WOMEN IN POWER SECTOR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK IN SOUTH ASIA

WePOWERS National Chapters

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1. The World Bank Group (WBG)’s South Asia Gender and Energy Facility (SAGE), with support from the Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP), initiated Women in Power Sector Professional Network in South Asia (WePOWER) to promote female workforce and leadership in the energy and power sector. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) joined the initiative as a coordinating partner. The main objective of WePOWER is to support greater participation of women in energy and power sector projects and utilities, and promote normative change regarding women in Science Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education in South Asia.

Rationale for WePOWER

2. Research has shown that greater participation of women in the labor force can positively impact the economy as well as the performance of companies. The 2018 rapid baseline assessment conducted by SAGE in eight countries confirms low representation of women in the energy and power sector in South Asia. Representation in utilities is low for women in all roles (3-15%), and even lower for women in technical roles (0.1-6%). Most women tend to work in the middle to lower-level and non-technical (i.e., administrative) positions, but an encouraging number of women (16.5% in Bhutan, 17% in Sri Lanka) are in senior and leadership positions. The assessment participants identified limitations in networking support, fieldwork/training opportunities, and inadequate facilities (e.g., separate toilets, day care, flex-leave) as the key barriers to women’s careers in the energy and power sector. The recommendations from these assessments have already informed the development of the WePOWER work program. WePOWER has started to work with local and international partners, including energy sector agencies, power sector utilities and engineering programs, to address the gender employment gap in the sector.

WePOWER Update

3. The WBG hosted the first regional conference to launch WePOWER in February 2019 in Kathmandu which was attended by more than 250 participants from energy utilities, power sector agencies and universities from South Asia. The second WePOWER Partnership Forum was co-organized with ADB and held in November 2019 at the ADB Headquarters in Manila. Both focused on improving women’s representation in the energy and power sector and building a network of institutional partners committed to WePOWER. Technical sessions on the 5 pillars (see Figure) created a platform of knowledge exchange and learning based on the experiences of the partners. Currently, WePOWER has 22 institutional and strategic partners in the network. The WBG serves as the interim-Secretariat, coordinating all activities and monitoring progress. A Steering Committee of institutional and strategic partners facilitates decision-making on key policies, procedures and future transition to the formal Secretariat for the network.

Motivation to Establish National Chapters

4. The National Chapters of WePOWER are key to institutionalize the network at the national level, foster exchange of ideas, facilitate lateral learning, open communications and encourage collaborative partnerships among national institutional and strategic partners. National Chapters can influence policy reforms and institutional changes for adoption of holistic, inclusive approaches and gender equality and social inclusion strategies in energy sector-related institutions. Through National
Chapters, WePOWER partners can exchange lessons, and best practices in the national context and organize trainings. For a chapter to be able to sustain its commitment and initiatives under WePOWER, technical and/or financial support from WBG and ADB may be needed and vary based on available financial resources from the Government and energy sector related loans, Grants and Technical Assistance.

**Institutional Structure of National Chapters**

5. The structures will be developed based on each network’s capacity to deliver the following key functions and/or commitments:

A. Recruit energy utilities; power sector agencies (e.g., line ministries, departments, and renewable energy and energy efficiency agencies); universities with engineering departments related to the energy sector; energy sector industry associations; professional networks in engineering and energy; organizations supporting female energy entrepreneurs; and selected private companies in energy and technology sectors and help them formulate their List of Activities (LoAs) document.

B. Report/monitor progress of partners in achieving the incremental activities using WePOWER monitoring templates, by:
   (i) Obtaining quarterly updates from in-country partners on their achievements by collecting data on specific targets and timelines; and
   (ii) Obtaining narratives and communication materials on success and challenges faced by WePOWER partners.

C. Inform and advise WePOWER Steering Committee and Interim Secretariat, on a quarterly basis by:
   (i) Sharing information on recruitment of new partners and challenges faced by WePOWER partners; and
   (ii) Highlighting emerging issues and opportunities impacting women’s employment in the energy sector and enrollment in STEM education programs.

D. Convene WePOWER partners, by:
   (i) Leading and supporting in-country events in close collaboration with Interim Secretariat and in-country ADB/WBG energy and social development teams;
   (ii) Organizing regular meetings among WePOWER partners and sharing meeting minutes with WePOWER Steering Committee and Interim Secretariat;
   (iii) Supporting WePOWER Interim Secretariat in securing participation of partners’ representatives in regional events; and
   (iv) Representing WePOWER in-country events on gender equality, social inclusion and energy.

E. Provide advisory, coordination and communication support to WePOWER partners, including civil society organizations committed to gender and energy by:
   (i) Organizing networking events to increase collaboration and cooperation among WePOWER partners; and
   (ii) Connecting energy sector organizations with female engineering students at all levels – schools as well as technical universities.

F. Disseminate information and messages from WePOWER Steering Committee, Interim Secretariat, and partners through online platforms and local media outlets.

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1 The first WePOWER national chapter was established in Bhutan in January 2020 by the ADB Bhutan Resident Mission.