



VIENNA ENERGY FORUM 2013

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Women's Leadership on Energy Justice in Productive Sectors Summary Report



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On 28 May 2013, the first UNIDO gender side event was held during the Vienna Energy Forum (VEF) at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, Austria. Organized by UNIDO's Gender Mainstreaming Steering Committee (GMSC) with the support of UNIDO's Energy and Climate Change Branch and the SEED Initiative, the side event – “Women's Leadership on Energy Justice in Productive Sectors”—centered its discussions on the lessons learned and potential ways forward to effectively promote and enhance the role of women as active participants, and moreover, leaders of modern energy services. In attendance were a diverse group of participants, including high level policymakers as well as recognized practitioners and experts from the private sector, civil society, and academia.

UNIDO Director General, Kandeh Yumkella, welcomed the distinguished panel and audience members setting the tone on the urgency and importance of women's economic empowerment not only in the green economy, but more importantly, in the broader goals of sustainable industrial development and global economic growth. Fatou Haidara, Director, Policymaking Organs Secretariat, Advocacy and External Relations Branch, continued the opening remarks stressing that the side event will serve to address the energy debate in a more comprehensive way moving the discussion beyond simply focusing on women's domestic energy needs. To underscore this point, Haidara presented the jointly produced and newly published UNIDO and UN Women guidance note which addresses the varied gender dimensions of energy.

Hadja Saran Daraba Kaba, the former Minister of Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women in Guinea, and the newly appointed Secretary General of the Mano River Union, delivered the keynote speech. Kaba expressed that women are key actors in the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres of society, echoing Yumkella, in that, sustainable development requires the advancement of the status and role of women in these spheres. To this end, she suggested that improved education and training for women, increased political participation by women, as well as research and innovations on women's economic empowerment are essential to achieving these goals.

Moderating the event was Joy Clancy, Associate Professor in Development Studies at University of Twente. As an expert in small scale energy use; management; and gender, Clancy ensured the panel discussions revolved around the key themes introduced by the opening and keynote speeches. The panel included leading experts and advocates of energy justice from the private and public sectors and academia.

Elizabeth Cecelski, founder and presently member of the Advisory Group and Senior Technical Adviser for ENERGIA, shared good practices on promoting women's economic empowerment in the energy sector such as building on women's existing skills, promoting women's participation in cooperatives and associations, and providing women's access to business development services and technical support. Cecelski gave several examples showing that, to make a sustained impact on reducing poverty, energy strategies must empower women. She suggested that the Sustainable Energy for All initiative should invest in efforts that promote women's entrepreneurship, capital funding, employment, capacity building, and representation in decision making processes that would allow women to effectively participate in the green economy.

Lakshman Guruswamy, Professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder specializing in International Environmental Law and Energy Justice, discussed “energy poverty”, women's vulnerability and predisposition to this phenomenon, as well as the severe and universal consequences that are linked to the lack of access to modern energy services. He asserted that the challenges of the “energy poor” affect all facets of life not just domestic life (cooking and heating), but also productive enterprise and access to markets (agricultural needs, transportation, and basic mechanical energy), and more importantly, community building (water access, sanitation and illumination). Guruswamy also deliberated over energy strategies for sustainable development stressing the importance of “just sustainability” which would allow for sustainable development that addresses the needs of the energy poor.

Georgina Kessel, the former Secretary of Energy in Mexico, and now partner at Spectron, described her experiences working in the energy sector recounting the evolution of women's participation from the beginning of her professional career. She asserted that in her 30 years of service, there has been little progress in regards to the perception of women, and consequently, the participation of women in the energy sector. Kessel stressed the need to address the underlying structural barriers so that women not only contribute to, but lead the dialogue on global energy issues. In this, she pointed to several ways forward including collecting the presently limited statistics and data on women in the energy sector, encouraging women's mentorship, promoting working conditions that are family friendly, and strengthening women's networks and associations.



Susan Kinne, former SEED award winner and Director of Programa Fuentes Alternas and Grupo Fenix, presented her community based project that promotes the empowerment of women through collective community planning, the strengthening of women networks, and the expansion of economic opportunities for women through innovative productive uses of modern energy services and technologies. From her project emerged two successful enterprises: what Kinne terms as “Edutourism”, a cultural and technological exchange with academic institutions; and a solar restaurant that utilises biogas and solar ovens enabling women in her community to sell “solar products” such as roasted coffee and other food products. She noted that due to the marked success of her project, similar initiatives have since been replicated in the neighboring countries of Peru, Dominican Republic, Columbia, Haiti, Costa Rica and Honduras.

Near the end of the session, the former president of Ireland and founder of the Mary Robinson Foundation—Climate Justice, Mary Robinson joined the discussion with a contribution on the essential need for women to participate and engage at the policy level to ensure that women’s needs and priorities are addressed in how policy is shaped and subsequently implemented. In particular, Robinson stressed that women should not concede when faced with opposition, but rather aim for the seemingly impossible, so that real progress can be realized.

Questions from the audience addressed, *inter alia*: strategies to increase the participation of men in addressing gender issues; more effective ways to reach out to and encourage women to participate in the energy sector; increasing the visibility of gender issues in the media; and ensuring that gender is part of the global debate. There was a general consensus by all: *in order to make a sustained impact on reducing poverty, energy strategies, policies and practices must empower women in both promoting their leadership and addressing the obstacles that presently hinder their full and active participation*. In this, several proposals on the the way forward were identified. More specifically:

- International organizations such as UNIDO have a responsibility to ensure women are included in the dialogue on global energy issues
- To enhance the economic opportunities for women, access to better quality and higher level education should be promoted
- For women to effectively participate in the green economy, the basic and necessary skills, training, and technologies should be readily accessible
- To ensure women’s leadership, the political representation and participation of women at all levels should be promoted and advocated for
- To ensure women are represented in local, national and international discussions, women should strategically organize themselves to form associations and networks
- To further facilitate the transfer of knowledge, skill sets and information, women should invest in mentoring other women and strengthen existing women networks
- To analyze the impacts and consequences of gender, statistics and data should be systematically collected at all levels (macro/meso/micro)
- To ensure decent work and social protection, working conditions that are flexible and favorable for women, who most often play the dual role of managing the household, should be promoted and provided

As a final word, the Presidential Adviser of Gender in Sierra Leone, Naasu Fofanah, stressed that gender should not be a side issue; rather it should be the central issue. She further suggested that gender dimensions of energy need to be prioritized and incorporated in the main plenaries of the next VEF. Following this, the Chair of the UNIDO GMSC, Nilgun Tas, assured that gender issues will be addressed and incorporated in the VEF final declaration, and moreover, women’s economic empowerment in entrepreneurship is scheduled to be a plenary session at UNIDO’s upcoming General Conference in Lima, Peru at the end of the year.

