



REEECH WEBINAR SERIES

Towards energy justice: Addressing gender inequalities in energy policies in the HKH

Country context: Nepal and Bhutan

07 October 2021 | 14:00-16:45

(Nepal Standard Time, UTC+05:45) | MS Teams

The webinar series

Energy poverty – the absence of adequate modern energy services to meet basic household needs – is one of the most daunting development challenges. Pre-existing social relationships and power hierarchies determined by gender, caste, ethnicity, religion, language, and geography determine access to reliable and affordable energy between and within countries, between urban and rural areas, and between and within households. These factors have led to an energy divide, leading to unequal flow of benefits from energy resources, and placing women, the poor, and people from excluded groups at greater risk of energy poverty.

Communities living in the mountain areas are particularly vulnerable to energy poverty as they have a high demand for thermal energy due to cold climatic conditions but limited access to power transmission networks and alternative energy sources. Furthermore, women in the mountain communities experience energy poverty differently and more severely than men as they are primarily responsible for fulfilling the energy needs of their families.

The potential welfare gain for women and excluded groups from increased access to energy sources, services, and technologies is significant. There is a need to recognize the linkages between gender, poverty, and energy and address them in energy policy. In this regard, our [Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Capability for the Hindu Kush Himalaya \(REEECH\) Initiative](#) and [International Renewable Energy Agency \(IRENA\)](#) is organizing a series of country-specific webinars as part of our commitment to achieve energy justice by addressing the lack of gender mainstreaming in energy policies in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region.

The webinar series will focus on clarifying the linkages between gender, poverty, and energy and addressing these through related policies and programmes to have far-reaching implications for economic development, women's equality and empowerment, and environmental conservation. The first webinar of this series focuses on Nepal and Bhutan. The participants will hear from gender and energy experts and government officials about the extent to which gender issues have been mainstreamed in relevant policies and programmes as well as the key challenges, constraints, ongoing efforts, and opportunities in addressing the gender dimensions of energy poverty.

Objectives

- Review the extent to which gender issues have been addressed in the energy sector (policy, institutional, and programmatic domains) of the HKH
- Draw on existing good practices in the energy portfolio
- Recommend strategies and approaches for gender mainstreaming and social inclusion in energy sector planning, project design and implementation, operations, and capacity building

Each webinar will conclude with recommendations for filling the policy gap in addressing gender-related constraints in access to, ways of use, opportunities, and control over energy.

Gender, energy, and poverty linkages in the HKH

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 7 states that 'ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all is central to progress in all areas of development'. However, very few countries



PHOTOS: JITENDRA RAJ BAJRACHARYA, ICIMOD

have balanced the growing demand for energy to drive growth and ensure energy access to all. In most developing countries, energy poverty is still linked to issues of availability, access, and reliability of energy services rather than affordability and sustainability. This is particularly true for mountain areas where people living in remote and rugged mountain settlements are usually far from major energy production centres and depend on natural resources for their energy needs. Women spend considerable time foraging, cutting, and carrying heavy loads of fuelwood to meet the energy needs of their families often at the cost of their education and other productive activities. Cooking with biomass in ill-lit conditions and using inefficient stoves that cause indoor air pollution has detrimental effects on their health. Lack of access to clean energy has a high opportunity cost for women, constraining their economic and social development.

Women and socially excluded groups experience several barriers while accessing energy services and technologies, including the high cost associated with grid extension, especially in remote areas with sparse population density resulting in limited access to energy services for poor and marginalized groups; the high up-front cost associated with renewable energy technologies; the lack of parity between state subsidy and user's equity and gender, caste, and ethnicity-based differences.

