



**Report: 78<sup>th</sup> Commission organised by the Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).**

**Title: The Importance of Inclusion in Reversing Inequalities.**

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Soroptimist International was represented at the 78<sup>th</sup> Commission organised by the Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2022. The 78<sup>th</sup> Commission provided a crucial platform for member States in the Asia Pacific to deliberate on their priorities and actions to achieve the targets under SDG 7 aimed at “ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.” As Soroptimist International’s UN Representative, I attended the side event entitled “Strategic Priorities for Adoption of Emerging Technologies in the Energy Sector for Climate Change Mitigation” on 24 May. The side event was jointly organised by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India, and the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT) of the United Nations ESCAP.

In the Asia Pacific’s transition to climate-friendly energy sources, embracing new technologies is especially important because the region is one of the most vulnerable to climate change. Rising sea levels threaten many countries as well as their coastal areas. In fact the region accounts for nearly half of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the world today. According to the ESCAP 2021 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) progress report, it is documented that Asia Pacific countries are struggling to achieve the targets outlined under SDG 13 (Climate Action) by 2030. Much then needs to be implemented to scale up the usage of clean and efficient technologies by adopting emerging technologies, especially since the Asia Pacific as a region is the largest energy consumer in the world.

Challenges persist, as obstacles continue to exist in the region’s path towards achieving the targets of Goal 7 by 2030. These encompass access, efficiency, and deployment of renewable energy. Then there are the problems of affordability, low quantity, quality, and reliability of the power supply. A gender aspect shows up in these obstacles as well: in the region: almost half of the population lacks access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking. Not forgetting that there remains the problem of implementation of and compliance with national regulations within countries.

While the transition to green energy has its challenges, opportunities abound. Saikat Chakrabarti, chief of staff to Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) is quoted as saying: “the Green New Deal ... [is not just a] climate thing ... [but] is a how-do-you-change-the-entire-economy thing” (Montgomery, *The Washington Post Magazine*, 10 July 2019). In this regard, the focus should be on “more sustainability in that prosperity” which can only be achieved through the remaking of structures of the world as we know it. In order to ensure that our fight against climate change and the adoption of the green agenda does not leave already marginalised individuals and communities behind, the new vision to build green economies has to be accompanied by the raising of human capital levels and provision of new job prospects.

To get to this destination, countries in the Asia Pacific region need to implement viable policy and strategy options in accordance with global governance structures related to climate action. As in other areas, partnerships and the

sharing of best practices are integral to helping countries and communities make an effective and efficient shift to cleaner energy sources. Aside from good practices, regulatory environments and strategies are important. The panellists of the side event presented compelling examples for how India has transitioned to a greener economy. The discussion revolved around the many advantages of innovative applications linked to the green energy sector such as efficiency improvement, emissions reduction, reliability, and cost optimisation. Besides, the presentations highlighted important information entailing strategies, frameworks, pathways, actions and good practices that could be adopted to combat climate change.

The event threw light on how Soroptimist International clubs in the various countries in which we operate could become involved in helping communities and, in turn, countries in the Asia Pacific region make a shift from fossil fuel dependence towards green energy. Emerging technologies play a critical part in fighting climate change. Importantly, the switch to low carbon energy provides a massive opportunity for Soroptimist International at the club level to help the Asia Pacific countries meet the targets under SDG 7 through promoting green energy sources at the community level.

Handing out solar panels to women at the community level serves the objectives of welfare, on the one hand, and access, on the other hand, to clean energy sources: Soroptimist International should engage beyond just distributing solar panels to women. We need to position women to control these resources and work towards facilitating communities to adopt the green agenda to the extent that women can achieve direct control over access to resources (Longwe 2002, pp. 6-7).

First, there is a need to recognise that these new technologies represent a business opportunity for women. For example, local women could be encouraged to actively engage in the buying and selling of solar panels. Soroptimist International at the club level could become involved in introducing successful business models to local women; especially since numerous innovative trade models are emerging, such as social enterprises and inclusive businesses, so adopting market-based approaches and, at the same time, addressing social and environmental challenges. And as pointed out by one of the panellists, Professor Rangan Banarjee, these new technologies are “less disruptive” when they are fed into the existing ecosystem and provide employment. Soroptimist International operating at the grassroots might also become part of the solution as it facilitates the provision of relevant training on business strategies relating to the adoption of these new technologies to grassroots women. If we are not able to undertake this task ourselves, we could act as an intermediary in this regard, connecting local women to organisations or corporations that are able to provide the relevant upskilling.

Second, if the business costs are prohibitive; Soroptimist International operating at the club level could step in to connect communities of women with private sector companies, especially with the emergence of a new wave of investors who are in business to invest for impact rather than invest for profit. In fact this should not be a problem since a growing number of corporations are realigning their priorities with the SDGs.

Countries in the Asia Pacific are at a crossroads in their development trajectory. At this crucial juncture of the history of humankind worldwide, in which sustainable development is more important than economic growth, as we know it, Soroptimist International is well-positioned to engage and support countries and communities to make the crucial shift towards green energy: especially because we work tirelessly at the grassroots level through our numerous clubs. This is the time we should capitalise on our strengths. We possess in-depth knowledge and extensive expertise of working at the grassroots, and are acutely aware of the needs, interests and concerns of women. Moreover, because we work at the global and local levels, we have a profound understanding of the opportunities, on the one hand, and the challenges, on the other, of women from all walks of life in the Asia Pacific in their desire to achieve gender equality.

References:

- Longwe, Sara H. 2002. 'Addressing Rural Gender Issues: A Framework for Leadership and Mobilisation.' Paper presented at the III World Congress for Rural Women, Madrid, Spain, October.
- Montgomery, David. 2019. "AOC's Chief of Change," *The Washington Post Magazine*, 10 July