



Gender and Energy Workshop

*Energy Access and Women's  
Changing Social Position*

Bangalore, 22 May, 2018

Supported by



**Workshop Proceedings**

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## Background

Modern energy services are crucial to human wellbeing and are considered to be an essential instrument to facilitate overall human development. It is also regarded as an important input in improving gender equality and social inclusion, particularly in contexts where women experience harsh living conditions and are subjected to discriminatory norms. The Beijing Declaration (1995) identified the need for inclusion of women's priorities in public investment programmes for developing economic infrastructure, such as electrification, energy conservation, and water and sanitation. More recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 7 and SDG 5, are encouraging national and international initiatives globally towards providing access to 'affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all' and in achieving 'gender equality and empowering women and girls'.

While there is a growing body of evidence indicating access to modern energy services contributing to improved and enhanced living conditions of women and children, and augmenting the overall economic well-being of families, what has not been fully explored is the changing social position of women within the household and beyond, and the depth and level of empowerment brought about through modern energy. Hence, it is important to have a dialogue and in-depth discussion around the diversified thoughts and opinions about existing linkages, evidences and gaps to understand the various facets of energy access and gendered empowerment.

In the light of this discourse, the Gender and Energy Network India (GENI) aims to work towards gender integration across the entire sustainable energy systems from its production to utilization, as well as in policy making and governance across India, linking a diverse range of organisations and individuals from various disciplines, regions and sectors. GENI is steered by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)<sup>1</sup>, the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and Integrated Research and Action for Development (IRADE).

## Aim of the workshop

In order to promote the exchange of ideas and collaboration on the theme of gender inclusion in sustainable energy access, as well as strengthen GENI, TERI hosted a one-day regional workshop in Bangalore on 22 May, 2018. This event was the third in a series of workshops hosted in cities across India by GENI partners.

## Participants

The focus of the workshop was to brainstorm and initiate a dialogue on unbundling the complexities of energy's impact on women and how these might be channelled towards changing women's social positions and overall empowerment. This was achieved by rich panel discussions on relevant themes, conducted by distinguished and erudite experts from various fields. The workshop generated great interest and received an encouraging response with more than 50 participants from leading national academia, regional policy makers and practitioners,

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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))

corporates and civil society members working in the gender and energy sector and beyond, attending the sessions. The deliberations and discussions initiated through the workshop are expected to create a robust and sustainable platform for future dialogue in the context of amalgamating gender equality and empowerment into the energy domain.

## Summary of Sessions

The workshop was inaugurated by **Mr Debajit Palit**, Associate Director and Senior Fellow, TERI, who welcomed all the guests and gave an overview of the sessions to come. **Ms Kirsten Campbell** from the Low Carbon Energy for Development Network (LCEDN) then introduced GENI to the participants through a presentation. The workshop sessions comprised three panel discussions followed by a GENI meeting for those interested in joining the network.

The first panel discussion on '*Moving beyond buzzwords: energy transitions to complement social transitions*' sought to unbundle the missing linkages between energy access and its potential impacts on intra-household dynamics, cultural sensitivities and women's changing social positions. Three questions were raised for discussion -

- What are the social transitions that accompany energy transitions, and how significant are the changing social positions of women due to energy provision?
- What could be the enabling environment that is a prerequisite for social transition? What are the linkages? Where are the evidence?
- Do gender responsive energy sector policies and programmes lead to larger goals of social transition and gender equity? Are the approaches and results moving beyond the namesake, and if so, how?

The panel was chaired by **Dr Veena Joshi**, Energy expert (formerly Senior Advisor- Energy, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), and the panellists included **Dr Mini Govindan**, TERI; **Mr Chandrashekar Singh**, IRADe; **Dr R. Rengalakshmi**, MSSRF; and **Ms Uttara Narayan**, WRI.

