



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

National Meeting on “Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurial Development in the Rural Context: The Role of Renewable Energy”

UN House, Beirut, Lebanon 30-31 July 2019

Summary

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy (ENERGIA), organized a National Meeting at the UN House in Beirut, Lebanon on 30 and 31 July 2019 titled “Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurial Development in the Rural Context: The Role of Renewable Energy”. The main objective of the meeting was to formulate actionable recommendations for mainstreaming gender and human rights in policy planning, capacity building, and awareness raising for rural areas.

The meeting allowed the sharing of women empowerment experiences and initiatives both from a national perspective and a regional one while the discussions covered the challenges currently being faced, the lessons learned from previous experiences and projects, and the recommended solutions and suggestions going forward.

The meeting concluded with a series of recommendations that address national collaboration on data collection and sharing, stakeholder cooperation and coordination, and capacity-building and awareness-raising opportunities.

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I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy (ENERGIA), organized a National Meeting at the UN House in Beirut, Lebanon on 30 and 31 July 2019 titled “Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurial Development in the Rural Context: The Role of Renewable Energy”.
2. The main objective of the meeting was to formulate actionable recommendations for mainstreaming gender and human rights in policy planning, capacity building, and awareness raising for rural areas.
3. The meeting was attended by 25 participants representing local, regional, and international gender and energy experts, NGOs, government ministries and entities, UN organizations, research institutions, and academia.
4. The meeting spanned over two days and consisted of five sessions. Section II of this report summarizes the meeting’s recommendations while Section III provides a summary of the presentations and the main topics of discussions held during each session. Section IV reviews the organization of work, including information regarding the meeting agenda, participants and a summary of the participants evaluation outcome. The full documentation of the meeting is available at the following address:

<https://www.unescwa.org/events/women-empowerment-entrepreneurial-development-rural-renewable-energy>

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

5. This National Meeting concluded with the following findings and recommendations:
 - a) Developing capacity-building activities and curricula at the vocational training level on renewable energy operation and maintenance for both men and women and ensuring that the activities are gendered.
 - b) Developing capacity-building activities focusing on African and Asian experiences in terms of technology solutions for women in rural areas.
 - c) Foster and/or build partnership on gender data between ESCWA and ministries and their respective gender focal points where ESCWA can assist in improving data collection and creating indicators.
 - d) Building a network with practitioners to bridge the gap between the two rural areas selected by the REGEND project in Lebanon through best practices sharing on gender empowerment and renewable energy in the rural context. With time and experience, the network can be upgraded to share best practices between countries and regions as well.
 - e) Building a network composed of all the organizations and entities working on gender empowerment in Lebanon within the rural context to consolidate efforts and coordinate moving forward.
 - f) Emphasizing the importance of behaviour change campaigns through success stories and knowledge products that showcase the challenges faced and the sustainability of solutions and best practices of renewable energy in rural areas.
 - g) Developing low-cost financial instruments for the rural population to uptake renewable energy.

III. MAIN TOPICS OF DISCUSSIONS

6. Presentations and discussions are summarized in the following sections which are organized according to the substantive sessions of the meeting.

A. SETTING THE STAGE: RENEWABLE ENERGY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

7. The session opened with a presentation by ENERGIA on its programme titled “Supporting Last-Mile Women Energy Entrepreneurship” where it was emphasized that in entrepreneurship, women do not need handouts and that women should rather be engaged because it makes sense for business. The programme promoted women-led energy businesses, identified the productive uses of energy, and empowered women to compete in energy markets. Based on the work’s experience, the strategies that worked are Employment and Entrepreneurship; Supply Chain Financing; Capacity Building and Skills Training; and Communication, Information and Monitoring. The programme’s lessons learned centred around Commitment, Partnership, Finance, Support, and Integration.

