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POLICY BRIEF ON GENDER DIMENSIONS OF ENERGY ACCESS AND CLEAN COOKING

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GENDER & SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

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1. BACKGROUND: WHY IS GENDER EQUALITY RELEVANT FOR SUSTAINABLE ENERGY?

Currently, 1.2 billion people in Africa do not have access to electricity and almost 900 million lack access to clean cooking solutions (IEA, IRENA, UN Statistics, World Bank and WHO, 2018). The continent lags others such as Asia and Latin America in energy access with an average electrification rate below 30%. Under current policy and investment scenarios, most African countries are unlikely to reach the 2030 goal of universal access to sustainable energy. To improve prospects of universal access, it cannot be considered only in terms of numbers, but also ensuring that traditionally marginalised persons have access and are part of the provision of sustainable energy. In this respect, research has shown that both access and use are gendered and, in most cases, women are left out. For example, in Kenya, female headed households lag male headed households in accessing electricity by 9.5 percentage points.

Women and their needs tend to be left out both in accessing sustainable energy and in making decisions on energy at all levels, including on energy policy. Even when energy is available, it does not always meet the needs of women. Indigenous women, rural women, and young women, who tend to have low **education** and **economic opportunities**, live in areas with poor infrastructure and/or have low decision-making power, are the worst affected.

In rural Kenya, women in households with electricity access – whether through grid, mini-grids or pico products, still have to spend many hours collecting water for domestic use, and firewood for cooking.

ENERGIA, 2018

2. IMPACT OF COVID19

In Malawian hospitals even at referral level, women, who make up the majority of guardians for patients, still cook patients' meals and their own, on open fires. And women as main carers of patients lack energy to support sterilization of patients' utensils, beddings etc and sometimes must travel long distances to access health services that need power including vaccines, incubation or ventilation support of pre-term babies, or to give birth in equipped hospitals. In the context of COVID-19, the inability to easily and “abundantly” (adequately) access water and inability to sterilise utensils, beddings, etc becomes a more immediate danger for the carers.

COVID-19 has highlighted the difficulties of living without access to electricity and efficient, clean cooking energy. Without electrical appliances to support the increased burdens imposed by COVID-19, the adverse impacts on women's welfare including physical and mental health are high. Lack of clean cooking appliances and cleaner fuels results in 3.8 million premature deaths each year (WHO, 2021) mostly affecting children under the age of five and women due to their higher exposure rates. Household air pollution from cooking fuels could make women susceptible to respiratory infections, which could lead to higher mortality rates for women with COVID-19. In recent years, women have made some gains in entering energy supply chains and have been critical to reaching last-mile populations with renewable energy technologies. However, due to the barriers they continue to face, their businesses are highly sensitive to market changes and are

fragile. COVID-19 disrupted supply chains (e.g. capacity to import) and limited the capacity to reach customers or trade due to travel restrictions or customers' conservative purchasing behaviours in the face of economic uncertainty. It is likely that these women's energy businesses will lose the gains made thus far. While COVID-19 has created opportunities in working from home, and hence theoretically been supportive of women whose mobility is limited, there is little supportive infrastructure such as reliable power and ICT, and support for child-care and the burdens of unpaid care work.



Focusing on COVID-19 in particular, women in almost every country but particularly in African countries are on the frontlines of efforts to address the coronavirus pandemic, whether as carers in health care facilities or at home, or resource providers. In many African countries, implementing lockdown has been impractical in part due to inability to access basic life-supporting services within homes: many households have no power to stockpile and refrigerate food, no indoor or homestead water supply, and many need to go out and purchase lighting fuels or batteries. Even if lockdown is instituted, women still have to go out to source energy, water, food and medical supplies for their families. Women have also taken on increased burdens of home schooling and child-care, heightened care needs of sick people, more cooking at home, and more hygiene and cleaning needs.

