand. Natural gas, green and low carbon hydrogen and nuclear energy will play a crucial role in expanding modern energy access in the short to medium term.” However, AGN withheld from adopting the proposal on the grounds that a supportive stance toward expansion of gas would trigger debate and cause confusion in priorities such as adaptation and climate finance.

While not adopted among negotiators, it is possible that leaders and ministers of African nations may express support for expanding gas in the run-up to COP27. Whether these moves by African countries and by developed countries will work in unison deserves attention.

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