

Introduction to WISER

On behalf of WISER I welcome you all once more to this gathering. Many of you have travelled long distances to be here, many of you have come from closer home and I thank you for the time and effort you have taken.

Ms. Jennifer Graetz, Acting Office Director, Program Support from USAID/India, Ms. Anne F Stenhammer, Regional Program Director, UN Women, Prof.V.K.Damodaran, Vice Chairman of EMC, the guiding force of Energy Management Centre, and many other energy initiatives, Mr.Dharesan Unnithan, Director EMC and ofcourse my dear friends and colleagues, Ms.Nandita Mongia, Principal Technical Advisor, USAID SARI/Energy at Tetra Tech, and Ms.Mercy Thomas, Regional Program Coordinator, USAID SARI Energy, friends and colleagues, I am privileged to be in your midst today.

Energy is essential in expanding economic and social opportunities for women. Looking carefully at the energy priorities of both women and men, and understanding the constraints that particularly affect women, helps ensure that the needs of families are better met, and earning potential is improved. Because women are household energy managers, energy users and suppliers, and often energy-consuming entrepreneurs, including them in energy sector decisions that affect them can help ensure more effective use of resources and satisfied customers.

WISER's mandate is to enable women in South Asia understand and identify energy conservation and energy efficiency activities relevant to their daily lives, and facilitate their involvement in improving their livelihoods and living conditions through cleaner and better energy use

Let me take a couple of minutes now to tell you about WISER's journey so far.

WISER, as Ms.Graetz mentioned, has its origins in a network of

energy professionals from government, corporate, grassroots and academic organizations from the eight South Asian countries, promoted by USAID SARI/Energy as the South Asia Women in Energy, known to many as SAWIE. Four working groups focused on the areas of addressing energy needs of women through Renewable Energy Technologies/Green Architecture; Micro Finance/Income Generation; Gender Streamlining; Capacity Building/Best Practices/Information Sharing

There was consensus in the SAWIE network about setting up a resource hub to consolidate knowledge and experience on technologies and delivery mechanisms, support assessment of gender needs and facilitate capacity building, facilitate networking in the region and mobilize resources for all of the above.

Launched in March 2010 as a joint initiative of USAID SARI/Energy and Energy Management Centre-Kerala, the WISER office was set up in September 2010, and we are beginning to get a sense of the task at hand, and develop our work.

The launch of WISER coincided with the training of 19 women from Afghanistan over a week in March 2010. Over the past six months, among our key activities has been setting up a clean energy demonstration and training centre, and collating the training resources around it. The first training program on assembly of solar LED lanterns as an enterprise activity, awareness of energy efficiency and conservation was held last month coinciding with the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day.

We are also working on collation of best practices in technology applications, services and enterprise modules across South Asia, which will be disseminated by WISER through the web and other media.

Another key aspect of our work is development of training

modules for promotion of women's energy enterprises. This workshop is a significant step in this direction, where we look to learn from experience and figure out what worked, what did not work and what the key lessons are. From this we hope to work towards the mix of conditions for replication and scaling up sustainable enterprise and business modules.

Our key challenges would be to form a core team and to build core partnerships to take forward WISER's activities, and to raise the resources for all that we set out to do.

As we look ahead:

- WISER aims to evolve as a resource and capacity development hub for energy enterprises, catering to the needs of women.
- Offering training programs catering to local contexts for energy efficiency and energy conservation, and for applications of energy technologies in livelihoods improvements and combating effects of climate change
- Undertaking action-research programs and studies to continue to further our understanding in collaboration with field, donor, govt., corporate organizations, academic institutions and others supporting dissemination of clean energy technologies and services

This workshop marks an important milestone in WISER's journey, and I am grateful to each one of you for having agreed to come and share your rich and varied experience, which will aid us set a collective course of action.

We have here representatives of 37 organizations from seven South Asian countries. Participants from Pakistan unfortunately did not get visas, evidently the Indo-Pak match was more important and all energies were given to that. Coming back, around 20 organizations will share their experience of implementing programs on the ground. We will also hear from donor and network organizations about their perspectives and experience and what guides their mandates in working with

women and issues of energy access.

There are evidently several exciting projects in the region which we will be hearing from. From setting up solar home lighting systems, or building improved cookstoves, women are coming forward to learn new technologies that are relevant for them. Whether it is women fixing solar panels or doing residential wiring or going from village to village promoting energy efficient appliances, they are defying stereotypes and breaking barriers. Women are also looking at technologies and innovations that aid their livelihood activities and give them more income. They are making efforts to understand specific requirements at a very local level, and getting manufacturers to respond with tailor made products and innovations.

Perhaps the most critical in this has been the recognition and leveraging of the collective strength of women, in spreading the message of energy efficiency and conservation.

There is however the realization that many of these successes remain isolated, and have not entered the mainstream of markets, financial resource allocations, and policy processes.

This workshop of WISER we hope will accelerate the process of enhancing women's access to clean energy technologies, applications and services, through identification and scaling of replicable models in the region. My colleague Dr.Nandita Mongia will be talking about details of the workshop structure in a later segment today.

I wish us all a productive time here in Thiruvananthapuram.