The second panel discussion was centered on the theme, '*We the women: networks for knowledge sharing and collective learning for gender-based transformative changes*' and discussed the importance of networks and women's collectives in influencing gender and development outcomes in the energy sector by promoting more, better informed dialogues, policies and practices. The questions posed to the panellists for discussion comprised -

- How can women's networks/collectives transfer best practices on specific topics by stimulating active knowledge sharing?
- What kind of a platform needs to be created to link a diverse group of practitioners from different regions and sectors?
- What ensures the sustainability of collective networks and platforms?

**Ms Soma Dutta**, Gender and Energy Expert, moderated the discussion amongst the panelists including **Ms Kala Timalina**, Women's Network for Energy and Environment (WoNEE), Nepal; **Dr Ben Campbell**, LCEDN, UK; **Ms Svati Bhogle**, Clean Energy Access Network, India; and **Ms Uma Reddy**, WeConnect International, India.

The final session of the workshop, titled '*Winds of change or winds of challenge: stories from practitioners*' focussed on practitioner experiences with gender approaches to energy interventions and their possible impacts on changing the social power of women within households and beyond. The panellists addressed the following questions while putting forth their views

- What lessons have been learned about changing social positions of women from project level experiences?
- What are the common barriers and challenges that hinder energy projects from turning into a reliable mechanism for women's empowerment at the individual and community level?
- How can policies governing other sectors assist to develop synergies for gender inclusion in the energy sector?

**Mr Debajit Palit**, TERI chaired the session and the panellists comprised **Mr Anshuman Lath**, Gram Oorja; **Mr Vivek Shastry**, Selco Foundation; **Ms Alexie Seller**, Pollinate Energy; **Ms Ruchi Jain**, AOL, **Mr Sreekanth Nair**, SSRDP; and **Ms Sujitha T.**, Kudumbashree Mission.

### **Inaugural Session**

The Gender and Energy workshop was inaugurated by **Mr Debajit Palit**, who extended a warm welcome to all the speakers and participants. Mr Palit briefly explained the objective behind GENI and holding the workshop, which was to promote collaboration on the theme of gender and energy. This theme had been derived from three years of research under the ENERGIA Gender and Energy Programme, which is being carried out by five different teams, each focussing on a particular research topic aimed at understanding some facet of the linkages between gender and decentralised energy. Further, Mr Palit shed light on one such branch of this research- the project '*Exploring Factors that Enhance and restrict Women's Empowerment through Electrification*' (EFEWEE), whose findings would be highlighted in the ensuing discussions and could be beneficial for strengthening the cause of GENI. According to him, the research shows enough evidence that energy interventions empower women economically, but changes in social hierarchies and intra-household dynamics have not been substantial. These were the questions that would be unravelled in the ensuing discussions. In conclusion, Mr Palit gave an overview of the day's agenda, and paved the way for the opening the floor to the first round of panel discussions.

## Session 1: Moving beyond buzzwords: energy transitions to complement social transitions



**Dr Veena Joshi** welcomed the panellists and highlighted the theme of the session and the broad areas on which the discussions would ensue. Further, she emphasised the importance of incorporating gender-specific issues into the energy domain and how GENI can play a crucial role in promoting, strengthening, and taking forward the cause of gender inclusion in the different facets of the energy sector.

She invited the panellists to start the round of discussions.

According to **Mini Govindan**, while it has been relatively easier to gauge changes in women's educational, health and economic levels, it has been much harder to comprehend the changing social positions of women through energy access, and understand if social transitions are facilitating energy transitions or is it the other way round. To elaborate, Dr Mini cited the example of a reservation scheme for women by the Mahavitaran (electricity Distribution Company of the Maharashtra government) wherein 30% seats are reserved for women staff, which includes technical positions. As a part of the scheme numerous women have been recruited and trained as Mahila Vidyut Sahayaks, to handle technical tasks such as climbing poles, and maintaining and repairing transformers and cables. However despite these provisions, there has been reluctance among women to take up such jobs. Dr Mini said that women fear the reactions of the community, especially men, if they start climbing poles, and there also have been reports of women demanding fairness creams with their toolkits to prevent tanning while on the field. Men have also shown resistance to women taking up jobs that traditionally belonged to them. Another similar initiative quoted by Dr Mini was the 'Pink Electricity Zone' created by the Madhya Pradesh power distribution company, which exclusively has women staff in technical and administrative roles. Dr Mini emphasised that it takes more than policies and programmes to bring changes in social positions, as these changes are dynamic, especially in the context of energy. Nevertheless, some positive changes have been witnessed through the intervention of the JEEVIKA project in Bihar, which witnessed some affirmative changes in decision making capacity of women in an otherwise deeply patriarchal society.

