

**USAID SARI/Energy – Women-in-Energy Workshop**  
**April 21, 2008**  
**USAID Deputy Mission Director, Ms. Beth Hogan**

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**Advancing Energy Access and Efficiency in South Asia – Role of Women**

Attending:

Mr. L. Radhakrishnan, Secretary of Power, Government of Kerala;  
Honorable Minister for Electricity, Shri A.K. Balan Government of Kerala;  
His Excellency Shri R.L. Bhatia, The Kerala Governor; and

ladies and gentlemen.

I am pleased to be here representing the U.S. Agency for International Development mission to India.

Thank you to K.M. Dharesan Unnithan, Director, Energy Management Centre for hosting us in Kerala and organizing this event with our partners from PA Consulting that are also here.

I am delighted to welcome our honored guests from the South Asia region to this workshop on Women-in-Energy. The workshop agenda that we have before us is a challenging one given the limited time and number of interesting sessions; and that is why it is so important that we have so many distinguished representatives from throughout the South Asia region. I know that you have all traveled long distances, left behind important work, and set aside time in your otherwise busy schedules for this workshop. I would like to commend you all for your participation and I am personally looking forward to sharing with you, through this workshop, an intensive dialogue on women-in-energy issues. I am sure we will learn from each other in sharing our experiences. While women around the world and here in South Asia have made great impacts on energy related issues, there is still much more that can be done by women to conserve energy and promote alternative energy source in the region. And this workshop is intended to address this challenge.

Before others delve into the specifics of the workshop program, I would like to present a few thoughts on the role of women in advancing energy access and energy efficiency in South Asia; and a brief overview of USAID's activities supporting energy security in the region.

We know that women in South Asia, like women in much of the world, struggle with issues of inequality. Many face violence and suffer from lack of economic and political empowerment. South Asian women are also less likely to have the health and education resources of their male counterparts. Literacy rates are lower for women than men in all South Asia countries.

What differentiates women with respect to energy access and energy efficiency? Women are more likely to bare the brunt of lack of energy as it relates to quality of life. Yet, women often have their greatest decision making role related to household energy resources. When women control decisions related to the kitchen and cooking, it can lead to investment in alternative energy resources such as solar or bio gas cookers that benefit the entire family through greater access to energy, improved health by reducing smoke and reduced cooking times

In most rural dominated areas of South Asia the role of women are that of homemaker and child bearer; and the myriad of tasks that this encompasses almost always fall upon women. Studies have shown that women are so burdened with these tasks that there is virtually no time for them to improve their livelihood. Household labor saving devices not only provide a way to save time, but also contribute to one's feeling of self worth as women have time to devote

to more self-development activities and their families. However, women have to choose such equipments very carefully, for they can consume significant amounts of energy, and can upset the entire household budget. Thankfully, modern day technical advancements provide us with the choice of energy efficient systems, but we have to act responsibly towards choosing the right type of appliances. For instance, choosing a five star rated refrigerator can save us significant amounts of energy. Similarly installing solar cookers or water heating systems will not only help us use abundantly available clean solar energy but also will increase energy access in remote off grid areas as well. National governments are also promoting increased usage of such products through provision of financial incentives. Women have to be cognizant of these alternatives so as to be able to make informed decisions. This is where you and your organizations can make a difference.

When women do work outside the home, they tend to have greater control over household finances and decisions. In the market, gender inequality is reflected in unequal access to land, credit, and labor markets, and in significantly less access to new production technologies. In society, gender inequality is expressed as restrictions to women's participation in civic and political life.

Energy is not the only area in which an equitable role for women can have a positive impact on families and society as a whole. Evidence suggests that increasing the role of women in household decision making changes the allocation of household expenditures, resulting in a larger share of resources devoted to children's education and health. Finally, in addition to improving individuals' lives, increased gender equality can contribute to better aggregate economic performance of society.

USAID has long recognized the linkage between gender issues and greater economic development. Energy is also interrelated to economic development cycle. Two examples:

Education is the single most important avenue for women to improve their livelihood and achieve parity with men; this is a well recognized fact. Energy access is necessary in order to have light to study by, access to radio, television, and even the internet as windows to self development and growth.

Income generating activities also advance energy access and the general well being of the household. And women who earn income are generally more self sufficient and able to consider the investment in, and adoption of, energy efficient devices.

And we know the cycle of improved economic development for women does not stop at women themselves. Improved health, education and other resources for families is a direct outcome of women's livelihood improvements.

Maintaining reliable, affordable, and environmental responsible energy supply is a cornerstone of economic development, which benefits in each South Asian country. To this end, USAID is supporting a number of initiatives. USAID focuses on those areas which offer opportunity to strengthen sustainable initiatives which are economically viable and will stimulate private energy sector investment; while considering the social and development needs of rural and possible disadvantaged sectors of the population. We do this by addressing the energy sector on many fronts: from the broader concepts of sector restructuring, policy development, and promotion of laws, regulations, etc.; to the actual strengthening of distribution and supply sectors; and by promoting

responsible energy consumption by energy efficiency and demand side management programs. Outside of traditional energy supply, we also actively promote renewable and alternative energy development, particularly in rural areas.

For example, In India, USAID is promoting strengthening of the distribution sector via our DRUM project which stands for Distribution Reform for Utility Management. We are also promoting efficient energy and water usage under the water-energy nexus project known as WENEXA. In Bangladesh and Nepal, USAID continues to support long standing and very successful rural electrification programs. We are also providing support in the area of power sector reform and restructuring in most South Asian countries such as Bangladesh and India. We support development of alternative and renewable energy programs in nearly all South Asian countries. Most notably in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where with USAID support the US Department of Energy, recently completed wind and solar mapping for the countries. Soon we will extend the renewable energy activities into Bhutan.

We see USAID as a catalyst to mobilize domestic energy sector human resources throughout the region, introduce offshore technical talent, programs, and technologies where necessary, and to promote regional initiatives which will benefit each SARI member country. Our goal is simple: to assist the SARI member countries become as self sufficient as possible in energy supply and demand, while promoting regional cooperation and socially responsible energy sector development. Promoting Women's issues is a cornerstone of this goal.

I wish you all a successful program and want to emphasize how pleased I am that USAID has the opportunity to be your partner in regional energy sector programs. I know you all have come a long way, and put aside other priorities to participate in this event and all of us at USAID appreciate your dedication to this, and future, programs.

Thank you.