8. Delegates understood that many of the challenges that they were facing were similar to those faced in Africa including:

- lack of financing or gendered financial instruments especially for grassroots organizations
- capacity gaps among entrepreneurs e.g., bookkeeping,
- limiting cultural views of the role of women in rural communities
- lack of energy entrepreneur role models
- gender-blind energy policies at the national level
- lack of mentoring opportunities
- lack of effective monitoring to inform future focus
- lack of gender disaggregated data

9. A presentation by ESCWA’s REGEND Project started by discussing the Arab region’s energy challenges. Then, the Project was introduced along with its objectives, expected accomplishments, approach, ownership, and governance. REGEND is a 4-year Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)-funded project that started in 2018 and that covers Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. The presentation also detailed the Project’s gender mainstreaming strategy which covers all of the Project’s phases and which has been elaborated in a way where every activity has been engendered via specific interventions and measures.

10. Ensuing discussions highlighted the importance of adapting training for women to make it more adequate where it was recommended to move away from classroom-type training due to the effect of the long hours of training on the management of the household which often leads to low turnouts. It was also discussed that through entrepreneurship, rural women are seen as change agents where their work ends up engendering positive changes in the lives of their families and the communities they live in. The participants agreed on the fact that gender-blind policies will automatically lead to discriminatory laws and therefore, policy development needs to be inclusive where both women and men take part, but women are prioritized. On the regional level, it was recommended that Arab countries need to share their experiences on women’s lives in rural areas and to build institutional capacity in order to empower women to compete in productive sectors and energy markets; which is something the REGEND Project will work on as part of its workplan.

11. Delegates understood that for any interventions to be effective then they should work within cultural norms. Examples of ineffective interventions that were provided are such as is captured above to limit classroom lecture type interventions as well as minimize how far women have to travel to attend training and or provide childcare facilities.

B. THE LEBANESE CONTEXT AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: REGEND PERSPECTIVES AND RESULTS OF ASSESSMENT

12. A presentation by the Lebanese Center for Energy Conservation (LCEC) introduced the energy sector in Lebanon and presented data on electricity access and energy consumption by sector before discussing Lebanon’s commitment to fight climate change by setting renewable energy and energy efficiency targets. The presentation then detailed Lebanon’s initiatives, per renewable energy technology, to reach the set targets. These included Hydropower, Solar Water Heaters, Solar PV (utility-scale and decentralized), Concentrated Solar Power, Solar Water Pumping, and Wind Energy. The challenges facing renewable energy in Lebanon were also covered.

13. A presentation by ESCWA's consultant that worked on REGEND's assessment of prevailing situations in the rural areas of Lebanon started by going through Lebanon's socio-economic indicators and then moved on to cover rural indicators along with the challenges faced especially those affecting productive activities and women empowerment. The criteria used for the assessment and selection of the rural areas where REGEND will implement its activities were then presented along with general observations noted during the assessment phase which was culminated in the selection of Akkar El Atika and Chaqdouf in Akkar.

14. A presentation by ESCWA's consultant that worked on REGEND's gender mainstreaming, social inclusion, and human rights processes study in Lebanon started with an overview on Lebanon covering entrepreneurship, gender, rural-urban distribution, and renewable energy. Data and indicators on gender equality were showcased under four main categories: education, health, political empowerment, and economic participation and opportunities. Then, the challenges facing rural women in the energy and renewable energy sectors were presented in detail along with the study's recommendations and the role that each entity can play to transform policy and plans into action.

15. The participants discussed and agreed that gender budgeting is a paramount policy instrument that needs to be implemented so that the share of funds that benefit women can be tracked and monitoring and evaluation can be applied accordingly to shift allocations based on effectiveness. The formation of rural incubators was also deliberated at length since they can provide women with all the information needed to start new or grow their existing businesses without having to travel far for such services. Equally important, it was also emphasized that women need to be well informed when it comes to making their choice of working as employees or as entrepreneurs. Consequently, supporting SMEs and businesses that hire women was also brought forward and discussed.

