Summary report – Roundtable Dialogue

“Investing in women’s leadership in renewable energy and technology transfer – contributing to climate action and green economy in ASEAN countries”

at the ASEAN ENERGY BUSINESS FORUM

5th September 2019, Bangkok, Thailand

The Roundtable Dialogue was hosted by UN Environment, in partnership with ASEAN Centre for Energy under the project “EmPower: Women for Climate-Resilient Societies”, jointly implemented with UN Women and supported by the Government of Sweden. This roundtable presented opportunities in making women agents of change in technology transfer, renewable energy and climate action in ASEAN countries. It drew from case studies from Cambodia, Vietnam, and regionally in Asia and provided an impetus for increased regional and cross-country investment and cooperation.

UN Environment presented its one-minute video showcasing women’s leadership in renewable energy.

Key messages from the Roundtable Dialogue:
1. Invest in renewable energy for women entrepreneurs because it makes business sense
2. Ensure local and national planning for climate action and renewable energy includes women meaningfully
3. Access to finance and credit for women and rural communities is crucial
4. Gather more data, build regional cooperation and strengthen capacity among policy makers on women’s leadership in renewable energy

Summary Notes
• Opening by the moderator, Anjali Garg from the IFC highlights that it is not enough for us to say we want to work with women’s entrepreneurs; we need to understand that it makes business sense to put women at the center of a sustainable value chain. She later shared the experience from the program she leads (Lighting Asia/India) at IFC that is building a sustainable market for quality assured energy access products and how the program worked with a client to build a successful business models where women are trained to become entrepreneurs and sell and repair solar products in their villages.
• First speaker, entrepreneur Thida Khaev, Owner of Solar Green Energy Cambodia narrates her experience on becoming an entrepreneur and building community demand for renewable energy
products. “The community didn’t believe me that the sun could help us produce electricity; I spent two or three months trying to convince them”. In rural Cambodia in 2003, when electricity was very expensive (4-8 dollars per kilowatt) finding viable market alternatives was crucial. In the beginning when Thida started to receive requests to manufacture solar energy products, she had to take loans that charged 6 percent for one-month interest. In 2014, she established her company “Solar energy grid Cambodia” where they help households install, maintain and repair renewable energy products. Now 40% of Thida’s employees are women. Through support from the government and other businesses, she has built the capacity of her staff to learn the business and management skills and is now extending this to agricultural practice and growing hydroponic gardens using solar panels and building “smart farms” whose irrigation and water management is efficient. Looking back, the most challenging aspects was to build the community awareness and gaining access to finance and credit through formal means.

- **Sorn Sunsopheak**, Deputy Director of Program Management and Support Division, Secretariat of National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD-S), Government of Cambodia is focusing on strengthening planning at the subnational level placing three things at the heart of its policies - gender, climate change and accountability. Sopheak and his team encourage women to participate in the local government process, in the planning and the decision-making process. It is not just about numbers of women in politics in decision-making, but more about how we can support women and their families and the quality of support. Sopheak also emphasized the issue of intersectionality where women who are poor and/or live in female headed households due the increased migration by men to the cities, often struggle in articulating their needs and being heard. His take-away message is that sustainable development also requires small scale local investment which can accumulate larger gains. “The local people really need renewable energy and electricity and we need to build capacity and technology internally to do that”.

- **Parimita Mohanty**, UN Environment gives the example of Viet Nam’s uptake of biogas digesters and that in most cases, 90% of the cost of the renewable energy product is carried by the user and 10% are subsidy. Beyond digesters, it is expanding also to solar water pumping systems. However, access to finance is critical and building local knowledge and strengthening leadership of women is important. In Viet Nam’s case, the involvement of Vietnam Women’s Union is key, however, while they have the networks with women in the ground, their knowledge of renewable energy entrepreneurship is limited. “It is therefore important that we provide the entrepreneurs have access to capacity building support, business skills and set up a mechanism whereby we handhold the women entrepreneurs to set up their own enterprises“. The key question is - How do we make access to finance easier when women do not have the collaterals to invest in businesses/ renewable energy? The key is to demonstrate sustainable business models for others to learn from that makes it attractive to invest in, such as the example of Thida. Parimita explained EmPower’s approach in its three partner countries and shared examples of organisations such as GreenID in Viet Nam who are doing similar work. Her key takeaway messages: “Small scale renewables have an untapped potential to promote sustainable and inclusive development; so beyond looking at large energy investments, we need to explore this opportunity further to support our communities to build climate resilience”.

- **Tharinya Supasa**, ASEAN Centre for Energy shared their experience in supporting clean cooking and solar home technology and the rights-based philosophy behind it - “we believe that everyone deserves energy, including women in rural area”. Moreover, identifying, quantifying and presenting woman contribution in renewable energy development can increase attraction of investing in woman. While ASEAN has analyzed job creation in the energy sector, there is a need for more detailed data to show policymakers how much women contribute to the enhancement of renewable energy in technical and non-technical jobs, for example women’s contribution in financing, in promotion and installation and maintenance. There is a potential to link key gender indicators into ASEAN’s energy database to understand the situation better. While this is new work for ACE as well, Tharinya emphasized that investing in women demonstrates that it can benefit “all for all”. There is a need to support policymakers in the region to understand that renewable energy in small scale and including women can work for all and build more regional evidence and a platform for learning. Final suggestion is to consider regional roadmaps for women entrepreneurs in renewable sector in ASEAN.