



## **International Workshop on Gender and Energy**

### ***Electricity Access and the Changing Social Position of Women in Nepal***

28 March 2018, Kathmandu

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## Background

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 through reduced drudgery, improved health and through opportunities for education and socialization. Access to electricity sometimes leads to increased income for women, enhancing their economic empowerment. As to energy interventions initiated by the private sector and NGO's, several programmes have adopted a gender sensitive approach during implementation. Here, women have benefited both as end-users and through their involvement in the supply chain. Yet, energy policies and programs rarely address gender issues explicitly and their approaches are often gender blind. Moreover, gender disparities in opportunities and outcomes continue to restrict the rights and potential of women. 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.

In order 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 (EFEWEE)'. The project is part of the ENERGIA Gender & Energy Research Programme, supported by DFID (UK) and is being carried out in three countries- India, Kenya and Nepal.

The field research in Nepal has brought forth many dimensions of the economic and technical aspects around various grid and off-grid electricity systems, and how these influence communities and the women therein. It was interesting to note that in Nepal even the most basic forms of electricity are being used productively, apart from being used for lighting and mobile charging. This goes to show that women's traditional roles and responsibilities that tend to keep them predominantly at home and limit opportunities to pursue income generating livelihoods outside, have also evolved with electricity access, which has enabled women to pursue income generating activities like tailoring and poultry. These supplementary occupations have allowed women to generate additional incomes that not only serve to improve their quality of life but also their social positions.

With this background, TERI<sup>1</sup> in collaboration with the Women's Network for Energy and Environment (WoNEE)<sup>2</sup> hosted an International Workshop on Gender and Energy in Kathmandu, on March 28, 2018 in Kathmandu, to facilitate a dialogue and discussion on the theme *Electricity Access and the Changing Social Position of Women in Nepal*. This half day

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<sup>1</sup>The 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](http://www.teriin.org))

<sup>2</sup>The Women's Network for Energy and Environment (WoNEE) was set up in September 2017, facilitated by the Nepal Energy Foundation ([www.npnef.org](http://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.

workshop was aimed at taking forth the EFEWEE research through an interactive discourse with sector experts and stakeholders to bring in new perspectives and dimensions. The insights and experiences shared during the session will be used to enrich the project's findings and to add to the larger gender-energy discussion, paving the way for further deliberations and potentially leading to favourable gender-sensitive policy formulation.

## Summary of Sessions

The international workshop was inaugurated by **Mr Debajit Palit**, Associate Director and Senior Fellow, TERI, followed by introductory remarks by **Mr Dilli Prasad Ghimire**, Managing Director, Nepal Energy Foundation and a special address by **Mr Ram Prasad Dhital**, Executive Director, Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC), Nepal.

The inaugural session was succeeded by a session on presentations. **Ms Bigsna Gill**, Associate Fellow, TERI, representing the EFEWEE team, presented research findings from the Nepal study, followed by a presentation by **Ms Kala Timalisina**, Coordinator, Women's Network for Energy and Environment (WoNEE) on their ongoing activities and future course of research. The discussants, **Ms Indira Shakya**, a noted gender and energy expert, and **Dr Pranita Bhushan Udas**, Gender, Water and Adaptation Specialist, ICIMOD, Kathmandu, shared their expert views on the presentations and gave valuable suggestions.

The final session of the workshop was a panel discussion on the topic *Electricity Access & the Changing Social Position of Women in Nepal*, moderated by **Dr Ben Campbell**, Senior Lecturer, University of Durham, UK. The panellists for the discussion included **Ms Nigma Timrakar**, a gender and energy expert from Nepal, **Dr Aditi Mukherji**, ICIMOD, Nepal, **Ms Shanta Laxmi Shrestha**, Chairperson, Beyond Beijing Committee, **Ms Sharmila Karki**, Founding & Executive Committee Member, Jagaran Nepal, and **Dr G Mini**, Fellow, TERI. The workshop concluded with closing remarks and a vote of thanks by Mr Debajit Palit.