16. The discussion then shifted to focus on women's skills assessment and development where it was recommended that renewable energy technologies should be deployed in a way where they can help women expand into new productive activities rather than remain limited by their current activities only. In this regard, the participants discussed regional and international experiences and success stories where it was found that capacity-building activities proved to be more effective than the supply of equipment. Finally, all participants agreed that in order to solve the gender data gap, efforts need to be consolidated to improve data collection and to create indicators to track progress. To facilitate the consolidation of efforts and to coordinate going forward, it was recommended to form a network composed of all the organizations and entities working on gender empowerment in Lebanon.

17. Delegates understood that not all women are entrepreneurs and that recruitment should focus on selecting women that are already entrepreneurial or attain certain criteria that will increase her chances of success. Examples were provided from Africa where many women are entrepreneurial by 'poverty necessity'. Examples on effective gender sensitive policies from Africa were shared e.g., the one third (30%) gender rule for government tenders favouring women; specific banks set-up to lend to women energy entrepreneurs however delegates were advised to monitor all policies for abuse e.g., having a woman only be the face of an initiative while the men control the activities. The cultural context for sharing success stories was also brought up e.g., above the line awareness using local celebrities using the example of Kenya's "Upishi Digi" campaign that encouraged clean cooking via a TV series.

C. THE LEBANESE CONTEXT AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: NATIONAL INITIATIVES

18. A presentation by UNDP Lebanon showcased the "Women Economic Participation within Value Chain Approach" Project whose objective is to improve the conditions for women's integration, progression, and economic empowerment within key value chains in Lebanon as well as to strengthen the capacity of local stakeholders to support women economic empowerment and mainstream gender considerations in local interventions. So far, the project has selected 12 value chains to focus on including renewable energy and work is currently underway.

19. A presentation by FAO Lebanon introduced the “Support to Women Cooperatives and Associations in the Agro-Food Sector of Lebanon” Project whose objective is to train 150 women cooperatives and associations on business basics, sustainability, marketing, communication, value chain, quality and safety, constructive dialogue and negotiation, building a common vision, gender-based violence, protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, ethical behavior and prevention of fraud. The Project is currently in the stage of reaching out to all the women cooperatives in Lebanon before inviting them to training workshops which will later lead to the next round of shortlisting.

20. A presentation by Akkar Network for Development (AND) discussed the NGO’s various initiatives and interventions in Akkar covering gender-based violence; inclusion of women in the political process; socio-economic empowerment; awareness on child rights, participation, promotion and demand creation; and youth innovation labs. The challenges faced in the field were also highlighted along with the lessons learned which are vital to any organization implementing projects in Akkar.

21. The ensuing discussions underlined the importance of creating new value chains where women can play a leading role not only in the agriculture sector, but also in new sectors such the digital sector. This diversification of value chains will lead to increased participation of women in productive activities. Another key recommendation brought forward based on field experience and supported by the participants is to use a role-model approach in training activities where the recruited trainers are women who are experts in their field. This approach will have an osmosis effect on the targeted women and girls. On the other hand, it was also stressed that changing women’s role in society can carry real risks for them that need to be considered where, for instance, women’s increased mobility, in some contexts, can increase their risk of gender-based violence.

22. Delegates were sensitized to the “Africa’s Future Counts’ Water – Energy – Nexus initiative by RES4Africa that looks in-depth at the productive use of energy in the Agricultural sector. Further successful Train the Trainer (TOT) models were shared where local women are empowered to be role models within their communities breaking down cultural barriers that foreign trainers might have within the cultural context.

D. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL GENDER EMPOWERMENT EXPERIENCES

23. A presentation by Chemonics Egypt Consultants showcased the “Potential for Egyptian Start-ups to Unlock Solar Technology Markets in Agriculture” Project whose objectives are to strengthen the ecosystem supporting the clean technology sector, to identify key challenges and barriers and to connect key stakeholders across the value chain. The presentation also covered the evolution of installed renewable energy capacities in Egypt as well as women participation trends in Egypt in the labor force, unemployment, education, STEM, and renewable energy employment opportunities. Finally, the success stories of three Egyptian women in the renewable energy sector were told highlighting their positive impact on the sector and the communities where projects were implemented.