The transition from conventional fuel to affordable, reliable, clean, and sustainable modern energy like solar, hydro, or wind energy will not only help reach out to remote areas where outreach through grid electrification is difficult, but will also generate green jobs for the local community, have a transformative effect on women in the mountain areas through increased fuel efficiency, reduction in drudgery and health risk and ensure environmental conservation by lowering emissions and pollution

As primary energy managers in households, women can play a crucial role in promoting sustainable

energy consumption and accelerating the shift to renewable energy. However, to fully realize this potential, the renewable industry must address the underrepresentation of women by eliminating structural barriers to women's participation in the energy sector's labour force and decision-making. Unfortunately, energy policies not only overlook the specific needs of women and the challenges faced by them in accessing energy but also undermines their role in adopting, promoting, and accelerating the energy transition. This leads to their underrepresentation at all levels of the sector. To design and implement programmes and policies that ensure equitable participation and benefit-sharing from energy sources, services, and technologies, we need to understand the differential needs, capacities, and usage for men, women, and socially excluded groups and address the barriers that prevent them from participating in the planning of and decision-making on energy services and deriving benefits. Developing potential entry points for leveraging gender issues in the energy sector policies and programmes is critical to have transformative impacts that enhance welfare, efficiency, empowerment, and gender relations at the local level.

The country context: Nepal and Bhutan

NEPAL

The majority of Nepal's rural population depends on traditional biomass to meet its household energy needs, which has environmental and health implications, particularly for women. Women in Nepal's rural mountain areas spend around five to six hours a day collecting firewood and two to four hours processing food grain. Women can also spend up to four hours fetching a gallon of water. The use of renewable energy-based pumping solutions for domestic water supply and irrigation can bring significant benefits including saving time, reducing drudgery, improving access to water and sanitation, and other co-benefits for agricultural productivity and resilience.

BHUTAN

Household energy consumption in Bhutan is dominated primarily by biofuels, such as fuelwood, for cooking and space heating. These constitute 96% of final energy use in the residential sector. The high dependence on primary biofuels disproportionately affects the health of women and children. Bhutan has significant gaps in modern energy access among female- and male-headed

households. Lack of affordability among female-headed households also affects the uptake of modern energy solutions. For instance, while the Bhutanese government provides financial support to cover the electricity connection fees, user-borne charges related to the internal wiring, maintenance, and bills pose an affordability constraint for electricity use for cooking (and other purposes) for female-headed households.

Agenda

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Moderator: Suman Bisht, Senior Gender Specialist, ICIMOD

Time (NPT)	Programme	Speakers
14:00-14:10	Introduction and background	Suman Bisht, Senior Gender Specialist, ICIMOD
14:10-14:25	Welcome remarks	Rabia Ferroukhi, Director of the Knowledge, Policy and Finance Centre, IRENA
14:25-14:45	Setting the context: Findings from ICIMOD data analysis	Suman Bisht, Senior Gender Specialist Kosar Banu, Gender Specialist, ICIMOD
14:45-15:30	Panel Discussion 1: Gender review of national energy policies, programmes and institutional landscape	
14:45-15:00	Gender equality in the energy sector in Nepal: A review	Indira Shakya, Gender and Energy Expert, Nepal
15:00-15:15	Improving gender inclusive access to energy in Bhutan	Deki Yangzom, Programme Officer, NCWC, Bhutan
15:15-15:30	Q&A	
15:30-16:00	Panel Discussion 2: Key government strategies to promote gender mainstreaming in the energy sector	
15:30-15:40	Gender responsive development of energy sector	Parbata Bhatta, Assistant Director, Alternative Energy Promotion Center (AEPIC), Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Nepal
15:40-15:50	Gender responsive development of the energy sector	Dawa Zam, Deputy Executive Engineer Department of Renewable Energy, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan
15:50-16:00	Q&A	
16:00-16:20	Interactive session The way forward: Policy recommendations	Suman Bisht, Senior Gender Specialist, ICIMOD
16:20-16:40	Closing remarks	Chanda Gurung Goodrich, Gender Lead, ICIMOD

Relevant publications

[Renewable energy benefits: Decentralised renewable energy solutions for the agri-food chain \(2016\)](#)

[Renewable energy: A gender perspective \(2019\)](#)

[Wind energy: A gender perspective \(2020\)](#)

Organized by

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)

For further information

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