



## **PRESS CONFERENCE OPENING STATEMENT**

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Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, members of the press, Good afternoon, and welcome to this press conference on the Launch of the ECOWAS Facility for Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access.

It is a great pleasure to have this conference in Senegal, the same country where, about 4 months ago, the ECOWAS Policy on Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access was validated and adopted by the region's energy and gender experts. The Policy, which has been widely referred to as the first of its kind, works to ensure that the region's goal of

universal access to energy services by 2030 is achieved. The Policy seeks to create a level playing field that enables ECOWAS countries to harness and utilize its male and female human capital to the fullest.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

We are all aware of the energy situation in our countries; issues of blacks-outs and brown outs remain persistent. As a region, less than 50% of the 300 million inhabitants have access to electricity. The per-capita electricity consumption in the ECOWAS region is averaged at 88 kWh compared 13,000 kWh for United States- a country with almost the same population as our region but consuming 150 times per capita of Energy as we do.

Without universal access to energy services, achieving the status of being a globally competitive economy will be impossible to attain. Presently, 11 out of the 15 countries in the region are classified as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPICs). It is clear why eradicating energy poverty is imbedded in the heart of the region's development agenda.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

With half of the population unserved, there is a clear, and pressing need for ECOWAS citizens to be empowered to

match supply with demand. It is for this reason that barriers to energy access for the other half do not make any sense and should not be allowed to continue to exist.

Women, till today, continue to face barriers and challenges that hinder them from participating in and contributing to improving energy access in the region. Some of these barriers include lack of access to finance and technical know-how.

It is against this background that the ECOWAS Facility for Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access is being launched today. The Facility is a funding vehicle created for the specific purpose of operationalizing the ECOWAS Policy for Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access, which aims to address existing barriers to the equal participation of men and women in expanding access to energy in the region, and thus contribute to the success of the sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative.

Thus, through the Facility, ECOWAS and its development partners (some of who are seated here today) will provide technical and financial support to upscale the deployment of projects that simultaneously promote gender equality and improve energy access in the ECOWAS region. The Facility will support women entrepreneurs, on one hand and, on the other, will support energy projects and investments that will lead to women's empowerment.

The Facility's first operational phase will run from 2016 – 2019 and will support gender-responsive energy projects and investments worth 5 Million Euro. Today, we are launching

the call for proposals for the pilot phase, with a grant size of 500,000 Euro. I am therefore encouraging relevant Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies; International and local civil society organizations (CSOs); Women and Community-based groups and associations (including youth organizations); Entrepreneurs; Private sector organizations; Academia and research institutions, all over the ECOWAS region, to submit their proposals until 31 December 2015.

### **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Press**

This is a historic moment for us. With such regional initiatives I am convinced that we are not just on the path, but on the right path to achieving universal energy access, as no one (whether male or female) is left out in the region's development.

I would like to thank our partners in this endeavor: the UN Women; the Austrian Development Agency (ADA); the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), the United States' National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) and the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN); the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the African Development Bank for their support,

I will also like to use this opportunity to invite others to join us, as we work towards an ECOWAS region with universal access to energy.

Thank you for your kind attention.