



Weaving the golden thread of energy

One Young World
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Ben van Beurden

CEO, Royal Dutch Shell plc
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Ben van Beurden became Chief Executive Officer (CEO) with effect from January 1, 2014.

He joined Shell in 1983, after graduating with a Master's Degree in Chemical Engineering from Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands.

Ben's career in Shell spans both Upstream and Downstream activities. He has held a number of operational and commercial roles, including some 10 years in the LNG business, and a variety of positions in Downstream. He has been based in The Hague, Sudan, Malaysia, London and Houston.

In January 2005, he became Vice President, Manufacturing Excellence, based in Houston, USA. In this role he was responsible for standards in operational excellence and high-performance initiatives in refining and chemicals manufacturing.

In December 2006, he was appointed Executive Vice President, Chemicals, based in London, UK.

During his tenure in the role, Ben was appointed to the boards of a number of leading industry associations including the International Council of Chemicals Associations and the European Chemical Industry Council.

He is a visiting Professor of the International Studies Institute, the Party School of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, and a member of the Advisory Board of the School of Economics and Management Tsinghua University in Beijing (both since 2015).

From January to September 2013, he was Downstream Director and had regional responsibility for Europe and Turkey. He has been a member of the Executive Committee since January 2013.

Ben, a Dutch citizen, is married and has three daughters and a son.

A billion people today have no electricity at all and as many again have an unreliable or unsafe connection. A lack of energy access causes misery while getting access is the first step on the road to prosperity. Ben van Beurden sets out what he wants Shell to do to address the challenge of providing energy access and explains why the issue has powerful personal meaning to him.

I know what some of you are thinking. Some of you are thinking: why isn't this oil and gas guy going to tell us what he is doing about climate change?

If that is what you are thinking, come to the Q&A session directly after this. I am happy to talk about it. Action on the global climate is critically important for the future of our planet. But it is not the only thing that is critically important.

The UN has 17 Sustainable Development goals. Goals like no poverty. Zero hunger. Good health.

One of the goals is key to achieving virtually all of them, including climate action. It is universal access to clean, affordable energy.

Golden thread

Ban Ki Moon, the former UN Secretary General, described energy as the golden thread that connects economic growth, social equity and environmental sustainability.

His predecessor – and great friend to One Young World – the late Kofi Annan, called the failure to provide energy to all as “one of the great injustices of the 21st Century”.

A billion people today have no electricity at all. As many again have an unreliable or unsafe connection. That is two billion people without a modern energy supply. That is more than a quarter of this planet's population.

That is a lot of people. Let me tell you about just one. Mohamed.

I met Mohamed when I worked for Shell in Sudan. He worked as a watchman at the building in which I lived.

He was a short man with a goatee beard and a beautiful smile that was always on his face.

Mohamed's life was very tough. He would sleep on a simple bed in front of the building and had to walk for hours when he wanted to be with his family. But he looked and acted like he had a whole lot less problems than I had.

And we talked every day, sometimes twice a day, as best we could with my broken Arabic. How are you? I am fine. How is health? It is good. How is family? They are well, thanks to God. Are you really well? Yes, I really am well... and so on.

While I was there his wife gave birth to a daughter. I bought them a goat to help them celebrate. I asked about his little girl every day as she grew from a baby into a toddler. He would always answer: everything fine, thanks to God, thank you very much.

Until one day.

One day he did not.

His daughter had died.

Mohamed's family lived without modern energy and what it provides. He lived without transportation, without running water, without electricity.

His daughter got sick and he could do nothing about it, apart from sit next to her, hold her hand and offer comfort, as she turned black and died.

I am sure you can understand why my memories of Mohamed have stayed with me.

I believe many of you have also seen people suffering through a lack of access to energy, as well as energy changing lives for

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the better. Many of you already know much more than I did at your age. I am sure that, having seen these things, you want to see change, just as I want to see change.

Change

And I believe something else. As One Young World delegates you have come to understand something about what it takes to make change happen. That is why you are here.

Real, sustainable change takes passion. It takes determination. It also takes money.

And when I say "money" I want to be clear. I do not mean charity, although that is important. No. I mean investment. Investment in businesses that provide something people want at a price they can afford. That is how to achieve scale and sustainability.

I want Shell to help bring change. I want Shell to provide energy to those who do not have it today and I want that to become a significant part of Shell's business.

100 million

In fact, I have an ambition that I want to share with you. It is this: that, by 2030, Shell is providing a reliable electricity supply to 100 million people that do not have it today.

I want to do this by investing, as we have already begun investing, in Africa and Asia. We will help turn start-ups into substantial businesses. And we will help innovation to spread and take hold.

It is investment worth making in a market worth serving. Because these future 100 million customers already spend money on energy.

But, today, they are unable to buy the reliable supply they want. Instead they are forced to spend it on kerosene for lamps that give inferior light. They spend it on paying somebody with a scooter to recharge their mobile phone at the nearest town with a diesel generator. They spend it on a grid connection so poor that they cannot even run a fridge.

And yet much better solutions are available. So Shell is investing in them.

In SolarNow, for example. The company sells systems which link a solar panel to the sort of battery you get in a standard car. These can provide light, charge phones and power a radio, television or fridge.

By the way, they recently installed a larger version of that system in an orphanage for deaf and dumb children in Uganda. The children now have light in their dormitory at night. For them, using sign language, this light allows them to talk.

Solar power

Another example is SunFunder, which finds finance for innovative solar companies dedicated to transforming remote, off-grid communities.

And we have invested in Husk. This is a company that puts together larger systems, so-called mini-grids, that can power whole villages. It combines solar power with a back-up system which turns crop waste into natural gas.

Companies like these are making change happen. It is deep change that transforms lives and brings new opportunities. Yes, it eases poverty but, more than that, it creates prosperity.

Getting access to reliable energy can mean someone using an electric, automatic, sewing machine. Allowing them to make more clothes, better and more quickly – increasing the family income.

It can mean electric power tools in a workshop that are safer, more efficient and produce a better finish, allowing the owner to expand their business.

Or it can mean a freezer that allows a fisherman to get his fish to customers fresh, not salted, and sell them for a higher price.

This change, this energy, improves lives for families, for communities and for entire countries. It is, indeed, the golden thread: a thread that links people to prosperity.

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Just the start

So although this is a very small part of Shell's business right now I want it to grow. It will grow. And I hope serving these 100 million people is just the start.

Remember. There are two billion living without modern energy.

But if we succeed that will mean 100 million more people with the power to improve their lives and the lives of those around them.

It will not be easy. I know that. But that is all the more reason why we must try. And we must succeed.

I also know this: we will need all the help we can get.

So if you want to join us. Join us.

If you have an idea. Please tell us.

Because if Shell can help, we will.

After all, if the ideas do not come from bright young people like you, then who?

The world needs energy. And it needs your energy.

Thank you.

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