



ADDRESS

BY

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(ECREEE)

MANO RIVER UNION CONFERENCE ON ENERGY AND GENDER

**“WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ENERGY
ACCESS IN THE MANU RIVERT UNION (MRU) SUB-REGION”**

FREETOWN- SIERRA LEONE

7 - 9 MAY 2013

FREETOWN, 7 MAY 2013

- **His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone**
- **Her Excellency, the Secretary General of the Mano River Union**
- **The Honourable Minister for Energy of the Republic of Sierra Leone**
- **Honorable Ministers for Energy in the Mano River Union**
- **Honorable Ministers for Gender in the Mano River Union**
- **The Honourable Representative of the Environmental Protection Agency of Sierra Leone**
- **The Honourable Representative of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization**
- **The Honourable Representative of the African Development Bank**
- **Your Excellences, Ambassadors and Heads of Diplomatic Missions**
- **Distinguished Delegates of the Mano River Union**
- **Distinguished Delegates of the ECOWAS Commission**
- **Distinguished Representatives of International Organizations**
- **Distinguished Representatives of non-governmental organizations**
- **Distinguished Guests**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this high level conference on “Women’s Economic Empowerment through Energy Access in the Mano River Union”, and to the beautiful green country of Sierra Leone.

I will like to congratulate the Government of Sierra Leone, and the Mano River Union as a whole for taking the initiative to organize a conference in West Africa dedicated to an issue that is increasingly gaining prominence, as a front burner in the international discourse on global sustainable economic development.

You will agree with me that the Member States of the Mano River Union deserve to be highly commended for this bold step in the right direction. ECREEE is proud to have contributed to this effort and wishes to reaffirm to the people of the Mano River Union, its continued support and availability to partner with the Governments and people of the Mano River Union region to bring about sustainable development in the sub-region.

I will like to thank, especially, everyone who has contributed in one way or another to the organization and success of this conference.

We are also grateful to all the participants who have gathered here today for this historic event.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Indeed, the need for women's economic empowerment is not a matter reserved for developing regions alone, but is an objective shared by all countries, both developed and developing, and is one that will require a collective global effort if we are to succeed in addressing this challenge.

For years, women have received the short end of the stick, not having access to equal opportunities as men to social and economic development. Critical factors, such as lack of access to finance, legal and regulatory barriers, and the lack of appropriate education and technical skills have served to hinder women's full participation as significant agents for economic development.

However, despite these barriers, it is evident that where conditions appear to be even slightly favourable, women stand out as shrewd entrepreneurs. In the United States, for example, the World Bank figures show that women-owned businesses are growing at twice the rate of other businesses, creating about 23 million jobs for the country, and contributing about \$3 trillion to the United States economy.

In Africa, the number of women-led businesses is growing as well. The growth is occurring mostly in the informal sector where women make up about 63%. These businesses provide women with the means to provide for themselves and their family, thereby contributing to solving one of Africa's greatest challenges, poverty.

But it is too early to pat ourselves on the back; with the barriers still unaddressed, gainful and highly productive business opportunities remain largely inaccessible to women. Examples of such lucrative

business opportunities exist in the green energy sector, a sector poised for significant growth potential.

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA) forecasts, globally, clean energy will provide half the electricity generation in the next 25 years, attracting an investment of up to \$5.9 trillion. Already, the sector has created about 5 million jobs globally.

Ladies and Gentlemen, urgent and committed efforts have to be made today to change the status quo, if we are to ensure that this era of green energy development does not become another lost economic opportunity for our women.

At ECREEE, we are determined that women gain from investments in the ECOWAS region's renewable energy and energy efficiency sector as much as their male counterparts. Through the "ECOWAS Initiative on Mainstreaming Gender in Energy Access", ECREEE is working, in collaboration with the ECOWAS Member States and its partners, to address the core barriers that hinder women from

benefiting, in the economic sense and otherwise, from the renewable energy and energy efficiency market development.

Some of our activities in this regard, include:

Capacity development: In June 2012 in Dakar, Senegal, we conducted a training on Gender and Sustainable Energy. We also organized a workshop and adopted an Action Plan on the West African Clean Cooking Alliance (WACCA), in Burkina Faso in April 2013 and, of course, this Conference on Women's Economic Empowerment through Energy Access in the Mano River Union sub-region;

Secondly, in support of gender-sensitive clean energy policy developments in the region, ECREEE, with support from ENERGIA, ensured that the regional Policy on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency was gender sensitive. The Centre will now work with ECOWAS Member States to develop their National Renewable Energy Action Plans (NREAPs) which will build on lessons learnt in

developing the regional policies to ensure that Member States adopt action plans that meet sustainable gender requirements;

Through knowledge management and awareness creation activities, we plan to promote synergies on efforts implemented on gender equity in energy access. Also, ECREEE is building a West African network on Gender and Sustainable Energy. This will provide a platform for sharing best practices and lessons learnt from on-going efforts in the region.

Through our work in investment promotion and advocacy, our energy facilities, which considers amongst others, the contribution of the intended project in mainstreaming gender in energy access, we are able to bring about the implementation of renewable energy and energy efficiency projects that contribute meaningfully to the lives of men, women and the society as a whole. ECREEE also advocates for women's participation at the policy level and at the project level.

As a rule, ECREEE strives to adopt gender-sensitive approaches in its interventions, activities and programmes to ensure that they meet the energy and development needs of men and women in the ECOWAS region equally.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Empowering Women through Energy Access may take two forms. One is where through improving energy access, energy is made more available for income generation activities. The other is where women are made active actors in the business of expanding energy access through renewable energy and energy efficiency market development. This conference is therefore critical and timely.

Later today, we will listen to case-study presentations from countries in the Mano River Union and the ECOWAS region on the productive applications of renewable energy and energy efficiency to enhancing women's entrepreneurship.

Tomorrow, we will have an interactive session on how to mainstream gender in energy access at the policy and project levels, develop strategies for economically empowering women through energy access, and, drawing from our experiences, we will collaboratively develop an Action Plan for the Mano River Union. And finally, on the third day, we will establish a working group that will be charged with the responsibility of effectively implementing this Action Plan.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am therefore confident that this conference will provide impactful outcomes and contribute to achieving greater women participation in the Mano River Union's energy sector. This will, no doubt, also be of immense benefit for the entire ECOWAS region.

I look forward to the interesting deliberations that will take place here and wish you all a very successful conference. Thank you for your kind attention.