

Elizabeth Warfield
Keynote Address for Launch of the South Asia
Women's Institute for Sustainable Energy Research (WISER)
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I am delighted to be with you this morning in beautiful Kerala to launch—South Asia Women's Institute for Sustainable Energy Research also known as WISER. I am pleased to share this occasion with my distinguished colleagues from the Government of India, including Mr. A.M. Narayanan, the Head of Energy Efficiency Division, Energy Management Center; Prof. V. K. Damodharan, Vice Chairman of the Energy Efficiency Division; Mr. L. Radhakrishnan, IAS, Principal Secretary (Power), Government of Kerala; and the Honorable Minister for Health and Social Welfare, Government of

Kerala, Smt. P. K. Sreemathy. I particularly appreciate that we are holding this launch at the historic Kanakakunnu Palace.

Today, we celebrate the launch of the WISER. And wiser we will all become as we use this resource to build women's capacity to support energy development in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries.

Through the launch of WISER, we are striving to build a new model in South Asia – a model where women’s leadership improves the lives and livelihoods of women and their families through expanded access to clean and efficient energy.

Today’s celebration is the culmination of a multi-year effort launched by my agency – USAID – to bring together women who work in the energy sector in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. We formed a network of South Asia Women in Energy (SAWIE), to leverage our resources, tap regional expertise, and create an institution to sustain this effort.

WISER will be based here in Kerala, at the Energy Management Center, located in an existing institute of the Government of Kerala's Department of Power. We are pleased with the Government of Kerala's strong commitment to the launch and operation of the center.

As a Regional Center of Excellence, we expect the WISER center to be busy. We'll allow just a few more moments of celebration this morning, and then we'll put the Center to work! WISER's first activity will be to train twenty Afghan women power engineers, government employees, teachers, community leaders, and advocates, as well as a few recent graduates we hope we can attract into the energy sector.

Today is a powerful day for our guests from Afghanistan. Today, you have now joined the global connection of women in the energy sector. WISER will offer you personally and professionally rewarding experiences as you work together, learn from each other and share new knowledge and skills. While you will bring technologies to homes and villages in Afghanistan, you will also be exposed to new ideas from the local women you interact with. It is this exchange of information and networking that will create life-changing energy innovations.

Let me give you an example of how this model has worked to improve energy technologies in India. While rural electrification programs have made great strides

over the last ten years, most households still rely on traditional biomass fuels for cooking. These fuels, such as wood, charcoal, dung and crop residues, have put harmful air pollutants directly into homes. This intensity of exposure is one thousand times more harmful than exposure to the same pollutants released outdoors. Public health studies have linked this indoor air exposure to the rise of asthma that is now affecting more than 40% of Indian children, increasing acute respiratory infections, chronic pulmonary disease, lung cancer, tuberculosis, and cataracts. After consulting with women and scientists about traditional cook-stoves, USAID is now developing new, affordable cook-stove technologies

so that women and their families can enjoy energy benefits without harm.

Another concern in our region is the lack of connectivity to the electrical grid, coupled with unreliable, expensive and polluting sources of electrical power such as diesel generators. Indian towns and households are gaining greater access to renewable energy resources. As energy becomes more reliable, villagers are improving their livelihoods as they gain access to information, education, skills, and markets. Through the institute, you will have an opportunity to see how solar, wind, and battery power is deployed in India. This is not a distant dream; these are suitable energy solutions that you can bring about in your own communities.

Recently, USAID hosted the 2010 International Women of Courage Award winners from Afghanistan, the Dominican Republic, Korea, and Sri Lanka. Their courageous stories showed how they contributed to the advancement of their countries. These women made opportunities become realities, despite seemingly insurmountable challenges. This is proof that good development outcomes depend not only on the powerful or privileged, but also those with on-the ground, life experience. Successful development rises from will of all the nation's inhabitants. Nowhere is this truer than in the area of climate change.

Experts from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory will present tomorrow, satellite imagery that

shows pictures of how woodlands have vanished from the Afghan provinces of Takhar and Kunduz. Some 30 years ago, woodlands covered up to forty percent of the mapped areas.

How does such deforestation affect lives? First, it degrades local water quality and limits water availability; second, it harms the productivity of the soil and its suitability for agriculture; lastly, it affects the local micro climate. What is most sad about deforestation is that South Asian countries, including India, have tremendous potential to store carbon in trees and soils, to prevent the effects of global climate change. Drought is the most obvious effect of deforestation and climate change. Drought results in lower crop yields and scarcity that

increases the cost of food, which of course, is a greater hardship for the poor. Through the network and the institute, you will learn about renewable energy and energy efficiency alternatives that will enable you to offer better solutions and processes, or adapt models to local realities to help conserve and protect shared natural resources.

In closing, I wish everyone great success in your future energy endeavors. WISER's success will be generated from participation and from the leveraging of knowledge and financial resources. I look forward to our continued partnership as we work together to build expanded access to clean and efficient energy for South

Asian women and their families.