

What drives the switch to modern energy?

Linkages and Gender Implications

Workshop/ Stakeholder Meeting, Raipur

October 12, 2108

Record of Discussion

Session 1: Drivers of Adoption of Modern Energy: Perspectives from Chhattisgarh

The session started with a presentation of results from a collaborative study by TERI-IISD-IRADe, which explores synergies between energy use, women's empowerment and the drivers and barriers for the uptake of modern forms of energy in a household. The floor was then opened for discussion to all the esteemed panelists.

Mr Sanjeev Jain from CREDA enquired the reason for low usage of LPG as depicted in the study and if low weight (5 kg) cylinders were being distributed in the state. The representative from IRADe, Mr Chandra Shekhar, attributed high cost of the cylinder and lack of awareness among the masses as the reasons for low usage of LPG in the state. Mr Deborshi Brahmachari from TERI added that less 2% of the studied population used LPG exclusively as their primary cooking fuel, while if cases of stacking LPG with other fuels were considered, the percentage went up to 25%. The reasons for non-distribution of smaller cylinders were explained by Mr Debajit Palit, from TERI, as per the information provided by the distributor to NITI Aayog. He noted that the consumers felt entitled to a certain subsidy and thought the distributors were duping them by supplying them lower weight cylinders. Further, women who were already finding it difficult to convince their husbands to get LPG cylinders reportedly had to put in additional efforts to convince them of taking the 5 kg cylinders.

The next panelist to pose questions was Ms Maneesha Sharma, Director Sankalp Sanskriti Samiti, who queried about the data used, the methodology followed, and the rationale for selecting the districts. She enquired about the emphasis laid on the correlation between television viewing and LPG as concluded in the study. Ms Sharma was also keen on knowing if any variables were taken to assess the awareness of government policies and how they have impacted the lives of women.

The data used and the methodology adopted were clarified by the representatives of TERI and IRADe, who said that Census 2011 data was used for the selection of the districts, and the criteria to choose districts where all forms of energy was used , which made the selected sites ideal cases for the study.

A query was also raised regarding lack of any correlation with education and health parameters in the study. TERI and IRADe clarified that though factors such as education, income, and type of electricity were evaluated, they did not significantly affect the data.

Another query was raised on the selection of districts, where it was asked other districts with high energy disparity were not considered, and why the study focused only on LPG, but not other modern sources of energy. TERI and IRADe clarified that the selection was based on accessibility of LPG, various types of electricity access, etc.

On a query regarding electric appliances, Deborshi from TERI clarified that around 15 appliances were assessed but the ones mentioned in the study were used predominantly.

Sanjeev Jain from CREDA agreed to the conclusion of mobile phones being instrumental. He noted that in a solar PV program in a district, the interconnection of TV, mobile and solar lighting was witnessed. He added that the success of a million solar lamps was dependent on mobile phones as solar acted as a solution for charging the devices.

During the discussion regarding use of firewood viz that of LPG, the common sentiment that emerged was that collecting firewood was not a difficult task for women, especially considering lack of alternative productive uses of time and the easy and zero-cost access of firewood. Ms Samina Dubey, Toppers Education Society, noted that LPG procurement was a male dominated decision, and culturally the taste of food cooked on firewood and the lasting hotness of the food, also affect the decision to switch. She also noted that electricity alone may not enable gender mainstreaming and a lot of other factors affect it. Education for example was seen as a joint decision and TV viewing was determined by the majority (unlike in Bihar), but economic decision making was still a ma's domain.

Prof Amitabh Pandey, Indian Institute of Forest Management noted that culturally Chhattisgarh is egalitarian but migrant populations from the neighbouring and heavily patriarchal state of Uttar Pradesh had influenced the local population, to becoming more patriarchal in nature. He added that change from status-quo to LPG was being advocated by the state and, the study (if possible) should bring out a rural-urban contrast. He also noted that solar may be more accessible than electricity and solar appliances may come as a solution.

