Gender, Energy Access, and Women’s Agency

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**Research Question and Sites**

- **Research Question:** Does a gender responsive approach provide a greater empowerment to women and girls than traditional approaches (based on the household) in the energy sector?

- **Countries of Research:** India and Nepal, 10 rural sites

- **Methods:** Feminist political economy analysis of data collected through quantitative and qualitative methods at micro, meso and macro levels.

- **Focused Attention in conducting research:** Particular attention to social norms and attitudes in access to energy and to voices of women and men with regard to energy policies and practices.
Drivers having most effect on gender and energy policies

- **Electoral politics**: rural women as voters.
- **The state speaks to simultaneously to two groups**: the elites with male forms of power having access to governance, and the political constituency of organized groups of women and men who will influence through their voting rights.
- **Enabling environment**: Institutional structures to support an enabling environment that recognizes the need to address gender specific barriers and tries to address gendered social norms, with policies and effective implementation.
- **Women as economic agents**: as producers, income earners, and bread winners, not dependent on the heads of the household or subsumed in the household.
- 57% of women who were the breadwinners of the home, used LPG as their primary cooking fuel, compared to 29% of women who did not earn an income.
- **Women’s movements and feminist research**: research based advocacy and power of ideas.
Institutional Structures for Enabling Environment through Knowledge and Skills

- Gendered social norms and changes in social norms for equality and inclusion of women in gender specific areas of work and resource control.
- Constraint of gendered social norms are well known. We deal here with challenges to social norms.
- At the meso and micro levels, gendered social norms are being challenged.
- When women become independent income earners, rather than unpaid family workers, social norms change in favour of women.
- When women are owners of agricultural land, and thus recognised as farmers, their asset ownership increases (as against 12.8% of women having operational holdings, the recent national family & health survey 4, 2015-16 shows 38.6% women own land and house in either single or joint names).
- Social norms also change when women are organised/self–organised in groups such as self-help groups & other collectives where many women come together to challenge social norms, they seem to be stronger and more likely to succeed.
- Two-way relationship between energy and agency:
  - What the study demonstrates is that the linkage between energy and agency is two-way. “If women’s agency enables them to turn access to clean energy into use, their use of modern energy in production, in turn, also increases women’s agency or empowers them.”
While Policy for energy access may include gender considerations at macro level, the outcomes at micro level are often diminished socio-economic gendered norms. Hence bringing gender-responsive change is needed through:

- Unmediated (not through marriage relationship) asset ownership (land, house, energy & new technology),
- Delinking land ownership with the status of farmer so that women have access to government schemes meant for farmers
- Training and capacity development in new knowledge and financial skills as well as technology use and operations.
- Evidence shows that the valuation of women’s work is needed for subsidized LPG programs to result in fuel switching to clean cooking energy
- Attention to women’s collectives: In both India and Nepal, rural women’s organisations are active agents in promoting women’s greater use of clean cooking energy and agricultural appliances based on modern energy services. “We will never go back to cooking with wood”

Any energy efficiency programme has to aim at two things simultaneously:

- Assessing project/programme results in increased agency of women
- Increasing the efficient use of clean energy both for home and outside in agriculture.
Increased agency of women: Transformed power relations in the household structures with its impact on women’s social position

- **Policies and Programs for LPG**
- **LPG distribution agencies**
- **Local LPG distributors**
- **Women users and consumers**
- **Propogation/outreach of LPG scheme**
- **Women’s collectives and civil society groups**
- **Social and gender audits of access and use**
- **Linkages with women’s asset-holding, employment/self employment**

**Improved health and wellness**

**Efficiency of LPG use**

**Sustainability of supply**