



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-second session

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### **Statement submitted by Public-Private Alliance Foundation, Solar Cookers International, Soroptimist International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women rightly prioritizes gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. The future we want can only be achieved by supporting strategies for rural women and girls to participate equally in inclusive sustainable development. Categorically, rural women are the world's poorest citizens. Empowering rural women and girls is critical to leave no one behind in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Public-Private Alliance Foundation, Solar Cookers International, and Soroptimist International support the innovation, use, and promotion of solar technologies in pursuing challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

Finding a source of energy for basic household chores is a gargantuan task for the nearly 3 billion who cook and make water safe to drink over open fires. In rural regions of extreme poverty, biomass and fossil fuels are more expensive as a proportion of household income than in more developed urban regions. This creates a cycle of energy poverty which degrades human quality of life. Solar cooking addresses these challenges because solar thermal cookers use free solar energy, generate no emissions, and reduce energy dependence on fossil and biomass fuels. Access to free solar thermal energy for cooking may be the key to break the cycle of poverty.

Lack of energy access is a primary barrier for women's participation in inclusive sustainable development. To empower women and girls in vulnerable populations, it is imperative that women access alternative, sustainable sources of energy. Because women's traditional tasks themselves involve human energy, or are the source of obtaining unsustainable fuels, addressing energy poverty is a foundational step to achieve gender equality. Many types of solar cookers permit cooking without being attended by a woman or child, freeing additional valuable time for other family or community tasks, entrepreneurial activities, or study. Women can regain time that used to be spent gathering or earning fuel for cooking. Many aspects of the human experience and environmental impact are changing at an accelerating pace. Inclusion of women in sustainable development will ensure that women will be empowered to create a role for themselves and make significant contributions to our sustainably developed world and future.

Changing global temperatures have impacted crop yields, human safety, and fresh water resources. Traditional women's roles are often closely linked to agriculture. Though environmental impact from climate change is not restricted by gender, the first to be most affected by changes in weather and climate are often rural women and girls who are the most vulnerable to shocks. To feed themselves and cook for their families, women must adapt quickly to limited resources and continuously search for alternative solutions. These quests can be increasingly dangerous as women and children leave safety to gather or purchase household fuels.

Many women experience violence in their quest to acquire household fuels. When women are in remote areas gathering cooking fuel, rape, disfigurement, and even death from violence can be the tragic result. Such physical and emotional trauma affect women's and girls' ability to participate fully in many normal, satisfying activities, and impact a woman's desire and ability to pursue her life goals. Decentralized solar energy can improve women's safety and social roles by reducing exposure to predators and violent attacks.

In rural and indigenous communities, cooking is often performed by women over a traditional fire, often inside unvented living quarters. Cooking smoke is proven

to degrade respiratory health and cause premature death. Because solar cookers are no-emission cooking appliances and can heat water to make it safe to drink, women have reduced respiratory diseases. Waterborne illnesses are reduced, too. Therefore, solar cooking improves a woman's respiratory health, her quality of life, and her strength of spirit, which support the equalization of gender roles.

Thus we see that rural women and girls who live in extreme poverty must complete their daily activities despite three deficits: lack of health, lack of affordable and sustainable energy alternatives, and lack of physical safety.

Not only the current generation of women suffer. A lack of affordable, sustainable energy alternatives results in generations of children being stuck in the cycle of energy poverty. When rural women spend up to nine hours every week or more to provide household fuel for cooking and heating water, their potential is limited proportionally. To achieve a sustainable future for all, no one can be left behind. Therefore, improving energy access with solar technologies is a first achievement that frees women to participate equally in sustainable economic activities. Therefore, providing access to clean, sustainable energy for cooking and water pasteurization is an essential step to engage women in sustainable development activities.

Freed from a portion of the time and money costs associated with obtaining fuel, women are freed to be key participants and leaders in promoting solar technologies in their communities to improve quality of life for all. As quality of life improves, women can assume leadership roles in their communities and economic opportunities in their homes.

Improved environmental sustainability, including access to clean water, remains a global goal for civil society. The time and cost expenses of household fuels leave few resources for education, contribute to gender inequality, and result in higher risks of rape, attack and murder when searching for biomass fuel. A solar cooker can save up to one ton of wood per year thereby greatly reducing hours worked by women and girls. And carbon dioxide emissions are reduced by 1.46 tons per year of average use for every solar cooker. And important additional benefits for women include improved respiratory health.

Access to energy is improved as well. Solar thermal energy is a decentralized source of power. Women can access energy for their family's basic needs independent of centralized energy infrastructure. Women living in the most remote areas can access solar thermal energy for cooking on-site, without depending on vendors, logistics, politics, or a degraded environment to provide fuel. Because solar thermal energy is collected and used locally, women's safety is protected, and women's time and money are conserved.

Solar cookers have helped in the promotion of gender equality and in the empowerment of women. When a woman has access to local, free, no-emission solar thermal energy, she can begin to break the cycle of poverty that grips her family.

Earth's climate is changing rapidly, and the human community must respond at an accelerated pace. Freeing time and resources for our world's most vulnerable population — our rural women and girls — will enable them to make significant contributions though their work in the world's most distressed communities. Empowering women to engage equally in inclusive sustainable development is critical to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and solar cooking is an important first step.

Solar cooking aligns with all 17 SDGs. For goal 5, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, for instance, using solar thermal cookers reduces women's and children's exposure to violence when gathering biomass fuels. By using

free solar energy for cooking, women and children can gain on average nine hours per week in time, and their exposure to danger is reduced by nine hours per week, also. When time is redirected to education, women and girls are empowered for leadership roles.

We call on the Commission on the Status of Women to identify access to solar energy for clean, sustainable cooking as a key contributor to gender equality and women's economic empowerment, particularly for women and girls who live in remote tribal areas.

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