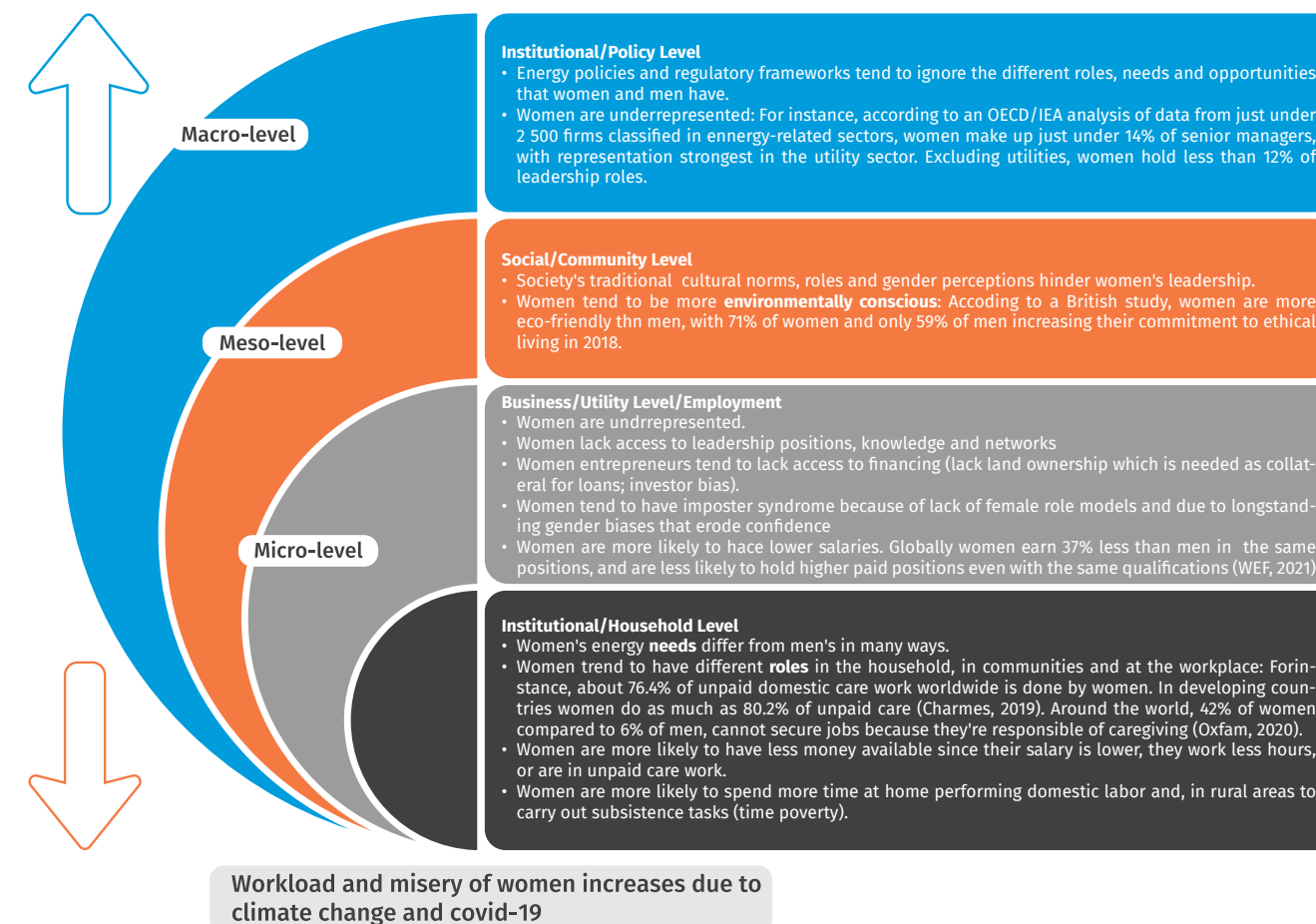


However, including women in all aspects of rural electrification and clean cooking has been found to be beneficial not just to women but to all stakeholders. For women, affordable rural electrification and clean cooking that meets their needs can improve their welfare by improving health through reducing household air pollution and increasing the level of services

available in health facilities, improving access to information including family-planning information, saving them time taken to complete chores, reducing drudgery, and improving working conditions. It can also improve women's economic positions and roles in households and their communities if they can use the energy for productive uses and have some influence over how they use their earnings. When women are included in policy making, and energy supply chains from design, production to sales and after sales, they gain confidence to contribute to wider societal goals. Women in leadership and non-traditional positions in the energy sector contribute to changing restrictive gender norms and narratives. For government, businesses, and development partners, including women diversifies the pool of talent, improving innovation, market resilience (e.g. when men migrate), and the reach especially to last-mile customers. In the specific context of COVID-19, the widely acknowledged need to reimagine economies and infrastructure post-COVID19 provides an unprecedented opportunity for radical transformation of gender relations and women's position in all aspects of the energy sector.