The second panellist, **Mr Chandrashekhar Singh** from IRADe highlighted the Ujjwala programme of the government whereby women get LPG connections in their name which makes them the legal owners of the energy system. The subsidy for the LPG cylinders is directly transferred to the bank accounts of the women, thus, leaving money at their disposal to purchase the cylinders. Intra-household relations, said Mr Singh, are based on the distribution of such resources, between men and women of the household depending on their different bargaining powers, and this bargaining power within the household has the potential to bring about social changes. Mr Singh submitted that since there are no national level data available to measure these evidences, primary data assumes more importance. In addition, as the pace of change of intra-household dynamics is slow, policy-level interventions are required to speed up the process of change. Dr Veena Joshi added that interventions are being made, both programmatically and at the household level, and that things are changing slowly, and this needs to be hastened.

**Dr R Rengalakshmi** described the work of her organisation, MSSRF, in clean cooking and the usage of clean energy for productive purposes, with a special focus on agriculture. Their research is spread across three states of India- Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Kerala- having three different agro-ecologies. She opined that federations played an important role in promoting and facilitating access to clean energy technologies such as cook stoves. Elaborating on gendered impacts of clean energy access, Dr Rengalakshmi pointed out that adoption of clean cooking technologies has created more time for women to spend on leisure activities. Further, the provision of energy access in agriculture coupled with men moving to non-farming employment, has led to women taking up larger roles in the agricultural sector including decision making and facilitating different processes. The role of government policies for trying to mainstreaming gender in agriculture was highlighted by Dr Rengalakshmi. One such example cited by her was the provision of subsidies for farm machinery for women farmers by the government. Those women who could gain from the subsidy and acquire farm machinery were also provided training to operate them. However, the success of the training was found to vary regionally as, in Dr Rengalakshmi's words, prevalent social norms limit participation. Though this is beneficial for women in agriculture, it came with a requirement for women to have agricultural land in their name, and since ownership of land for women in rural areas was quite limited, this scheme couldn't benefit a large number of women. The chair, Dr Joshi, gave a couple of important takeaways from Dr Rengalakshmi's talk. Firstly, there is no broad brush as far as women's issues go, as the situation is different for all women, and the variations in their needs have to be taken into account while planning interventions. Secondly, information on drudgery reduction and minimising labour rarely gets quantified. Thirdly, there was a need to ponder over the effects of migration on men and women, in terms of empowerment as well as distress to the rural economies. Finally, giving LPG connections or opening bank accounts for women are much easier than transitions in land ownership to women, which is a long term process.

**Ms Uttara Narayan** from World Resources Institute (WRI) was the final speaker for the first session. Ms Narayan briefed about their latest research which includes studying the nexus between forestry, land degradation and energy access. She said that at the household level, women are the most crucial actors as they are the main users of energy for cooking purposes. However, there is a need to conceptualise the role of women both on the user side and on the supply side in parallel. She added that it was also important to understand the different dimensions of access viz physical (technology), temporal and economic, and the meaning of

access within these paradigms. Ms Narayan pointed out that energy experiences are gendered and not all jobs are created equal. The more vulnerable and underprivileged with low social security are pushed to the lower rungs of these jobs. If we want to have more women in renewable energy jobs, the trainings for these should not be held in cities. Thus, the supply side needs to be readjusted to accommodate women. According to Ms Narayan, generally women's education is not seen as an investment to higher economic development. However, it was also seen that the men in rural areas, who understand the value of education, are more inclined to realise the importance of energy programmes. She opined that development challenges had to be made into entry points in order to bring in energy. For instance, women shouldn't be considered just as beneficiaries of energy interventions, but also as agents of energy access. In conclusion Ms Narayan posed a few questions for all to ponder over- How to conceptualise scale in energy access projects? How to manage and measure failures and how to revise implementation strategies? How to make women agents of policy?

