

Coal and the Sustainable Development Goals Roundtable

3 July 2018, Johannesburg

Summary of discussions

The roundtable was held under the Chatham House Rule

The World Coal Association (WCA) hosted a half-day roundtable in Johannesburg on 3 July, bringing together a range of stakeholders for a high-level discussion on coal and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The roundtable was the second in a series of events that WCA is hosting throughout 2018, where it is seeking to get external input on the work that it should undertake in this space. The first roundtable was held in London in March and a summary note of the discussions is available on the [WCA website](#).

Johannesburg Roundtable

WCA's roundtable process aims to define a pathway for coal and the coal industry to support the achievement of the SDGs and will help to inform a potential mapping exercise in 2019.

WCA opened the roundtable by highlighting the ongoing role of coal in driving the global economy but also that responding to climate change is its biggest challenge. WCA also emphasised that the SDGs are holistic and we need to think about the entire coal value chain.

Participants then introduced themselves and provided initial thoughts on coal and the SDGs. Following the opening remarks, the room divided into two groups to discuss issues such as the process, baselines and measuring impacts, what SDGs to cover, specific regional issues and challenges, outcomes and next steps.

A number of key themes emerged from the discussions, which are outlined below.

Key themes

1. Importance of coal to the region

Throughout the discussion, many participants made clear the important role played by coal across southern Africa. Coal has a positive impact on economic development, through job creation and in its role as an energy source, export revenue earner, an industrial input and in liquid fuel production. Coal mining provides significant opportunities as an employer of skilled and unskilled labour – employing (directly and indirectly) around 200,000 people across South Africa.

The importance of coal to economic development has implications for its contribution to the SDGs and shapes specific regional issues that should be considered. This includes, for example, declining



resource levels in some mining areas, such as the Witbank basin, which will have significant implications for jobs and economic development because of mine closures, but potentially also provide opportunities for creating sustainable livelihoods in the future. Participants also noted that while coal has significant economic benefits in the region, this has led to specific environmental challenges, such as acid mine drainage, in an already water stressed region.

Participants noted that while it was important that this process is global in outlook, it also needs to be informed by regional issues and include specific regional/country case studies to provide examples of positive contributions or challenges.

2. Cover the entire coal value chain

Coal's role across the region is not just as an energy source. Participants highlighted that it is therefore vital that the SDG discussions encompass the entire coal value chain – from mining through to its multiple uses, including in liquid fuel production in South Africa.

3. Focus on the opportunities as well as the challenges

While conversations around the negative impacts of coal are often more prevalent, it's also important to talk about the positive contribution that coal makes to the SDGs – the presence of the industry in certain areas supports local infrastructure development, e.g., roads, local WiFi networks, health clinics, etc. The industry itself also needs to identify areas where it can step up its efforts to make a greater contribution to the SDGs.

While highlighting the positive contribution that is made by coal to many of the SDGs and acknowledging that there are areas where greater value can be added, it was also noted that there are companies who aren't as responsible. This is a challenge for the industry and ways need to be identified of improving the performance of some companies.

4. Transparency vital to a credible process

Discussions made clear that transparency is vital to the SDG mapping exercise. Stakeholders have to be able to raise any issues and concerns during discussions and throughout the process, to ensure it is a credible process. This includes establishing an agreed set of facts and a baseline to assess coal's contribution to the SDGs.

5. Cooperation is key

Participants highlighted that mapping coal to the SDGs is not an exercise that the coal industry can undertake alone, otherwise there is a risk that it could be perceived as a self-serving exercise. While the industry could run an internal process to establish a sector view of the contribution coal makes to the SDGs, it is essential that there are external parties involved, such as policy makers and NGOs. These will provide more independent input and ensure there is a rigorous methodology for the mapping process.



Participants also commented on the importance of cooperation in enhancing the contribution of coal to the SDGs. This is vital given SDG17 – ‘Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development’.

Ultimately, a stakeholder mapping exercise will need to be broad and inclusive, with government and industry working together, tackling issues at the global, regional and local levels.

6. SDGs are not just about access to affordable energy

Participants observed that while access to affordable energy is important, it is not the only consideration. It is important to integrate policies across the SDGs and to recognise that African industrialisation can be done in a better/smarter way than has happened previously. Alongside least cost models for development, there should also be a focus on more sustainable outcomes. The exercise also needs to recognise that coal may not always be the most affordable source of energy in many regions and should look at other products and uses of coal as well.

7. Measurable outcomes

A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the importance of having specific, measurable outcomes from this process. The mapping exercise should lead to the development of an implementation plan, which outlines how the industry can enhance its contribution to the SDGs and how progress can be measured.

8. Looking beyond 2030

While it is important to recognise the 2030 timeframe of the SDGs, a longer-term view will also be needed, particularly given the African Union ‘Agenda 2063’ – a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over this time period.

Next steps

Discussions at each of the WCA roundtables held throughout 2018 will help to shape WCA’s strategic plan for the 2019 mapping exercise. This will be presented to the WCA Board at the end of the year for discussion and agreement on how to proceed. WCA emphasised that it will maintain transparency throughout the process and, as part of these efforts, will make this summary note of discussions available online.

Participating organisations

A number of individuals from the following organisations participated in the roundtable.

Anglo American	Bettercoal
CSIR Energy Centre	The Dragonfly Initiative
Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands	EPRI International Inc



Fossil Fuel Foundation	Glencore Operations South Africa
Hwange Colliery	Minerals Council South Africa
National Business Initiative	SANEDI (South African National Energy Development Institute)
South African Institute of International Affairs	University of Cape Town
University of Witwatersrand	World Coal Association

Please note that participation in the event does not mean endorsement of the process.

This note is a summary of discussions at the 'Coal and the SDGs' roundtable and does not necessarily represent the views of the World Coal Association or its members or roundtable participants.