



## Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

National Meeting on “Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurial Development in the Rural Context: The Role of Renewable Energy”

UN-ESCWA, Beirut – Lebanon, 30-31 July 2019

### INFORMATION NOTE

Within the framework of the “Regional Initiative for Promoting Small-Scale Renewable Energy Applications in rural areas of the Arab Region (REGEND)” Project, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) is organizing a National Meeting on “Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurial Development in the Rural Context: The Role of Renewable Energy” with the aim of sharing experiences and formulating gender mainstreaming and human rights strategy and action plans to support policy makers, government and local institutions in operationalizing a gender equality and human rights approach in the energy sector in Arab countries. The meeting will be held in Beirut, Lebanon on the 30-31 July 2019 at the UN House.

#### 1. Background Information

In September 2015, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, progress in sustainable energy can no longer be seen as separate from other socioeconomic development goals in the Arab region. Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (SDG 7) is essential for the achievement of virtually all development goals, including the fight against poverty (SDG 1); in support of greater gender equality (SDG 5); decent work opportunities and economic growth (SDG 8); and the development of modern industries, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9). The fragile natural resource balance in many parts of the Arab region, coupled with rapid and rising economic expectations by the region’s young and increasingly educated populations, means that managing the natural assets of Arab countries takes centre stage in ensuring that future generations can lead stable and successful lives.

Energy is crucially interconnected with a whole range of other factors for developmental success. Accessible, affordable and reliable modern energy remains the ‘engine’ for development. From its close link to the security of water and food supplies, sustainable energy is key to driving progress in development goals such as:

- universalizing access to modern health services and education
- gender equality and women empowerment
- the creation of sustainable living spaces
- technology innovation and productivity
- critical progress in mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change

In this context, gender disparity in economic and social sectors is a critical issue that needs to be addressed

towards achieving social and economic equity. Equally important, energy affects women and men differently as men and women have different roles and responsibilities in households, markets and social spheres, which makes their access, use, and impact of energy services also different. Improving gender equality and social inclusion is essential to fully realize the development impact of many energy programs. The path to achieving SDG 5 and SDG 7 therefore indeed interlinks gender equality and energy access.

The UN-ESCWA is implementing the “Regional Initiative for Promoting Small-Scale Renewable Energy Applications in rural areas of the Arab region (REGEND)”. This regional initiative is a Sida-funded project and includes several partners in implementation such as the League of Arab States (LAS), line ministries, local authorities, various regional organizations and Arab Women associations, UN organizations, local and regional NGOs, research institutions and academia.

Women empowerment and gender equality constitute an integral part of REGEND’s activities and expected outputs and are considered a cross-cutting priority along the various phases of its implementation.

By using appropriate small-scale renewable energy technologies for productive activities and entrepreneurial development, REGEND aims to:

- improve the livelihood, economic benefits, social inclusion and gender equality of Arab rural communities, particularly marginalized groups, bottom-up approach by addressing energy poverty, water scarcity and vulnerability to climate change and other natural resources challenges in three targeted countries, namely: Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia.
- establish a gender-based advisory network with expertise in developing energy entrepreneurial skills in rural areas to bring together practitioners from around the world and the Arab region to share experiences, emerging tools, available resources, and knowledge on gender and energy.

In addition, the UN-ESCWA Centre for Women (ECW) carries out research on gender equality in the region and evaluates the impact of national policies, legislation and programs on gender issues. Priority issues for the center include gender-based violence, women’s economic participation and access to resources, female political participation, women and the knowledge society, and women, peace and security. The ECW strives to find suitable solutions to the problem of gender discrimination, organizes capacity-building throughout the region and advises member States on gender issues and on reporting to human rights bodies on their compliance with international conventions on the rights of women.

In this context, UN-ESCWA, in partnership with ENERGIA, is organizing this National Meeting on “Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurial Development in the Rural Context: The Role of Renewable Energy” by building on REGEND’s ongoing activities and the expertise of ECW, ENERGIA, UN agencies, international organizations, and the valued stakeholders and participants. The meeting will feature presentations and experience-sharing discussion panels that will cover women empowerment, entrepreneurial development, and renewable energy in the rural context.

## **2. Objectives of the Meeting**

Based on the country gender assessment study that was launched within the framework of REGEND in early 2019 to evaluate gender mainstreaming, social inclusion and human rights processes and outcomes of access to energy in targeted rural communities, the National Meeting is organized by UN-ESCWA to convene key partners, energy entities and local rural communities to:

- Review the findings and outcomes of the study
- Discuss the potential benefits of realizing the rights of marginalized groups in rural areas
- Create synergies between key sectors (energy, water, agricultural, tourism, services, industries, etc.)
- Share experiences and foster learning between stakeholders and participants on the challenges and opportunities facing women empowerment and entrepreneurial development in the energy sector and opportunities that renewable energy could offer.

- To identify key experts and practitioners to be part of the gender-based advisory network on energy and entrepreneurial skills in rural development at the national and Arab regional level.
- Formulate actionable recommendations for mainstreaming gender and human rights in policy planning, capacity building, and awareness raising for rural areas.

The key messages and recommendations of the meeting will serve as the basis for suggesting a gender mainstreaming and human rights strategy and action plans to support policy makers, government and local institutions in operationalizing a gender equality and human rights approach in the energy sector in Arab countries. These elements will serve in developing the capacity building programs and awareness-raising campaigns to be undertaken within the framework of REGEND and to be suggested for local/public institutions for follow-up after the project completion to ensure sustainability.

The National Meeting will also feed into the process of establishing the gender-based advisory network on energy and entrepreneurial skills in rural development that will support in applying the aforementioned gender mainstreaming and human rights strategy and action plans.

### **3. Participants**

The National Meeting will bring together various local, regional, and international gender and energy experts, NGOs, government ministries and entities, UN organizations, and research institutions and academia.

### **4. Date and Venue**

The National Meeting on “Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurial Development in the Rural Context: The Role of Renewable Energy” will be held in Beirut on 30-31 of July 2019 at the UN House.

Registration is scheduled for 8:30 A.M. on Tuesday, 30 July 2019. The meeting will conclude by 02:00 P.M. on Wednesday, 31 July 2019. The draft agenda will be circulated to registered participants.

### **5. Language of the Meeting**

The meeting will be conducted in the Arabic and English languages. Simultaneous interpretation from and into the Arabic and English languages will be provided.

### **6. Correspondence**

All correspondence related to the seminar is to be sent to either one of the three addresses:

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