

Powering Equality

Women's entrepreneurship transforming
Asia's energy sector



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Foreword

With less than a decade left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, we are at an inflection point. COVID-19 has brought mass unemployment alongside an extreme economic downturn. Though our headlines are now dominated by the pandemic, the climate crisis has never gone away. This pandemic is merely a preview of the potential upheaval that climate change can bring.

In times like these, inequality, especially in developing economies, continues to exacerbate. It is women, often the backbone of vulnerable communities, who are expected to shoulder the burden of survival and recovery.

The energy sector presents one of our biggest opportunities to change this status quo and build resilience for all. By 2030, renewable energy sources are likely to power over 60% of new access to electricity. New ways of delivering energy through off-grid and mini-grid systems are democratizing access to electricity and is giving women and vulnerable communities, new economic freedoms.

While we have seen great jumps in electrification across the Asia-Pacific region, last-mile consumers in many rural areas are still falling through the cracks. As we aim to build back better from the pandemic, women's businesses in the energy sector can help scale up decentralized energy systems to reach these communities and power households and essential services. From influencing purchasing decisions to accessing new and often impenetrable markets to diversifying the sector, women are vital agents of change. We need to invest in their experience and leadership in championing for a renewables-based recovery.

This will require innovation, but we don't have to reinvent the wheel. Asia and the Pacific boasts of a wealth of experience in growing enterprises for climate action. "Powering Equality: Women's entrepreneurship transforming Asia's energy sector" is an initiative by the joint UN Environment Programme-UN Women project- EmPower: Women for Climate-Resilient Societies to capture the evidence and lessons that make the case for investing in women-led energy enterprises and supply chains. The report considers various business models spanning across sectors like agriculture, WASH, public infrastructure, nutrition and the policy environment that can reinforce this.

This recovery is presenting an opportunity to double down on the fight against climate change and make the new normal a better one. We must seize this opportunity while we can and empower women entrepreneurs for a resilient future.



Dechen Tsering

Regional Director and Representative
for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations
Environment Programme

Acronyms

A breakdown of acronyms you will encounter throughout this publication.

| | |
|--------------|---|
| APEC | Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| BDS | Business development services |
| CREE | Community Rural Electrification Entities |
| GBA | Global Banking Alliance for Women |
| DREA | Decentralized renewables for energy access |
| GHG | Greenhouse gases |
| ICT | Information and communication technologies |
| IDCOL | Infrastructure Development Company Limited |
| IFC | International Finance Corporation International Finance Corporation |
| MSME | Micro, small and medium enterprises |
| NAMA | Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action |
| NAP | National Adaptation Plan |
| NDC | Nationally determined contributions |
| NGO | Non- governmental organization |
| REDD | Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation |
| RE | Renewable energy |
| SDC | Sustainable Development Goal |
| SME | Small and medium enterprises |
| STEM | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics |
| SURE | Sakhi Unique Rural Enterprise, India |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| WEE | Women's Economic Empowerment programme of ENERGIA |

Key messages

This publication examines energy access and the need to strengthen the livelihoods of the poor, especially women, in Asia. More critical today than ever before, as governments prepare to deal with the economic and human crisis that COVID 19 has brought with it, promoting women's entrepreneurship in renewable energy provides a unique opportunity to achieve inclusive growth and climate resilience.

- 01** Achieving SDG7, i.e. universal access by 2030 to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy services, is essential for achieving other SDGs, including those related to gender equality, health, poverty reduction, climate and environment. Vice-versa, gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental to achieving universal energy access.
- 02** In developing countries, women bear most of the responsibility for household tasks such as collecting water and firewood, cleaning and washing, bearing 60-80% of unpaid domestic work globally. At the same time, as informal workers and entrepreneurs, women are earning less, saving less, and holding more insecure jobs. Since the outbreak of COVID 19, unpaid care work in homes is increasing due to social distancing practices, school closures and home schooling, heightened care needs of older and sick people, and more cooking being done at home.
- 03** The energy sector is experiencing a fundamental shift towards a renewable, decarbonized energy system. Moving forward, decentralized renewables for energy access (DREA) systems will play a pivotal role in meeting universal energy goals.
- 04** DREA systems provide good opportunities to open new economic potential for the poor, unlock resilient livelihoods for communities,

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