24. A presentation by ESCWA’s consultant that worked on REGEND’s gender mainstreaming, social inclusion, and human rights processes study in Tunisia provided an overview on Tunisia covering economic, social, and gender indicators. The agriculture sector in Tunisia was also covered with a focus on its challenges including those specific to rural women and the role that renewable energy can play to alleviate these challenges in addition to study’s main recommendations to address these challenges.

25. A presentation by ESCWA’s consultant that worked on REGEND’s gender mainstreaming, social inclusion, and human rights processes study in Jordan started with an overview on Jordan covering economic, social, and gender indicators as well as the country’s renewable energy strategies and policies. The study also included site visits to rural areas of Jordan where women are active in productive activities. Finally, the study’s recommendations were presented and categorized as quick interventions and strategic interventions.

26. The participants discussions emphasized the key role that women should play in the political and decision-making processes so that policies are engendered from the earliest stages.

27. Delegates were encouraged to tap into resources such as the ENERGIA website, wPOWER and SE4All People Centred Accelerator to appreciate the work that has been done globally including Africa and Asia to accelerate success.

E. PROMOTING INTEGRATED APPROACHES TO ADDRESS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE RENEWABLE ENERGY SECTOR IN LEBANON: WAY FORWARD

28. ESCWA invited the participants to discuss and deliberate on means for gender mainstreaming in the energy sector including data sharing and creation of indicators and baselines as well as capacity-building opportunities. Discussions were structured to answer the following questions:

- Where do you identify the most potential for introducing and implementing gender mainstreaming in the energy sector and what are the main challenges and barriers?
- Are there any statistics or data that track the implementation of gender mainstreaming and what are your suggestions or recommendations to develop such baseline and indicators?
- How can the developed renewable energy capacity be leveraged not only for renewable energy entrepreneurship, but also to boost and create current and new productive activities that support women empowerment and improve their lives?
- What gender mainstreaming and human rights action plans and recommendations can be recommended to policy makers, government and local institutions for the energy sector?
- What are the recommended main themes to develop capacity building programs around to be implemented by the REGEND Project?

29. Based on the discussions, it was agreed that the main challenges facing women empowerment in the energy sector in Lebanon are gender data collection, availability, and analysis; the weak cooperation and coordination between all the stakeholders working on women empowerment in Lebanon along with the resulting duplication of work; the presence of a big gap between policy and its implementation; the lack of education and awareness on renewable energy technologies and entrepreneurship in rural areas for both men and women; and the absence of low-cost financial instruments for the rural population to uptake renewable energy.

30. Delegates appreciated that all the challenges listed are similar to those experienced in Africa and there is value in having close collaboration with organizations already working in the space e.g., ENERGIA.

31. The recommendations to address these challenges included developing capacity-building activities and curricula at the vocational training level on renewable energy operation and maintenance for both men and women and ensuring that the activities are engendered as well as capacity-building activities focusing on African and Asian experiences in terms of technology solutions for women in rural areas. It was also suggested that a partnership on gender data be formed between ESCWA and ministries and their respective gender focal points where ESCWA can assist in improving data collection and creating indicators. To bolster collaboration and cooperation, it was recommended to build a network with practitioners to bridge the gap between the two rural areas selected by the REGEND project in Lebanon through best practices sharing on gender empowerment and renewable energy so that with time and experience, the network can be upgraded to share best practices between countries and regions as well. Aspects which are already envisaged in the REGEND project components. In addition, a network composed of all the organizations and entities working on gender empowerment in Lebanon within the rural context was requested to consolidate efforts and coordinate moving forward. Moreover, the importance of behaviour change campaigns through success stories and knowledge products that showcase the challenges faced and the sustainability of solutions and best practices of renewable energy in rural areas was highlighted. Finally, the development of low-cost financial instruments for the rural population to uptake renewable energy was proposed.