## Inaugural Session

**Mr Debajit Palit**, extended a warm welcome to all the revered guests and participants of the workshop. In his inaugural address, he briefly discussed the motivation behind holding the workshop and gave an overview of the EFEWEE research and its findings. **Mr Dilli Prasad Ghimire** gave the introductory remarks for the session and brief overview of the Nepal Energy Foundation and its activities. He elaborated on the issues faced in strongly placing women in the context of energy access and supply. According to Mr Ghimire, gender issues are not given the required space in the sphere of power sector deliberations, and that existing gender-friendly policies are not being strongly implemented. Therefore, in order to give women's voices a platform and ensure a rightful place for them in the energy policy domain, NEA facilitated the creation of WoNEE. Mr Ghimire's talk was followed by special comments by **Mr Ram Prasad Dhital**. Mr Dhital shed light on the challenges faced in engendering the domain of energy, which ranged from limited resources, and lack of political will to pervasive discriminatory social norms and genuine concerns regarding the security of women in a traditionally male-dominated working environment. In the specific context of Nepal, the current transitional phase of the nation's polity is adding to the bottlenecks in mainstreaming gender into energy at a significant scale. However, the speaker emphasised that expanding and strengthening the network of women in energy fields through regular and rigorous training and conducting awareness campaigns will lead to favourable outcomes in the future.

## Presentations

The inaugural session was succeeded by presentations on the EFEWEE research and WoNEE. **Ms Bigsna Gill** began the session by presenting the findings from the ongoing EFEWEE project. Ms Gill summarised learnings from the policy reviews of the three study countries- India, Kenya and Nepal, and shared the overall research framework that was developed to study the impact of electricity access on women's empowerment in each country context. The policy review found that electricity policies rarely addressed gender issues explicitly and the lack of systematically collected gender-disaggregated data posed to be a major shortcoming in formulating a gendered energy policy. In addition to these, problems like lack of coordination among implementing agencies of the government and very few examples of women's active involvement in the energy supply chain were also highlighted by the speaker. The EFEWEE team also presented the key findings from the Nepal case study, which are listed as follows-

- Though men tend to be the subscribers of electricity systems and the final decision-makers in the purchase of appliances, the placement of lights was mostly a joint decision.
- Men use power in more productive uses whereas women use them for their domestic chores mainly. Some women use electric rice cookers, which saved time in the kitchen.
- Compared to the India case, a lot of women are taking initiative in starting new businesses, such as poultry farming, with the help of electricity.
- Gender access and use of electricity is still largely shaped by the traditional socio-cultural norms.
- Women benefit more from public services such as health centres having electricity.
- Women's role and participation in energy supply is very less, due to prevailing notions about the masculinity of these jobs.

- No change was observed in work responsibility or work division at home amongst women and men due to electricity access.
- Mobile phones are being widely used by men and women of all age groups. Good network ensures the usage of internet, mainly for communication and social media. There are certain instances reported of early marriages and extra marital affairs due to access to social media.
- Without electricity, schools cannot improve their services which impacts girls more significantly than boys as parents are apprehensive to send their daughters away from home (to towns or cities) for better quality / higher education Thus, for most girls, education is up to SLC level (12th grade).

Following the EFEWEE research presentation was a presentation by **Ms Kala Timalcina**. Ms Timalcina briefly explained about the inception and motivation behind the creation of Women's Network for Energy and Environment (WoNEE), and went on to describe concerns related to women and electricity, its activities and areas of focus..

The presentations were succeeded by remarks by the learned discussants, **Ms Indira Shakya** and **Dr Pranita Bhushan Udas**. Ms Shakya appreciated the research efforts in bringing out the nuances of the gender-energy nexus and creating the opportunity of addressing problems present at the grassroots level. She also praised the idea of exploring social security through energy access. Ms Shakya shared her valuable suggestions to help improve the study further. For example, she highlighted that along with observing the micro changes taking place in energy policies it is also important to note macro-level issues. She highlighted certain interesting case studies where women are successfully managing electricity services (in Udayapur) and running successful businesses such as dairy factories and home-stays using electricity. She also suggested giving some more focus to the role of health services in the study areas. The second discussant Dr Udas talked about transformative changes brought about in society through marriage and the role of inter-caste marriages in this respect. She recommended the team to explore this angle and the role of electricity access in the wake of such societal changes. She also mentioned that while the facet of economic empowerment of women through electricity access has been well addressed, the idea of breaking social and gender barriers through electricity should also be explored. The session concluded followed by a short tea break.

## Panel Discussion

The panel discussion focussed on the theme *Electricity Access & the Changing Social Position of Women in Nepal*, and was chaired by **Dr Ben Campbell**, who moderated the session. The first panelist to share her views on the topic of discussion was **Ms Nigma Timrakar**. She reiterated the fact that electricity access is a basic need that can greatly diminish the domestic work load of women, as it will increase the efficiency of doing household chores like cooking and cleaning. It also creates time for women to devote to helping children with their studies, as well as increases the possibilities for women to pursue some form of productive work. With electricity, social networks can be accessed by women, which can contribute to their personal development. She raised an interesting possibility of more men helping out women with household work due to the presence of electricity in the house, which can create an environment of peace and harmony in the household as there would be more time to spare. Ms Timrakar appreciated the efforts by the government in encouraging women's participation in various spheres of public life and commended the AEPC's inclusion of gender to its activities

through the GESI toolbox. In conclusion she stressed upon the need to bring electricity access to the doorstep of each and every woman, create human resources in the energy value chain, and make electricity affordable to all.

