

International Workshop on Gender and Energy

Electricity Access and the Changing Social Position of Women in Nepal

28 March 2018 | Hotel Annapurna, Kathmandu

Background Note

The provision of energy and modern energy services are crucial to human well-being and are considered essential to support overall economic development. Modern energy is also considered as an important contributor to improving gender equality and social inclusion especially in developing contexts where particularly women often experience harsh living conditions including discriminating norms. At present, studies of the energy sector from a gender lens reveal that access to modern energy tends to improve women's welfare if supplementary infrastructures and equipment are in place. For example, electrified water pumps reduce drudgery, improved quality of public services leads to better health and opportunities for education. Electricity access also conditions the use of phones and electronic media, enhancing opportunities for learning as well as socialization. In some cases, access to electricity leads to increased income for women (and men), enhancing their economic empowerment. Yet, empirical evidence shows that the potential for empowerment is often left untapped. This is linked to the fact that energy policies and programs rarely address gender issues explicitly, which leads to non-equitable processes and outcomes. Together with local gender disparities in opportunities and outcomes, electricity interventions reinforce women's limited rights, agency and access to resources – thus their potential for empowerment. A broader perspective is essential – one that actively addresses gender disparities in the distribution and control of resources, technologies and services with complementary efforts to promote gender equitable systems that allow both women and men to reap the full benefits of investments.

To examine the various aspects of electrification that influence agency and empowerment of women, as users of electricity services and as (potentially) involved actors in the provision of electricity, the University of Oslo (Norway) in partnership with TERI (India), Dunamai Energy (Malawi) and Seacrest Consulting (Kenya) have undertaken the research project, 'Exploring Factors that Enhance and restrict Women's Empowerment through Electrification' (www.efewee.org). The Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPIC), Nepal is the collaborating partner for the project in Nepal. The project is part of the ENERGIA Gender & Energy Research Programme, a Five-Year Sub-Programme on "Gender and Sustainable Energy for All" of the International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy (ENERGIA), supported by DFID (UK).

Three countries in the global South – India, Nepal and Kenya - were selected for empirical research. The field research in Nepal has brought forth some of the key dimensions (economic, technical and social) of both grid electricity and off-grid systems, and how these systems have influenced communities in general and the women in particular. From a comparative perspective, it was interesting to note that in Nepal, even the basic forms of electricity (off-grid) are being used for productive purposes. This contrasts our findings from rural India and Kenya, where decentralised systems and even grid electricity are mainly used for lighting and mobile phone charging. In rural Nepal, women's traditional roles and responsibilities, which tended to keep them predominantly at

home and limit their opportunities to pursue income generating livelihoods outside, have evolved with electricity access. This has enabled women to pursue income-generating activities like tailoring and poultry farming. These supplementary occupations have not only allowed women to generate additional income that serves to improve their quality of life but also enhanced their social positions.

In addition to increasing convenience and reducing drudgery, access to electricity has enhanced opportunities for connectivity, entertainment and information. Television programmes and mobile phones have become key instruments of influence in the community, creating awareness around a range of social, health and economic subjects. Among the younger generations in particular, such communication and media were also said to challenge traditional socio-cultural norms. This presents an interesting paradox of the implications of electricity access and its associated benefits in the wider socio-cultural and empowerment context. Nepal's varied mix of electricity interventions (grid, various types of decentralised solutions) and diversified end-use in rural areas makes this landscape a highly interesting case study, offering scope for understanding the possibilities for women's empowerment through electricity interventions. That being said, there are also limited attempts to include women in electricity supply in rural Nepal, which constitute important cases for learning.

With this background, **The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)¹, India** in collaboration with the **Women's Network for Energy and Environment (WoNEE)², Nepal** and **Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEP)³, Nepal** are hosting the International Workshop on Gender and Energy in Kathmandu during the International Conference on Development of Renewable Energy Technology (ICDRET) 2018. The theme of the workshop is *Electricity Access and the Changing Social Position of Women in Nepal*. The objective is to share the EFEWEE project research findings and to facilitate a closer dialogue and discussion on gender mainstreaming in the electricity sector in Nepal to bring in new perspectives and dimensions.

In the proceeding panel discussion a diversified group of experienced stakeholders are invited to share their insights to enrich the discussion. This session seeks to discuss aspects of the gender - energy nexus, in general and specifically for Nepal, and the various dimensions of electricity access that are (positively and negatively) impacting the social position of women. Reflecting upon supply side initiatives by government, private sector, civil society and donor agencies and the demand side perspectives of rural communities as recipients of electricity interventions, the discussion seeks to bring out the key implications of electricity access on the socio-economic fabric of these communities, and their specific impact on women.

The event is expected to add knowledge to the larger gender-energy-poverty nexus, potentially leading to favourable gender-sensitive policy formulation in South Asia in general and Nepal in particular, as well as contributing to the academic discourse.

¹The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) is a leading think tank based in New Delhi, dedicated to conducting research for sustainable development in India and the Global South. (www.teriin.org)

² The Women's Network for Energy and Environment was set up in September 2017, facilitated by the Nepal Energy Foundation (www.npnef.org), with the objective of exerting pressure at the policy and planning level to ensure women's participation through inclusive and participatory development and management of the energy sector – and is a key stakeholder to this discussion and sector.

³ The Alternative Energy Promotion Centre is an independently functioning government institution established by the Government of Nepal with the objectives of popularizing and promoting the use of renewable energy technologies, raising the living standards of rural communities, protecting the environment, and developing commercially viable renewable energy industries in the country.

PROGRAMME		
Time	Session	Speakers / Panelists
9:00 – 9:30	Registration	
9:30 – 10:00 INAUGURAL	Welcome Address	Mr Debajit Palit , Associate Director & Senior Fellow, TERI
	Introductory Remarks	Mr Dilli Prasad Ghimire , Managing Director Nepal Energy Foundation
	Special Remarks	Mr Ram Prasad Dhital , Executive Director, AEPC
10:00 – 11:15 PRESENTATIONS	Presentation on WoNEE	Ms Kala Timalisina , Coordinator, Women’s Network for Energy and Environment (WoNEE)
	EFEWEE Research Presentation	Ms Bigsna Gill , Associate Fellow, TERI <i>Discussants</i> Ms Indira Shakya , Gender and Energy Expert, Nepal Dr Pranita Bhushan Udas , Gender, Water and Adaptation Specialist, ICIMOD, Kathmandu Dr Magi Matinga , Energy Anthropologist, Dunamai Energy, Malawi
11:15 – 11:45	TEA	
11:45 – 13:15 PANEL DISCUSSION	<i>Electricity Access & the Changing Social Position of Women in Nepal</i>	<i>Moderator</i> Dr Ben Campbell , Senior Lecturer, University of Durham, UK <i>Panelists</i> Ms Nigma Timrakar , Gender & Energy Expert, Kathmandu Dr Aditi Mukherji , ICIMOD, Kathmandu Ms Sharmila Karki , Founding & Executive Committee Member, Jagaran Nepal, Kathmandu Ms Shanta Laxmi Shrestha , Chairperson, Beyond Beijing Committee, Kathmandu Dr G Mini , Fellow, TERI, New Delhi
13:15 – 14:00	LUNCH & NETWORKING	