F. CLOSING SESSION

32. The national meeting sessions were closed by Ms. Radia Sedaoui, Chief of the Energy Section, Sustainable Development Policies Division at ESCWA. The closing statement emphasized the fruitful discussions during the meeting and the intention to continue coordination and collaborating with the represented stakeholders. REGEND's upcoming activities will include similar national meetings in Tunisia and Jordan, a regional and international workshop afterwards, along with the detailed assessment to be conducted in the field to evaluate and select the projects and capacity-building activities that will be implemented.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

33. The meeting was held at the UN-House, Beirut, Lebanon on 30-31 July 2019.

B. OPENING

34. The meeting was formally opened by Ms. Radia Sedaoui, Chief of the Energy Section, Sustainable Development Policies Division, ESCWA.

C. PARTICIPANTS

35. The meeting was attended by 25 participants representing local, regional, and international gender and energy experts, NGOs, government ministries and entities, UN organizations, research institutions, and academia. The list of participants is shown in Annex II.

D. AGENDA

36. Presentations and discussions were made over five sessions. The agenda of the meeting is summarized below:

- a) Opening Session and Introduction
- b) Setting the stage: Renewable energy and women empowerment
- c) The Lebanese context and gender empowerment: REGEND perspectives and results of assessment
- d) The Lebanese context and gender empowerment: national initiatives
- e) Regional and international gender empowerment experiences
- f) Promoting integrated approaches to address women empowerment and gender equality in the renewable energy sector in Lebanon: Way Forward
- g) Closing Statement

E. EVALUATION

37. An evaluation questionnaire was distributed to the participants to assess the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of the meeting. The feedback received from 21 respondents was positive with 90% of the respondents confirming that the overall quality of the seminar met their expectations and that the meeting achieved its objectives. The quality of the presentations provided, and the facilitation of the discussions were rated as good or excellent by 87% of the respondents and 90% thought that the time allocated for the seminar and each session was appropriate. A suggestion was made to have more men involved in the meeting including politicians and decision makers to enhance the meeting's outcomes. Finally, 100% expressed their interest in introducing and/or implementing gender mainstreaming activities in the energy sector in Lebanon with the most interest being in institutional and policy strengthening.

ANNEX I: AGENDA

UNITED NATIONS

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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

National Meeting on “Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurial Development in the Rural Context: The Role of Renewable Energy”

UN-ESCWA, Beirut – Lebanon, 30-31 July 2019

Agenda

Tuesday, 30 July 2019	
08:30 – 09:00	Registration <i>Sponsored participants are kindly asked to bring their passport, visa stamp and airline ticket stub to the meeting.</i>
Opening Session and Introduction	
09:00 – 9:05	Welcoming Remarks Ms. Radia Sedaoui, Chief Energy Section, Sustainable Development Policies Division (SDPD), UN-ESCWA
09:05 – 9:10	Tour de Table
9:10 – 9:20	Review of the Agenda and expected outcomes of the meeting Mr. Jil Amine, Sustainable Development Officer, Energy Section (ES), Sustainable Development Policies Division (SDPD), UN-ESCWA
Session I	
Setting the Stage: Renewable Energy and Women Empowerment	
Moderator:	Ms. Rouba Arja, Social Affairs Officer, ESCWA Center for Women, UN-ESCWA
Rapporteur:	Ms. Sophie Chlela, Research Assistant, ES, SDPD, UN-ESCWA
09:20 – 09:40	Presentation: TBC Dr. Linda Davis, Chief Executive Officer CEO, Giraffe Bioenergy Ltd.
09:40 – 10:00	Presentation: REGEND Project Ms. Radia Sedaoui, Chief Energy Section, Sustainable Development Policies Division (SDPD), UN-ESCWA
10:00 – 10:20	Q & A and Discussion
10:20 – 10:35	Coffee Break
Session II	
The Lebanese Context and Gender Empowerment: REGEND Perspectives and Results of Assessment	
Moderator:	Ms. Radia Sedaoui, Chief Energy Section, SDPD, UN-ESCWA

