



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 November 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixtieth session

14-24 March 2016

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Solar Cookers International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Solar Cookers International, in its 29th year leading and convening more than 350 partners in 122 countries, welcomes the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. This gathering of global leaders working to empower women worldwide provides important opportunities to identify concrete actions to achieve household energy security for all women.

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Of particular focus are Goal 5, which undertakes reforms to give women equal rights to resources, and Goal 7, which ensures women have access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy. As climate change's growing impact is felt, women are the ones who experience its impact first, and most deeply, as they are most vulnerable. A disruption in a woman's household energy supply prevents her from performing essential daily tasks, like cooking food and pasteurizing water — the most basic of human needs. And the majority of the world's women and children experience these dire consequences of energy poverty: increased disease, and increased violence. True modern energy sources are essential to ensure energy access for all for the basic human needs of cooked food and safe water to drink. And the first step is to properly identify solar energy as ideal, true modern energy.

The World Bank's energy ladder concept identifies modern fuels on a progression from traditional biomass fuels to fossil fuels and electricity. This concept presupposes that fossil fuels and electricity are universally accessible, and sustainably produced. While biomass is renewable, neither fossil fuels nor electricity are renewable or sustainable. Solar energy is sustainable, and also globally accessible regardless of market and infrastructure variables. Recognizing solar energy as true modern energy is essential to achieve the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals.

As a result of the urgency caused by climate change, energy resources starting now and moving into the future, must give focused consideration to variables that were less important only two generations ago. These variables are biology, state of the global ecosystem, and limited fuel sources. Biomass cannot grow at a replacement rate. Fossil fuels are limited by supply and are expensive to purchase, and are costly financially and environmentally. Centralized energy, such as electricity, relies largely on sophisticated infrastructure and is sometimes produced with high-emissions fuels such as coal, or biomass. True modern energy must be decentralized and sustainable. Solar energy is the only fuel that meets these critical criteria.

Too many women — nearly 3 billion — still cook food and pasteurize drinking water with household fuels whose use damages their own health, their children's health, and the health of their habitats. As ecological pressures increase due to climate change, these damages accrue more intensely, and more quickly, in the most vulnerable populations. As women travel further and further from home to gather biomass fuel, they risk being attacked, raped, or killed for the simple act of collecting fuel to cook food and make water safe to drink. As a growing population competes for a finite amount of wood, animal dung, or crop wastes, danger for women and children increases as they travel further from home and safety. Fuel-gatherers risk attack, rape, and even death. Fossil fuels often require government subsidies because the cost is a large percentage of income. Even at a subsidized

price, fossil fuels such as liquefied petroleum gas can be too expensive for villagers to buy. Electricity is generated by water power, biomass, coal, and fossil fuels. Each of these fuels has limitations of supply and distribution. The exception is solar energy.

Solar energy is free and is zero-emission. Solar energy is available to all people irrespective of social status, economic status, gender, or politics. Solar photovoltaic technology permits storage of energy for use as a decentralized source of electricity, and can be available for household use in outlying areas that lack infrastructure. Solar photovoltaic is a sophisticated solar technology that is appropriate in some, but not all, regions. Solar photovoltaic technology continues to increase incrementally in energy efficiency, while costs per unit are decreasing. On the other hand, solar thermal energy, which has the highest energy efficiency of all fuels, by converting light into heat energy, is the ideal, appropriate technology in many regions of the world. Heat storage for solar thermal energy, enables women to cook food and pasteurize water with modern solar thermal energy at night and during inclement weather.

The drive of a market economy favours fuels that are processed or purchased. Solar is neither. The people who would benefit most by using solar energy are also the people least likely to have the resources of education or finances to influence markets and decision-makers. Therefore, it is to a nation's benefit for civil society to inform the public of free, sustainable solar energy, and advocate for policy and education. Additionally, adequate research and funding to upgrade technologies to supply modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, particularly Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States, is essential.

Three responses are needed to ensure equal energy access to attain the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. First, members can correct the structure of the energy ladder by identifying sustainable solar energy as true modern energy. Policymakers and global agencies, such as the World Bank, currently identify unsustainable energy sources, such as gas, Liquefied Petroleum Gas, and electricity as true modern energy. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals compels a revision of the energy ladder. Increased adoption of appropriate, solar energy technologies is essential to achieve Goal 5 and 7, as well as the goal set by the World Bank to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030.

The second action requires legislative policies that support innovation and research in solar technologies. Policy is an important driver and accelerator of change, and a strong market influencer. Because of the need for urgent action to address climate change, new and augmented policies that support innovation in solar energy capture must be included in agendas at the international, national, and regional levels.

Third, involving women in the use of and innovation of solar technologies would increase economic opportunities for women, and empower them to take charge of their own physical and economic safety. Most household cooks are women, and they are heavily tasked with gathering and purchasing household fuel. Up to 40 per cent of this energy provided by women is used to heat water, a use for which solar thermal technologies are particularly appropriate. Using free solar energy to reduce household energy use for water heating, and cooking, permits women to divert household income to food, clothing, education, and other

household purchases that support human dignity and increase the family's standard of living. And women can divert gained time to the pursuit of education, income-generating activity, and rest. Combining the gain of time formerly used to gather fuel, the reduced total of fuel purchased, the lessened risk of violence and danger while gathering fuels, and the decrease in inhaling emissions, we see that solar energy use can be life-changing, particularly for women living in less developed countries.

The rapid acceleration of climate change calls for a corresponding rapid change in human practices. By focusing resources and policies on the development of sustainable solar energy, particularly solar thermal technologies, we have the greatest potential to attain the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Strong messages and advocacy for the development of solar energy technologies, both thermal and solar photovoltaic, are needed to achieve the 2030 goals.

We call on the Commission on the Status of Women to identify solar energy as modern, sustainable energy with the greatest potential to ensure energy access for women worldwide.