## Session 2: We the women: networks for knowledge sharing and collective learning for gender-based transformative changes



The second session was chaired by **Ms Soma Dutta**, who shared some insights on the value of engaging women in high positions in different fields, including renewable energy and energy access, and also acknowledged that a number of organisations in the renewable energy sector are engaging women in important roles. She emphasised the importance of networking between sectors since energy is a multidisciplinary field.

**Ms Kala Timalisina**, representing WoNEE, Nepal introduced her organisation and the objectives behind creating WoNEE, which is a national network of grassroots women active in 19 districts of Nepal, and works mainly towards advocacy and capacity building of women in energy. Ms Timalisina stressed that a network is an important forum to transfer knowledge, create leadership and identify problems. Networks also serve to fill the gaps between the top and bottom levels of governance, link practitioners and like-minded people, connect different ideas, and transfer learning to diversified groups. An important issue faced by networks was highlighted by Ms Timalisina, which is financial sustainability, as money is required at every step of a network's activities. She suggested several means of ensuring financial inflow such as

selling products of network members, seeking government support, and making efforts to avail grants from donor agencies.

Ms Reddy from WEConnect shared her journey in the field of creating entrepreneurship opportunities for women in the energy sector. In her experience, if women get support to get into entrepreneurship, they tend to employ and support other women. Technology acts as a means and tool for any entrepreneurship and so women need to be brought into that sphere, and provided with useful technical training. Her organisation trained several women to fabricate integrated circuit boards, and all of them went on to find employment later. She shared that they are planning to set up a training centre for women to provide them basic engineering skills. Ms Reddy explained that since women wanted to be successful as entrepreneurs, gaining access to markets became crucial and for this purpose they created a Whatsapp group where women could conduct business and buy products from each other. This gave them a platform where they could witness other women excel in business and this created a demonstration effect for others. The procurement policy at WEConnect dictates them to procure products from women-owned enterprises. They also connect certified women-run companies to big Fortune 500 companies, thus opening up a plethora of opportunities for them. As a closing remark, Ms Reddy added that networks are platforms to share knowledge, discuss issues and look for solutions.

**Ms Svati Bhogle** gave an overview of the Clean Energy Access Network, which she described as a network of practitioners in the Decentralised Renewable Energy (DRE) space. However, they do not yet have a dedicated women's cell. Ms Bhogle stressed that a network must be an ecosystem builder, and that networks must not compete with the businesses of their members. She added that entrepreneurs, both rural and urban, are so engaged in their work that they are unable to think of the big picture, in terms of understanding policies and their implications. In such cases networks can play a role in helping these entrepreneurs respond to issues that can affect them. She gave the example of the time when the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was implemented, how her network conducted trainings and gave advice to their member entrepreneurs in order to prepare them for it. Ms Bhogle elucidated some challenges faced in incorporating the gender aspect in the DRE sector. Projects working as businesses often don't know how to integrate gender into their work without affecting business. Grant funded networks have certain best practices and have the thought process in place, but they primarily focus on the projects rather than creating women entrepreneurship. Also, enterprises linked to energy access products for women in rural areas, such as small solar systems and cook stoves, are not as empowering as they should be. Ms Bhogle felt that though enterprises provide the first step, the entrepreneurs are not able to take it forward. To this Ms Soma Dutta added that networks should not compete, but complement and amplify each other's progress.

The final speaker for this panel discussion was **Dr Ben Campbell** who represented LCEDN. He described the LCEDN as a platform between partners in different disciplines for conversations that otherwise might not be held. He underlined the need for focusing on making technology available at the correct price. He also laid emphasis on having dialogues that embrace multiplicity and diversity, and that it is important not just to 'know-how' but to 'know-who' while negotiating within networks.

The chair concluded the session by giving a key takeaway for GENI- there is a need to talk beyond just gender and energy access, and expand towards gender and energy issues in broader aspects such as education and health.

