



# Solar Energy to Alleviate Poverty and Generate Income



ESCWA is championing the use of modern technologies to alleviate poverty and generate income while preserving the environment. Most recently, it organized the first of a series of six hands-on technical workshops on the manufacture of solar water heaters tailored for small industrialists and technicians. The sessions focus on transferring cost-effective and environmentally-sound methods of generating energy while still making a profit.

The training program is in line with efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through the use of appropriate renewable technologies. The program is an outcome of a memorandum of understanding signed between ESCWA, the Lebanese Solar Energy Society (LSES) and the Lebanese Industrial Research Institute (IRI) to establish an on-going practical,

training in solar thermal water heater manufacturing, installation and maintenance. Twelve small enterprises and service providers benefited from the first training session that was conducted from July to August. The workshops are based on a training manual prepared by the project partners and delivered by the partner organizations. Participants are taught the basic components of manufacturing solar heaters, maintaining them, and testing them according to Lebanese quality standards.

Why should we use solar heaters? Besides offering clean energy and undeniable environmental benefits, this method to heat water is less costly for individual consumers than electrical water heaters and provides an economic benefit to the national economy by creating new employment opportunities as well as reducing pressure on the national elec-

tricity grid. In Lebanon, switching to solar water heating could also reduce dependence on imported energy, take a load off the electricity network and reduce the number of power cuts experienced in urban centers.

The initiative will provide ongoing training opportunities, with a second one scheduled to begin on October 1st; other sessions will follow in 2010 and 2011. The main objectives of the workshops are to generate new employment opportunities through the use of renewable energy alternatives while ensure environmental sustainability and reduce carbon dioxide emissions, which in turn helps to mitigate climate change impacts. The training program is also designed to assist small and medium-sized enterprises to improve their productivity and competitiveness, and expand their operations through

the development of new value-added products by engaging in the manufacture of simple and cost-effective technologies.

This training program was launched with the financial support of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), under the overall framework of the ESCWA initiative on Technology, Employment and Poverty Alleviation (TEPA). The TEPA initiative aims at creating employment opportunities to benefit disadvantaged communities through the promotion of modern technologies and the implementation of pilot projects. Under this umbrella, similar employment and income generation projects have been launched by ESCWA to support small producers in the agricultural and garment manufacturing sectors. ■

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# Women's Participation in the Economy

ESCWA gathered experts from five different member countries to address the issue of women's economic empowerment and give their feedback on two studies developed under this theme by consultants for ESCWA.

The expert group meeting on Women's Economic Participation was held on 18-19 August at the UN House- Beirut, to examine the studies entitled "Women's control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including micro finance", and "The impact of the financial crisis on the advancement of Women in the Arab Region".

Both studies will be used as input to the 4th Committee on Women, scheduled in October 2009, and both will be made available in Arabic and English. The study on control over economic resources will be the regional input for the 2009 issue of the UN World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, which has the same focus.



The first study noted important findings, putting the finger on delicate issues such as the lack of statistics, which, when available, are often not disaggregated by sex or seem unreliable because official numbers are so different from field survey results.

According to the study, women's economic participation has increased in the region, but compared to other world regions it is still very low, and there is a high level of economic dependency with all the social consequences this implies. Women are often employed in the informal sector, and when they own their own businesses, they do not actually manage them most of the time, having to leave this task up to a male family member. When they are employed, there are wage gaps between them and their male colleagues, but due to lack of data, there is no reliable statistical evidence for this. The study also provided an overview on women's legal situation, i.e. how labour laws, inheritance laws, and social security laws affect them.

Entitled "The impact of the financial crisis

on the advancement of Women in the Arab Region", the second study noted the losses Arab women will suffer further to the world economic crisis. The study said that working women in Arab countries are the first to be affected by economic crises and to lose their employment, whereas they are the last to benefit of times of economic prosperity.

Despite a lack of official statistics, the study found that Arab women are mostly employed in the services sector. It added that this sector was dealt a big blow by the current economic crisis, which will in turn reflect on these women.

The current crisis has granted governments the chance to change their macro-economic policies and now is the time for investments to be directed at ensuring gender equality, the study says. It recommended in this regard encouraging initiatives by both private and public sectors towards empowering women, namely by giving them priority in investments, micro-credits and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). ■



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