

## **We-POWER 2<sup>ND</sup> PARTNERSHIP FORUM**

Welcoming Remarks by Mr. Shixin Chen  
Vice President, Operations 1, Asian Development Bank  
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Ms. Mara Warwick, Country Director, World Bank Philippines;

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen.

Good Morning.

On behalf of the Asian Development Bank, I would like to welcome you to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Partnership Forum of the Women in Power Sector Professional Network in South Asia, or We-POWER. I am truly honored to be part of this unique event.

### **Purpose of the Forum**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Partnership Forum will cover a number of important issues. During these two days, you will:

- (a) Discuss how We-Power network can address challenges to girls' education in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) to build a pipeline and close the gender employment gap in South Asia's power sector;
- (b) Share We-Power members' achievements and lessons;
- (c) Share commitments by new We-Power members; and,
- (d) Reach an agreement on the We-Power Network Charter to ensure its sustainability and growth.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) puts gender equality and women's empowerment at the core of Strategy 2030 – our overall corporate strategy. As Vice-President of Operations 1 responsible for South, Central and West Asia, I am personally committed to contribute to achieve proactive gender-inclusive design elements in 75% of our sovereign and non-sovereign operations by 2030.

I am very pleased that this Forum provides the opportunity to cross-fertilize experiences among ADB's departments and developing member countries in South, Central and West Asia. Representatives from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will join forces to identify common bottlenecks and prospective solutions.

This is also an opportunity to promote strategic collaboration between ADB and World Bank.

Perhaps most importantly, energy sector agencies, global networks, and academic programs will be able to share diverse perspectives and identify good solutions.

## **ADB's Contribution**

Energy access and infrastructure development are crucial for economic development of South Asia, yet opportunities for women to contribute to the energy sector are very limited. Women are closing gender gaps in education. But, in engineering programs, women's participation ranges from 0% in the Maldives to 23 -31% in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bhutan. Across South Asia, women comprise less than 25% of the workforce in utilities; they hold mostly middle-to-lower level non-technical administrative positions and less than 21% in technical positions.

The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Team in ADB's South Asia Regional Department strives to address these challenges.

I have encouraged colleagues in the energy sector to go 'beyond the meter' and explore opportunities to mainstream GESI in areas besides distribution. And we are seeing good results.

For example, in **Bangladesh**, ADB loans are complemented by grant resources to support scholarships and exposure visits for women in energy sector agencies, utilities and engineering departments.

Similarly, in **Nepal**, ADB-financed projects provide training in energy-based livelihoods for members of electricity user cooperatives, as well as targeted training to female technology promoters.

ADB is also providing support to build the pipeline for women in STEM education and careers in South Asia. In **Bhutan**, we will support the government to establish a new flagship Technical Training Institute. In **Sri Lanka**, we are directly assisting four universities in providing sex-segregated and special-needs toilets, and stairs, ramps, and lights that are accessible to all. Academic staff recruitment will include gender considerations; and special programs for training, mentoring, career guidance, and employment support will be provided for female students.

## **Achievements and Challenges of the We-Power Initiative**

At its core, the We-Power initiative consolidates a range of critical global development commitments and values. If further cemented and institutionalized, these elements could be exemplary and replicated across other sectors of ADB operations, namely Urban Development and Transport.

I would like to leave you with three thoughts that I hope you will incorporate into your discussions during the next two days:

- (1) First, We-Power has taken a great stride forward with energy sector public sector agencies, public/private sector utilities and academia agreeing to endorse its objectives and implement incremental activities.** These activities are based on the interest and priorities of currently over 20 strategic and institutional partners. They incorporate the five pillars of We-Power: (i) STEM Education; (ii) Recruitment; (iii) Development; (iv) Retention; and (v) Policy and Analysis. Looking to the future, it will be important to focus on keeping the network strong and sustainable.
- (2) Second, the promotion of gender equality should be at the forefront of energy sector policy reforms supporting energy transition, not an afterthought.** ADB is working closely with government agencies and power companies to accelerate the transition to low-carbon energy technologies, and has seized the opportunity to promote women's employment, agency, and voice in this traditionally male-dominated industry. While the We-Power Network has been focusing primarily on the centralized operations in energy sector, it is time to improve energy access to all and expand opportunities for women's employment and entrepreneurship.
- (3) Third, launching national We-Power chapters will leverage your collective voice on unifying issues to influence decision-making at policy, institutional, and community levels.** To move this agenda forward, it is important to leverage your collective skills, resources and actions in each country to achieve these common goals. As a Network, you will have stronger advocacy, more power to influence decision-making, and more connected initiatives to open women's pathways in each country than you can achieve as individual organizations.

## **Conclusion**

I wish all success for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Partnership Forum. I hope it will further strengthen the We-Power Network and your motivation and contributions to gender equality. And I wish you a pleasant stay in Manila.

Thank you.