Session 2: Household Energy Use - Linkages and Gender Implications

Ms Maneesha Sharma, whose organization works with rural, urban and primitive tribes, observed that cow dung and firewood were prevalent in rural areas. As per her, obtaining fuel under the Ujwala scheme was expensive for the people, especially at the time of refilling. Also as lack of water in these areas posed a constraint for usage of toilets, women went in the open for defecation and while there, would collect wood alongside. Education was helping the society as school drop-out rates were observed to have lessened and children were motivating the parents to fulfill their demands. This was being reinforced by civil society organisations working towards spreading awareness. Another factor

was that the Forest Department was not restricting them to take out wood and motivating them to shift to LPG. She added that SHG's were helping in livelihood creation and creating access to finances, which brought an urge among the masses to become modern. These resulted in a lot of subsidies being utilized and increase in awareness. She concluded that the scenario was surely changing, but the process was slow.

Prof Ravindra Brahme, School of Studies in Economics, Pt. Ravishankra Shukla University, asked if energy was really empowering women, and if it wasn't where were we lacking. He stated that Chhattisgarh has a good sex ratio, with the northern and southern parts of the state being predominantly tribal areas. Therefore, the condition of women from the north and south was very different from those from central Chhattisgarh. Prof Brahme added that when assessing energy's impact on empowerment, policy issues become obstacles as at a policy level, the government has not defined energy poverty. He felt that officialising this definition would help the government in assessing the policies and maybe correct the current scenario of low LPG penetration.

Dr Ajay Kumar Singh, Department of Forestry, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, also concurred with Prof Brahme that the northern, central and southern parts of the state had different ideas of living and sustenance. In the northern and southern parts, people mostly habited inside forests or their outer boundaries, and were mostly poor, depending on fuel wood from the forests. He noted that the selected districts, in contrast, come under urban areas. Further he added that from an environment and forest point of view, the situation was not good in the state, as there was heavy dependency on fuel wood for cooking and coal for electricity, and that the electricity being produced was sold out of the state. Solar power picked up in the early 2000's and post 2008 policy changes regarding the classification of biosphere reserves affected the pace of deployment of solar projects. Now solar energy was lacking in the state especially in rural areas which could not afford expensive solar plates.

Dr Pushparaj Singh, Department of Rural Technology and Social Development, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, stated that women's empowerment and energy consumption were not related and added that only positive variables had been included in the study. Quoting an MNRE study, he noted that according to the study, out of 720 families only 31 families hold LPG connection and only 120 use heaters (induction). He agreed to the ill-effects of firewood, especially during the monsoons when extra smoke was produced, but did not see LPG as the solution as accessibility and provision was low, plus it was related to the income – an average rural household could afford it. He suggested concentrating other access areas, such as energy efficient devices. Five thousand tonnes of wood was being burnt in a day, so it goes much beyond women's empowerment, he added.

The representative from SR Corporate Consultants Private Limited noted that though women were being involved in micro-grid systems' maintenance, there was limited information on how women were being affected. However, they have observed it to be a male dominated decision as women required the consent of men. Literacy level of districts also played a major role, as it enabled women to come forward with suggestions and ideas. He added that the onus was on them to maintain the grids to ensure continuous use of supply, and that as a system integrator, they will educate women before installation of a system which will help them in the long run.

In the discussions during and after the session, people noted that the government schemes were getting mixed up and not reaching the beneficiary. Questions were also raised on the consideration of only LPG even when solar was prevalent in Chhattisgarh. It was suggested that the survey should explore beyond LPG. It was also suggested that since macro indicators do not allow for LPG use in a state with 40% poverty, so alternative forms should be made more efficient and less hazardous, and appropriate energy methods should be adopted in tandem with the development of the state. In conclusion the panelist noted that the future policies required for empowerment should be in areas such as education, solar energy, increasing awareness, energy efficient appliances, training and skilling for school drop-outs in energy efficient technology. The session ended with a vote of thanks by the hosts.