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How Gender-sensitive Are India's Energy Policies?

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(This editorial is based on the article "How Gender-sensitive Are India's Energy Policies?" which appeared in EPW for 19th January 2019. In this editorial, we'll see how the use and access to energy is gendered, and discuss gender sensitivity in Indian energy policies.)

There is an argument that access to clean energy is gendered. It is influenced by intra-household decision-making driven by restrictive gender norms.

Energy policies that do not recognize the gendered nature of energy access will continue to focus on supply-side measures without giving due attention to the diverse energy demand characteristics of end users.

Concerns

- **Women and men have differential energy needs** given the prescribed gender roles at both household and productive spheres.
- **Cooking, washing and care work, and the consequent lack of access to clean energy** for these activities have an impact on women more than men.
- Women are more vulnerable to household air pollution-related health hazards from solid biomass use as they are primarily engaged in cooking as well as fuel collection for cooking. **The other impact of solid biomass dependence is in terms of lost opportunities for women's time and labour.**
- Lack of clean energy-based home appliances increases women's drudgery in household work.
- In agriculture and allied rural livelihoods, there is a clear gendered division of labour. **Women are largely engaged in labour-intensive activities like sowing, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting.** However, women face barriers in accessing clean energy-based drudgery-reducing implements/machinery due to restrictive gender norms that limit their ownership of productive assets and recognition as farmers.
- **Furthermore, women's role in energy supply and value chain is rarely recognized**

in policies. Their contribution to energy supply is estimated in the range of 10% to 80% of the total energy in developing countries.

- Women participate in the energy supply chain as biomass collectors, producers of charcoal, briquettes, dung cakes, improved cookstoves, solar lights and also in marketing of energy products like liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), cook stoves, solar lights, and cookers.

Gender Inclusiveness in Policy

- Traditionally, India's energy policy designing and planning have been gender-neutral, with the exception of the **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)** launched in 2016.
- The PMUY is an attempt to bridge this gap and, though it has resulted in increased LPG uptake, the low refill rates reported across the states are a cause of worry for the long-term sustainability of the programme.
- The PMUY is the first attempt to bring in a gender focus, in addition to retaining the income focus, in domestic energy policies.
- However, India's energy policy interventions pertaining to pricing and energy availability have recognized sectoral and class differences in energy requirement and consumers, respectively. This is evident in the policy on free electricity for agriculture, differential pricing for energy used in agriculture and industry, concessional pricing for backward areas, and special provision for tribal areas.
- On the domestic cooking energy front, the provision of subsidized fuel, introduction of smart cards for below poverty line (BPL) families and the National Biogas Programme are steps taken by policymakers to facilitate clean energy access to poorer sections of society.
- An analysis of LPG use across social categories and by female-headed households across India clearly shows that female-headed households have the lowest uptake of LPG, much lower than Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Scheduled Caste (SC) households.
- The 2011 Census reports cooking and lighting sources according to the sex of the household head, but does not provide gender disaggregated data on the quantity of energy consumption by energy sources.
- **Rajiv Gandhi Gramin LPG Vitaran Yojana (RGGLV)**, an LPG distribution scheme to reach the unreached remote areas, provides LPG dealership in the joint ownership (50% partnership) of the applicant and his/her spouse.
- **The Shakti Gaon Yojana of the Odisha government** which hands over LPG distribution to women SHGs is also a step towards enabling women's presence in the energy supply chain.
- **The Saubhagya scheme** is a welcome step as it relies on the "deprivation" criterion, which includes female-headed households, in the socio-economic and caste census for beneficiary identification.
- **A critical analysis of the Integrated Energy Policy (IEP)** and the National Energy Policy (NEP) reveals that while both the IEP and NEP emphasize and recognize

women's gendered role in the domestic sphere they do not recognize women's gendered role in production, and fail to make any specifically targeted provisioning of clean energy for productive purposes on the basis of gender.

- Lastly, **policies aimed at facilitating women's land ownership through joint pattas (title deeds), or incentivising land transfers to women through a higher subsidy rate for energy-intensive technologies (as observed in Odisha), organising women into collectives to increase their bargaining position and facilitating access to energy-intensive technologies** through collectives like Kudumbashree in Kerala are some of the complementary interventions that have yielded results in women's access to clean energy technologies for productive purposes across some states in India.



Way Forward

- At present women manage one-third of the energy system in India through gathering

fuels. They need to be supported through management, investment, and technology so as to manage it sustainably and with minimum hardship.

- **Energy, health and the transport of fuels need to be addressed** in order to reduce energy poverty. All these require more management and policy initiatives. Capacity building is needed to promote the use of efficient energy appliances and their availability.
- A national mission on “**having cooking fuel available for rural women within one kilometer**” is needed to reduce the hardships of carrying heavy loads. In addition, transportation should be made easier by enabling access to transportation solutions such as wheelbarrows, better pathways, and small motorized transport with community arrangements for carrying heavy biofuel loads.
- **Women could form cooperatives** to grow trees for fuelwood or plant oilseeds. This would put an end to searching and gathering by organizing a wood supply on a sustainable basis. There is a need to promote Self Help Groups for empowering women. Also, create rural fuel markets by establishing a value for the fuelwood collected or grown, and so add economic value.
- **The government should also continue to provide a subsidy to promote clean fuels.** Mass awareness programs for popularising clean fuels.
- Further, the Government should develop micro-enterprises by interlinking microcredit and energy programmes, and shift from government initiatives to public-private partnerships.
- **Access to energy should be linked as a promotional incentive** for running small-scale energy business units for livelihood security and creating more employment opportunities for women.
- **Health centers should be sensitized to the issues** associated with indoor air pollution and the workers trained to spot and address respiratory diseases as well as problems linked to transport fuels.
- There is a need to look beyond cooking fuels, at energy for livelihoods, lighting, transport, agriculture, and also water and sanitation. Policy initiatives require a shift of focus from energy supply to end-user services. **Emphasis also needs to be placed on the education of women and spreading awareness.**

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