Rapporteur:	Ms. Maya Mansour, Research Assistant, ES, SDPD, UN-ESCWA
10:35 – 10:55	Presentation: Renewable Energy in Lebanon Ms. Joumana Sayegh, Associate Director of Engineering and Planning, LCEC
10:55 – 11:15	Presentation: REGEND's Assessment of Prevailing Situations in Rural Areas of Lebanon Ms. Jessica Obeid, UN-ESCWA Consultant
11:15 – 11:45	Presentation: REGEND's Gender Assessment in Lebanon Ms. Hania Chahal, UN-ESCWA Consultant
11:45 – 12:30	Discussion
12:30 – 13:30	Group Photo and Lunch Break
Session III	The Lebanese Context and Gender Empowerment: National Initiatives
Moderator:	Mr. Jil Amine, Sustainable Development Officer, ES, SDPD, UN-ESCWA
Rapporteur:	Ms. Sophie Chlela, Research Assistant, ES, SDPD, UN-ESCWA
13:30 – 13:50	Presentation: Women Economic Participation within Value Chain Approach Mr. Leon Chammah, Livelihood and Local Development Senior Coordinator, UNDP
13:50 – 14:10	Presentation: Support to Women Cooperatives and Associations in the Agro-Food Sector of Lebanon Ms. Ranya Chaya, Project Assistant, FAO
14:10 – 14:30	Presentation: What Role for Women in Rural Akkar? Ms. Nadine Saba, Board President and Project Director, Akkar Network for Development (AND)
14:30 – 15:30	Q&A and Discussion
15:30 – 15:45	Closing of the Day 1

Wednesday, 31 July 2019	
Session IV	Regional and International Gender Empowerment Experiences
Moderator:	Ms. Bothayna Rashid, Economic Affairs Officer, ES, SDPD, UN-ESCWA
Rapporteur:	Ms. Maya Mansour, Research Assistant, ES, SDPD, UN-ESCWA
09:00 – 09:15	Presentation: Rural Renewable Energy in Egypt: Leveraging the Skills of Women for a More Rapid Growth Dr Omniya el-Baghdadi, Environmental Specialist, ECO Industrial Department, Chemonics Egypt Consultants
09:15 – 09:30	Presentation: REGEND's Gender Assessment in Tunisia and the Tunisian Experience Mr. Hatem Mliki, UN-ESCWA Consultant

09:30 – 09:45	Presentation: REGEND’s Gender Assessment in Jordan and the Jordanian Experience Ms. Sawsan Gharaibeh, UN-ESCWA Consultant
09:45 – 10:15	Q&A and Discussion
Session V	Promoting integrated approaches to address women empowerment and gender equality in the renewable energy sector in Lebanon: Way Forward
Moderator:	Ms. Radia Sedaoui, Chief Energy Section, SDPD, UN-ESCWA
Rapporteur:	Mr. Jil Amine, Sustainable Development Officer, ES, SDPD, UN-ESCWA
10:15 – 11:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Where do you identify the most potential for introducing and implementing gender mainstreaming in the energy sector and what are the main challenges and barriers? ➤ Are there any statistics or data that track the implementation of gender mainstreaming and what are your suggestions or recommendations to develop such baseline and indicators? ➤ How can the developed renewable energy capacity be leveraged not only for renewable energy entrepreneurship, but also to boost and create current and new productive activities that support women empowerment and improve their lives? ➤ What gender mainstreaming and human rights action plans and recommendations can be recommended to policy makers, government and local institutions for the energy sector? ➤ What are the recommended main themes to develop capacity building programs around to be implemented by the REGEND Project?
11:45 – 12:00	Coffee Break
12:00 – 12:30	Summary of Key Messages and Recommendations for the Way Forward
12:30 – 12:40	Closing Remarks
12:40 – 13:40	Lunch and End of Day 2

ANNEX II: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Ministries

Ms. Nada Kassem Makki
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Head of Cabinet service
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Beirut, Lebanon

Ms. Rola Al Achi
Head of Project Department
Ministry of Agriculture
Beirut, Lebanon

Ms. Abir Chebaro
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National Commission for Lebanese Women
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Beirut, Lebanon

Ms. Zeina Maalouf
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HIVOS

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Sustainable Food and Renewable Energy
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