

National Summit on Powering Sustainable Livelihoods

The National Summit on Powering Sustainable Livelihoods, organised by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and Villgro, was held at ITC Maurya, New Delhi, on 17 May 2023. Development Alternatives, represented by Kanika Verma, Associate Vice President, participated in a panel discussion titled “Clean Energy to Boost Incomes: Realising a \$50 billion Opportunity”. The panel was moderated by Abhishek Jain, Fellow and Director - Powering Livelihoods, CEEW. It included Jeevan Kumar Sethi, Senior Director Ministry of New and Renewable Energy; Sridhar Easwaran, Head of Strategic Partnerships, Institution and Capacity Building, Samunnati Foundation; Tushar Devidayal, Founder and CEO of Devidayal Solar Solutions, and Aparna Dua, Director, Asha Impact Trust on the panel.



Kanika Verma addressing the panel

The panel discussion focused on identifying means and measures to realise the unmet potential of Decentralised Renewable Energy (DRE) livelihoods technologies, the barriers to realising that potential, and the opportunities to enable scale-based impact. In the initial stages of the conversation, finance was marked as crucial to bringing DRE technologies onto the ground to challenge the current value chains. However, it was noted that mapping out the value chain itself was imperative before any substantial action could be undertaken. Kanika Verma emphasised the centrality of an ecosystem that would support and enable micromovements of change. The potential is massive, and to realise it, she underlined that the ecosystem should cater to the aspirational needs of the entrepreneurs. She exemplified one of the partners in the Work4Progress programme, RangDe, a peer-to-peer lending platform offering collateral-free credit, which has been crucial to equipping entrepreneurs. RangDe and other institutions can constitute an ecosystem that fosters healthy competition, leading to more favourable interest rates and diversifying the options that the entrepreneur can choose from. Aparna Dua, from Asha Impact Trust, highlighted the need to look innovatively at finance regarding scaling solutions. Further, she pointed out that although assistance with access to credit is essential, it should also come in with support in terms of experience,

expertise, and linkages, as interlinking the several factors and components is crucial towards realising the goals.

Speaking on the risks that entrepreneurs take on their ventures, Kanika stressed that it is essential that we stop looking at micro-entrepreneurship with a one size fits all approach, as people and personas vary. When we understand their unique personas and, in turn, their needs, we will be able to build enabling ecosystems that respond to the risks as opportunities. This, in turn, would unleash latent entrepreneurial energies, as it would cater to the individual according to what they need. Here, she takes the case of the District Entrepreneurship Coalition (DEC), one of the systemic prototypes co-created through a social innovation approach, as an essential enabler for this. Whilst at the district level, many organisations are working towards supporting micro-enterprises. However, the efforts are often isolated and siloed due to the top-down approach and lack of comprehensive policies and implementation plans. DEC aims at leveraging relational aspects for cooperation to create solidarity and trust. It also seeks to prototype solutions collaboratively and aims to create an enabling ecosystem to catalyse entrepreneurial growth.

The summit concluded with a resounding call to action, urging stakeholders to embrace collaboration and collectively work towards creating comprehensive policies and implementation plans. The vast potential of DRE livelihood technologies can be unlocked by nurturing an ecosystem that combines finance, innovation, and supportive networks.