

Women's Institute for Sustainable Energy Research (WISER)  
Regional Workshop on Women, Energy and Enterprise Building  
Trivandrum, Kerala, India  
April 4, 2011, Travancore Heritage Hotel

Jennifer Graetz, Acting Director, Program Support Office,  
Remarks for Keynote Address

I am delighted to be with you this afternoon in beautiful Kerala, speaking at the inaugural session of a South Asia Regional Workshop on energy access issues for women. I am pleased to share this occasion with distinguished delegates from the Government of India, including

- Prof. V. K. Damodaran, Vice Chairman, Energy Management Centre, Government of Kerala
- Mr. Dharesan Unnithan, Director, Energy Management Center
- Miss Anne. F. Stenhammer, Regional Program Director, South Asia, UNWOMEN; and
- Ms. Jayapadma, the Regional Director of WISER

This event was organized by professionals and development practitioners who want to bring about a change in the way women are involved in the decision making process of energy access and use. Almost a third of the total energy consumed in South Asia is either managed or administered by women. Yet, there are no focused institutional mechanisms available to prepare women to provide the training, capacity building, information sharing, knowledge, and skills to plan and manage the efficient utilization of energy, including the use of renewable energy sources in

their daily lives. I congratulate the Women's Institute for Sustainable Energy Research, WISER, for taking concrete steps to address this issue.

WISER represents the culmination of a multi-year effort launched by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under its South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy (SARI/Energy) program, in partnership with Energy Management Center (EMC), Government of Kerala.

WISER is driven by a women's clean energy network, South Asia Women in Energy SAWIE, which was launched in April 2008. SAWIE brings together energy sector professions, governments, NGOs, academicians, activists, corporate executives, and micro entrepreneurs from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka to learn about, identify, and develop sustainable approaches to providing low cost, efficient, and affordable energy to rural women throughout South Asia. Additionally, SAWIE is working to develop a "roadmap" for addressing women's energy needs. USAID/SARI/E conceptualized and formed WISER in response to the recommendations of the SAWIE network.

WISER was launched just a year ago in March 2010. Since then we have come a long way in making WISER a hub for clean energy activities supporting women's empowerment. We are using this resource to support the application of energy technology to create better lives for South Asian women.

During this workshop, you will be discussing and learning from field level experts how best to integrate energy technology with other enabling mechanisms, like

access to markets, finance, and capacity building . Through WISER's activities, we are building a new model in South Asia – a model where women's involvement and leadership will expand access to clean energy; empower them to improve their lives and livelihoods; influence communities to adopt sustainable development life styles; and contribute to economic growth.

As a Regional Center of Excellence, WISER has been busy. WISER's first activity was to train nineteen women from Afghanistan, including power engineers, government employees, teachers, community leaders, and advocates, as well as a few recent engineering graduates, on decentralized clean energy sources and applications. WISER had also held other capacity building trainings for local communities, field organizations, and self-help groups on subjects that include energy efficient lighting, and the use of solar driers for food processing, among others.

Following these trainings, both experts and those new to the field have been able to bring their newfound knowledge and skills back to their homes and villages in South Asia. Through this exchange of information and the networking opportunities, WISER is helping to create life-changing energy innovations.

Over the next few days, you will be networking and learning about some initiatives that have been successfully scaled beyond individual pilot projects. I am impressed that a vast range of organizations are participating in this workshop, including national and regional institutions representing community level organizations, NGOs, government and semi government bodies, as well as bilateral and

multilateral donor agencies. You bring an enormous wealth of knowledge and experience to this workshop.

Our challenge over the next four days of the workshop will be to develop a ‘roadmap’ that will help bring women into the mainstream in terms of access to clean energy technologies, applications, and services. The issues of energy access and the effects of climate change are immediate and touch lives in many direct and indirect ways. With inequitable and often uncertain access to energy, women often have limited resources and mechanisms to meet the basic needs of their families, including procuring fuel and water. In spite of vast advancements in technology, many of the world’s women are still left using primitive, polluting, and often hazardous resources and processes.

We are here today because we all believe that access to energy and sustainable enterprises can truly empower women and help break the cycle of poverty, deprivation, and under-development.

Before I close, I would like to thank the EMC team, the WISER team, and the SARI/Energy team for leading this unique women’s initiative.

I wish each one of you great success during this event and your future energy endeavors. I look forward to our continued partnership through the next few days and in the years to come.

Thank you.