

Women in Power Sector Professional Network in South Asia (We-POWER)
2nd PARTNERSHIP FORUM

Opening Remarks by Ms. Deborah Stokes
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Mr. Guangzhe Chen, Global and Regional Director, Infrastructure General Practice, World Bank Group, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen. Good Morning.

I would like to welcome you to Day 2 of the 2nd Partnership Forum of the *Women in Power Sector Professional Network in South Asia* (We-POWER).

I am honored to be part of the We-POWER 2nd Partnership Forum which brings together women and men leaders from government agencies, public and private sector utilities, universities and civil society organizations from 13 countries in South Asia, Central and West Asia, Africa, Middle East and Southeast Asia as well as representatives from global, regional, and national networks and international development partners including the ADB, World Bank, USAID and Australian DFAT to share their rich knowledge and good practices at policy, institutional and project levels.

Gender equality is a topic very close to ADB's heart. Under ADB's Strategy 2030, we are committed to accelerating our support for gender equality. By 2030, 75% of ADB's committed sovereign and non-sovereign operations will promote gender equality.

As an organization with a big focus on energy, our gender equality goal means we need to make even more concerted efforts to enhance gender equality in our energy operations. We are doing this in our projects and in our knowledge events.

ADB hosts the annual *Asia Clean Energy Forum* (ACEF). For the last two years, we have taken steps to actively enhance women's participation and contribution. In 2019, women

were 36% of speakers and 37% of registered participants. In addition, the program featured a number of special events and networking opportunities for women: a Women's Networking Reception; a Women in Energy Lunch. ACEF also introduced a Code of Conduct to ensure a harassment-free environment at ACEF where each participant, regardless of gender, feels empowered to network freely and participate fully in the forum's week-long sessions and activities. We will build on these steps in future years, including drawing on the inspiring work of We-POWER.

Looking at today's four technical sessions, I can see that you will dig deeper into some of the key challenges faced by women and girls and discuss ways, in your own organizations and collectively as the We-POWER Network, how you can facilitate women's choices to pursue STEM education and careers in the energy sector.

The common social perception globally is that technical STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) jobs are "men's jobs" and women are more suited to non-technical administrative jobs or positions in human resources and communications. To tackle key barriers that keep women from advancing into male-dominated sectors, the focus needs to be on

- building individual capacities of girls and women; and,
- challenging restrictive organizational systems and unconscious gender bias.

In male-dominated environments, workplace structures, policies and practices are likely to have different impacts on men and women. These practices can create powerful obstacles to women and prevent them achieving their full potential including reaching leadership roles. It also means that organizations are not reaping the benefits that flow from diversity including at the leadership level.

In ADB, it is important that we 'walk the talk' about gender equality in our own organization.

In 2016, ADB Management took a series of actions to strengthen the gender equality of our institution. We set higher targets for the representation of women in our international workforce including targets for women in senior roles. We enhanced our efforts in recruitment, career management, leadership training and retention. As a result, in the past 3 years,

- Female international staff (IS) representation increased from **34% to 36.6%**;
- **We set a target of 40% by 2022;**
- Female IS promotions increased from **36.6% to 38.3%**;
- Female IS attrition rate decreased from **8.3% to 6.8%**;
- Leadership development programs are now offered with high proportion of female staff participation;
- More than 500 staff including 100 managers have participated in a bank-wide program on mitigating unconscious bias at work, including gender bias (2017);
- Family-friendly work practices have included flexible work arrangements and upgraded facilities for nursing mothers;
- We put in new arrangements to address bullying and harassment, and to expand training for staff to promote a positive and respectful workplace.
- ADB also made significant progress on the EDGE certification. EDGE (Economic Dividends for Gender Equality) Certification is the leading global assessment methodology and business certification standard for gender equality. EDGE-certified companies are evaluated according to global and industry benchmarks through a third-party audit of four pillars: gender balance at all levels, pay equity, effective policies and practices to ensure equitable career flows, and an inclusive culture. I see on your program that later this afternoon you will hear more about EDGE certification process. It was a challenging and rewarding process. I am pleased to say that ADB earned its first level certification (EDGE ASSESS) in December 2016 and

achieved its second level certification (EDGE MOVE) in March 2019, becoming the first international financial institution to achieve this level.

As members of the We-POWER Network, you are gender equality champions in your respective organizations. You are role models who can:

- **inspire women and girls** to pursue education and careers in STEM fields;
- **change social perceptions** about women working and rising to leadership positions in male-dominated sectors; and
- **challenge gendered structures and practices** in your organizations as you advocate for gender-equal pay, training opportunities, flexible work, and career advancement.

In closing, I congratulate all of you for your commitment and collaborative efforts in establishing the Women in Power Sector Professional Network in South Asia. I wish you a very successful Forum and I look forward to hearing about the results of your collective actions.

Thank you.