3. KEY FACTS: WHAT HINDERS WOMEN'S ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLE ENERGY?

- Cultural factors, gender norms, bias, and gender roles, and resulting legal restrictions
- Lack of access to resources such as finance, training, technology, networks, business partnerships, opportunities and information, etc.
- Gender-blind or gender-neutral energy policies, strategies and energy access initiatives, such as workplace policies in energy companies, in public procurement, in gender-budgets, etc.
- Under-representation of women in decision making, global energy policy discussions and fora; male-domination of the energy sector; lack of role women models;
- Lack of gender-disaggregated data and gender statistics;
- Lack of awareness on the benefits of gender equality and women's empowerment, such as the business case.



4. KEY ACTIONS – WHAT LEGISLATORS AND POLICY MAKERS CAN DO TO SUPPORT GENDER EQUALITY IN RURAL ELECTRIFICATION AND CLEAN COOKING

1. Build your knowledge on cultural factors, gender norms, bias, and gender roles, and the resulting legal restrictions. **Enhance awareness on the benefits of gender equality and women's empowerment, such as the business case.** Parliamentary energy committees should strengthen their capacity to support gender inclusion, and become high-level champions for gender: examining expenditure, administration and policy in the sector, integration of gender and energy across other ministries, and supporting the inclusion of evidence on gender mainstreaming through working with reputable and experienced gender and energy advocates.
2. **Enhance access of women entrepreneurs and women-led business to resources** such as finance, training, technology, networks, business partnerships, opportunities and information. For instance, implement

long-term, and sustained programmes that support inclusion of women's businesses in energy supply chains, and in energy access (e.g. subsidies to female-headed households, COVID-19 social protection packages to women's energy businesses and productive uses, long term skills building action plans) must be created and supported. Women's entrepreneurship must specifically be promoted, not just low value energy products and services

3. Ensure that there are no more gender-blind or gender-neutral energy policies, strategies and energy access initiatives.
 - a) Legislation should set clear targets and indicators for gender-responsive energy agendas, supported by appropriate levels of investment (financing, time, capacity etc) to support the inclusion of women in the energy sector. This also includes applying a gender-lens to public procurement and in public budgets. Gender should be integrated at all levels a key part of procurement processes.

b) Collaboration and partnership: There is a need to forge stronger and more effective links between energy ministries and gender machineries, and working as equal partners. Gender and energy should be the responsibility of all ministries and should be integrated across all Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Increase women's participation in decision making, global energy policy discussions and fora: Government and development partners must intentionally support the inclusion of women and their concerns in discussions, financing, and strategies on energy transitions and post COVID-19 recovery as well as in energy organisations. This could be done by developing and supporting the implementation of workplace policies and practices that respond to women's needs such as flexible work arrangements and maternity leave.

5. Lack of gender-disaggregated data and gender statistics; Parliamentarians can partner with gender and statistics experts to increase the generation of sex-disaggregated data including tracking gendered energy access through household and demographic census.

6. Lack of awareness on the benefits of gender equality and women's empowerment, such as the business case. Parliamentarians can educate themselves on the business case so they can use evidence during discussions on this topic with the aim to enhance awareness and buy-in from other parliamentarians and policy makers to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

7. Energy access programmes should apply a service-based approach and provide a mix of options according to context. This could include defining and supporting energy access such as lighting and clean cooking access; household electrification combined with power for water supply, health facilities including power for reproductive health services, schools, and community centres etc. Parliamentarians can support this by ensuring that public service budgets specifically allocate funds for services according to needs of women and men, and include energy budgets for public services.

5. ABOUT ENERGIA

ENERGIA was established in 1996 with the objective of mainstreaming gender in energy sector policies and programs in developing countries. It has emerged as a leading international network and played a key role in establishing gender and energy as a credible issue. Today ENERGIA implements a multi-country and multi-partner program spanning 18 countries in Asia and Africa.

You can see more on: <https://www.energia.org>



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