

CONCEPT NOTE



ECOWAS WOMEN'S BUSINESS FUND

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE) launched a flagship programme entitled ECOWAS Programme on Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access (ECOW-GEN). The programme was established against the background that women's potential, in the ECOWAS region, as producers and suppliers of energy services is under-utilized and that empowering women to make significant contributions in the implementation of the adopted regional renewable energy and energy efficiency policies is necessary for the achievement of the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) goals in West Africa. Moreover, the programme is founded upon the principles of the ECOWAS Gender Policy which emphasizes the "need to develop policies and programmes to provide alternative energy sources which would contribute to women's health and also alleviate their time burden".

To stimulate the development of women-led business initiatives in the energy sector, ECREEE, through the support of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development (AECID), established the ECOWAS Women's Business Fund. ECREEE will work with Member States to identify and support, through the fund, innovative energy projects implemented by women groups and associations. In addition to this, ECREEE will assist Member States to establish similar funds in their respective

countries, with the objective to consolidate the incremental benefits of this initiative in the ECOWAS region.

2. BACKGROUND

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) consists of 15 countries making up 16% of Africa's total surface area and with a population of approximately 300 million inhabitants, equalling roughly one third of Africa's total population. Despite its vast energy resources (both conventional and renewable energies) the region is facing an energy crisis that continues to stand in the way of its economic development goals.

With finance, for investments in energy expansion, being a scarce resource, development experts recommend that investment in energy access be tied to energy for productive uses, especially at the micro-level¹. Such a model will benefit women who suffer more as a result of the region's energy challenges, as it is mainly women who rely on traditional biomass for cooking, affecting their time-use and health. This continuing situation denies women equal opportunities to improve themselves, socially and economically.

Considering that women and their energy needs are rarely well represented at the institutional and policy levels, it is, therefore, necessary that women are rendered some assistance to enable them participate in the benefits coming from the new developments in the energy sector.

ECOW-GEN works to strengthen women economically by improving energy access for income generating activities and, more importantly, empowering women as active actors in developing renewable energy and energy efficiency markets.

The overall goal of ECOW-GEN is to work with Member States to mainstream gender in national policy formulation, legislative drafting, project and programme design and implementation as it concerns energy development in the region so as to ensure that the energy needs of both men and women are adequately met and the objectives of the aforementioned ECOWAS sustainable energy policies achieved.

ECOW-GEN operates through four strategic approaches, namely to:

¹ Njeri Wamukonya (2002) A critical look at gender and energy mainstreaming in Africa. Available online at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/forum-sustdev/Njeri-paper.pdf>

- *Steer and support the development of gender-sensitive and gender-specific policies within the ECOWAS region:* the programme aims to enable Member States close the gender gaps existing in the energy sector by supporting them in developing gender responsive policies;
- *Improve knowledge management, awareness creation and advocacy on gender and energy issues:* through information, education and communication (IEC) materials and a regional gender and energy network ECOW-GEN is implementing actions to educate the general public on gender and energy issues in order to systematically address sociocultural barriers;
- *Build and strengthen capacities for gender mainstreaming in energy policies and projects:* ECOW-GEN strives to address capacity related barriers by conducting tailored training activities aimed at enabling energy ministries and other relevant institutions within the ECOWAS mainstream gender into their operations. And, on the other hand, equipping women entrepreneurs with skills to start-up and manage sustainable energy businesses.
- *Implement gender-responsive investment and business promotion for sustainable energy development in the ECOWAS region:* ECOW-GEN's activities under this strategic approach are aimed at supporting the deployment and up-scaling of women-led energy businesses through the ECOWAS Women's Business Fund.

3. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The objective of the ECOWAS Women's Business Fund is to support the establishment of energy businesses driven by women entrepreneurs, which will contribute to addressing the energy challenges in the region as well as to women's economic empowerment.

It is expected that through this initiative:

- commercially viable energy projects will be initiated and ran by women, with several others replicated throughout the Member States as a result; and
- women entrepreneurs will gain the necessary skills to be competitive as producers and suppliers in the energy sector.

The ECOWAS Women's Business Fund will be implemented in two phases: the pilot phase and the operational phase of the fund, which will be implemented based on lessons learned from the pilot phase.

Below is a description of the implementation strategy.

3.1 Identification of Women associations: Through calls of Expression of Interest (EOI), ECREEE with the energy ministries in the respective Member States will identify women associations that have distinguished themselves in the gender and energy field. From this pool, each of the associations identified will be evaluated against a set of criteria based on past and ongoing projects; participation in development activities; partnership building and networking strength; commercial viability, e.t.c. After this evaluation process one, from each country, will be selected.

3.1 Identification of projects for grant support: Working with the women associations selected, ECREEE will identify projects that will be supported through the fund. This could be on-going energy projects which could be up-scaled or, through ECREEE's technical assistance, a new project will be designed. The support provided through the fund will be based on a co-financing arrangement, where the recipients of this grant may make in-kind or cash contributions. The essence of this is to ensure that the beneficiaries own the project, rather than consider them as gifts. In addition to this, the beneficiary will report to ECREEE its expenditures of the grant according to the signed agreement. Moreover, the beneficiary will be responsible for raising awareness and promoting visibility for the project being implemented through the fund, based on the awareness strategy agreed with ECREEE.

Women's technical Exchange program: with the objective to disseminate the knowledge and experiences acquired through the project's implementation process, as well as to facilitate inter and intra country collaboration, ECREEE will implement the Women's technical Exchange Program to complement the ECOWAS Women's Business Fund.

Through this program, women associations will have the opportunity to learn from other women associations in different countries, through a combination of face-to-face trainings and e-learning activities.

The fund will be managed by ECREEE, with the support of an Advisory Group, comprised of the ECOWAS energy ministries, donors and technical partners.

With a larger number of women-led energy business initiatives existing in Ghana and Senegal, these countries were chosen to serve as pilots for this fund, starting with a budget of 40,000 EUR for the two countries. It is envisaged that the fund will be extended to the rest of the Member countries by 2015, which will mark the end of the pilot phase and the start of the operational phase of the fund.