**Dr Aditi Mukherji** was the next panelist to present her views on the given theme. She shed light on one of the projects undertaken by ICIMOD in the Terai region of Nepal. The project focussed on increasing the access of solar energy for irrigation through solar pumps to the farmers of that region. This proposition was supported by AEPC which introduced a 60% subsidy on solar pumps. In order to make this more gender inclusive, ICIMOD further subsidised the pumps, to around 70%, but put forth the condition that the land where the panel would be installed should be registered in a woman's name. According to Dr Mukherji, this proved to be very successful, surpassing their expectations. Currently almost half the applications for the solar pumps in the project areas are from women.

The next speaker was **Ms Shanta Laxmi Shrestha**, began by briefly describing the demographics and socio-economic profile of the Nepalese population in order to contextualise the social position of women in Nepal. She also shed light on certain gender-discriminatory issues faced by girls and women in the society. The strong nexus between gender and energy is visible through the significant changes it brings to the everyday lives of women, as enhanced access to energy services addresses the time poverty of women, reduces their unpaid domestic and care work, and is an inevitable requirement in changing times. Ms Shrestha reinforced the prospect that sustainable energy goals can be achieved if they are designed with the democratic participation of women. However, the energy policy of Nepal is gender neutral and there is an under-representation of women in different aspects of the energy sector such as energy projects, energy access, energy labour market, energy consumption, energy technology, and education in the country. She added that gender gaps in decision making were perpetuating patriarchy in sustainable development, and gave certain examples of the possible negative effects of electrification. She concluded with some recommendations on making the energy sector more gender inclusive and ways to mitigate any negative implications of gendered energy access.

**Ms Sharmila Karki**, the next panellist suggested to link this issue of energy access to the human rights of women, in order to ensure justice. Explaining her point, Ms Karki recalled the times when electricity access was absent, and women had to work day and night. But since the advent of electricity, the comfort level and quality of life of women have seen a positive change. She emphasised on the need for doing more fact-finding and developing gender-inclusive case studies. Ms Karki also suggested the provision of subsidising electrical appliances that women need, and advocating the same. She concluded by underlining the need to focus on capacity building of the womenfolk, which can empower women economically and thus, bring about a change in their social position.

The last speaker of the panel discussion to put forth her views was **Dr G Mini** from TERI. Dr Mini discussed the findings from the two study areas (Bihar and Chhattisgarh) from the India case of the EFEWEE project. She began with the Bihar case, where the JEEVIKA project (a micro-credit based livelihood promotion programme of the Bihar government) in collaboration with TERI supplied subsidised solar PV systems, for basic lighting and mobile charging, to targeted women beneficiaries. The provision of these subsidised systems became a life-enhancing tool for women as it increased their mobility, security, increased possibility of income-generation,

reduced women's health problems, and provided better environs for children to study. In addition, the time saved on doing household chores created ample opportunities for women to get trained in different skills. However, prevailing social norms and the 'masculine' tag associated with technical jobs hindered women from taking them up. Dr Mini then moved on to the Chhattisgarh case, where it was observed that women had limited opportunities in the technical sectors, as technical organisations preferred to employ men. Also cultural barriers make women hesitant to take up these jobs. Dr Mini also highlighted that though the society was observed to be more egalitarian in this case, women had limited agency due to men being the main asset holders of the households. In conclusion, Dr Mini called for different supporting factors, along with policy implications, to be considered to better understand women's empowerment through electrification.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The workshop was concluded with Mr Debajit Palit giving the concluding remarks and delivering the vote of thanks to all the guests and participants.

### **Acknowledgements**

This workshop was organized as part of the on-going interdisciplinary research project - "Exploring Factors that Enhance and restrict Women's Empowerment through Electrification (EFEWEE)". This research is undertaken by TERI with University of Oslo, Seacrest Consulting, Kenya and Dunamai Energy, Malawi. The research project is one of the five research areas under the ENERGIA Gender and Energy Research Programme Framework, a Five-Year SubProgramme on "Gender and Sustainable Energy for All", supported by the DFID.