Each of the panellists was asked to give one piece of advice to GENI, which is listed as follows-

Ms Svati Bhogle- There should be transparency, communication and engagement with members of the network

Ms Uma Reddy- Help other women set up enterprises

Dr Ben Campbell- Give importance to who you want to recruit, especially younger people

Ms Kala Timalisina- Bring focus to the local level by identifying local issues

Ms Soma Dutta- Break the silos that exist between disciplines and the local level

### Session 3: Winds of change or winds of challenge: stories from practitioners



The chair for the final session, **Mr Debajit Palit**, introduced the members of the panel and passed on the baton to the speakers to share their stories and experiences with gender based approaches to energy interventions.

**Mr Anshuman Lath**, Gram Oorja, briefed the audience about his organisation's interventions for energy access, which consisted of micro-grid implementation, work on community waste management, agricultural solutions, and solar pumping. He shared many anecdotes from his village level experiences in energy access and gender. In Malwa, Madhya Pradesh, when they planned to introduce biogas for cooking and asked the village community for their opinion, all the men rejected the proposal and instead asked for better pumping solutions. Mr Lath noted that though the village was relatively 'richer', they still depended on firewood and dung primarily. This showed that economic positions or energy access doesn't necessarily change social dynamics. Social structures were the main problem, especially in the northern belts of India. However, tribal communities were found to be more progressive towards issues related to women empowerment and decision making. But even in these communities, women were

generally uncomfortable in engaging with government agencies, which are mostly male-dominated.

The next speaker, **Ms Alexie Seller**, shared Pollinate Energy's work in rural and urban areas with the workshop participants. They focussed on addressing the issues of marginalised people, who otherwise couldn't access formalised resources and support from NGO's. She shared an anecdote of her experience, where she realised that despite being a female CEO of the company, there were no other female employees. Gradually, she said, she also uncovered a lot of internal biases and a lack of acknowledgement of barriers faced by women in such roles. Ms Seller added that solutions that work in rural communities can also work in urban slums, but due to the threat of eviction, the interventions need to be small scale and mobile.

**Mr Vivek Shastry** from Selco Foundation acknowledged energy as a catalyst for social development and called for the creation of social safety nets, where energy can have a role to play. In his view, lack of energy disproportionately affects women, and went on to give examples of Selco's interventions in addressing these issues, like creating solar powered labour rooms at various Primary Health Centres (PHC's). In terms of women's entrepreneurship, Mr Shastry placed importance on family support to ensure the sustainability of the enterprise.

Representing the Kudumbashree Mission of Kerala was **Ms Sujitha T**, who was the next speaker to share her experiences. She firstly shared the structure of the Kudumbashree network of women's groups. She stated that economic upgradation does not really lead to empowerment as women do not have control over money. In order to tackle these obstacles, Kudumbashree introduced the Gender Self-Learning Programme, where they prepared and distributed modules to women and facilitated discussions in the women's groups. Ms Sujitha emphasised the need to study social transitions as it is a slow process, and ground level realities are often different from the understanding of policy makers. Therefore, Kudumbashree began collective action in the form of leadership programmes, and also helps women become more expressive about their opinions.

The Art of Living (AOL) Foundation was represented by **Ms Ruchi Jain** and **Mr Sreekanth**, who talked about their work in villages, their energy projects and the approach followed by them. Ms Ruchi elaborated about their inclusive approach where they try to include the village community, especially elders, women and the needy in their developmental interventions. They conduct Youth Leadership Programmes, which include yoga and meditation as a part of the training. They also form a village development committee with 60% women representation. These women are responsible for the solar plants installed by the Foundation in the village and take care of the O&M aspects for the same. Mr Sreekanth added that women are given opportunities and support for product distribution, without having to invest anything into the business.

### **Concluding Remarks**

**Mr Debajit Palit** gave the vote of thanks to all the speakers and participants and organisers of the workshop, and requested interested people to stay for the GENI meeting. The bios of the presenters and additional information is available at the website: [http://www.efewee.org/news\\_event.php](http://www.efewee.org/news_event.php)