

*Part Two*

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# **Lessons from Project Experience and Policy Gaps**

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# Overall Lessons Learned and Policy Gaps

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Experience from projects provides an important lesson, that engendering development in a real sense is not possible without first addressing the problems of women related to time and drudgery. Projects that consider only the short-term benefits and ignore productive and strategic gender needs are unlikely to be sustainable in the long run. The pilot implementation project, 'Incorporating Needs and Roles of Women in Water and Energy Management in Rural Areas in South Asia – Capacity Building in Rural Areas of the Himalayas' identified water and energy as the key entry points for intervention to meet women's practical needs first (ensuring daily survival) through improved access to W&E technologies.

The saving in time and the reduction of the drudgery involved in the daily collection of water and fuel was harnessed by integrating the support mechanisms of credit, skills training, and the organisational capacity building necessary to address women's productive needs for income generation and increased economic capability. The saving was also harnessed to meet women's strategic needs, i.e., their position in society, in particular to gain greater equality with men, and contribute to empowerment. The project provided space for women to participate in and benefit from multiple activities, and addressed the twin challenges of engendering water and energy management and empowering women. The experience from the project suggests that this is a method to achieve both efficiency goals (meeting practical needs) and equity goals (meeting strategic needs).

## Lessons Learned

The key lessons that emerged from the project experiences are summarised below in thematic groups. (The project is described in more detail in the companion publication 'Capacity Building of Women in Energy and Water Management in Rural Areas of the Himalayas': Final Report, ICIMOD 2005).

### Understanding and awareness of the issues and the solution

- Gender analysis in identification of needs and roles is the essential first step in any W&E related programme.
- Awareness raising about different renewable W&E-related technologies is important for enhancing rural women's access to water and renewable energy technologies (RETs).
- An exposure visit is critically important for breaking the entrenched sociocultural barriers that restrict the use of improved technologies.

## **Capacity building and training**

- Training of prospective women as trainers is an effective way to train other women both within and outside project villages.
- The organisational capacity building of women at the grassroots level is essential for raising their voice in the decision-making process at the household and community level.
- Coordination and linkages with different organisations from the beginning of the project is essential for wider support in various areas.
- Women can be successful energy entrepreneurs.

## **Choice of appropriate technologies**

- Time-saving and drudgery-reducing technologies are crucial entry points for addressing women's practical needs and for contributing towards their productive and strategic needs.
- As a more permanent solution to water scarcity, recharging traditional water springs is possible through innovative measures such as micro-reservoirs, plantations, and social fencing on mountain slopes.
- The technology demonstration village is an effective model for broadening awareness and speeding up technology transfer in inaccessible mountain areas.

## **Financing technological interventions**

- The establishment of a revolving fund and group savings is essential for enhancing women's access to renewable energy technologies.
- Provision of a clearly designed level of initial subsidy is essential for pump priming.
- The availability of an accessible micro-finance institution with comfortable lending practices is the key to overcoming the initial cost barriers (high up front costs).

## **Policy mainstreaming**

- Integration of good practices from pilot activities into the existing government programme is possible and is an effective method of linking bottom-up experience with national policy.

## **Targeting women**

- Focusing on women as a target group for empowerment is an essential first step for gender mainstreaming. Women-specific initiatives can create an empowering space for women and act as an important incubator for ideas and strategies that can be mainstreamed later on.
- Women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming do not compete with each other but are complementary. Women are to be given priority because they are the key managers of energy and water resources at the household level, besides taking care of the whole household.

## Policy Gaps

The pilot project also provided a possibility for analysing existing policies in the three countries studied and highlighting gaps in the country-specific policies and programmes related to integrating gender needs and concerns in W&E management. These are summarised below.

As in much of South Asia, the greater Himalayan region, particularly in India and Nepal, is an area of classical patriarchy in which women have few economic rights (land, formal credit); have low literacy levels; and suffer because of strong traditions of female seclusion. This patriarchy is manifested essentially in legal structures, e.g., tying women's property rights with marriage, the ideology of the compulsion of marriage, and the need for having sons for salvation. The relationship is circular and hampers women's access to resources and avenues of employment, health facilities, education, and knowledge, which in their turn make women more dependent on men for access to resources. Although Bhutan has a matrilineal system, in practice here also little voice is given to women to shape their own choices, and despite the fact that the government has recognised improvement in women's status as one of its major policy objectives, the inadequate gender sensitivity of the implementing machinery remains a major hurdle to the implementation of all government policies. Much of the problems with women's advancement are thus related to such societal ideology, behaviour, and structures. It is in this context that the realisation of pro-women W&E policies calls for confronting these societal norms, attitudes, and practices through changing people's mindsets, apart from the enforcement of formal law and regulations against gender discrimination.

A close review of the existing national policies and programmes in the three countries under study reveals that policy makers continue to treat W&E policies as gender neutral in terms of impacts, thus failing to recognise the differing roles and needs of women and men in water and energy management. As an example, the conventional investments in W&E that goes into larger infrastructures often do not benefit women and they have little control over such projects. Biomass energy at the national energy planning level has not received the attention it deserves despite the fact that it will be dominant in the overall rural energy scene for many years to come.

Many energy uses and energy sources are ignored completely in national energy planning, in particular, the human metabolic energy used. Women's interest in energy is narrowly defined in the sense that fuelwood is regarded as the main concern of women with no thought for other energy-using tasks and other sources of energy that impinge on them. With the exception of projects related to ICS, biogas, and forestation programmes, all other energy projects – both for conventional energy investment (power stations, extension of the electricity grid) and for new and renewable sources – are seen as gender neutral. Even in projects which are seen as 'women's projects' the voice of women is not always heard when women are not involved in the project, with little or no attention paid to women's opinions about the technology. This was the reason why the earliest improved cooking stove programmes were mostly a disaster. Projects which have a short funding period

coupled with a limited number of staff cannot afford to 'waste' time arranging for project staff to sit for hours discussing the technology with women. Programmes with a centralised, target-based, subsidised approach have mistakenly based their success on the hurried achievement of the allotted targets rather than the number of stoves – or other technology – actually used, often ignoring aspects such as awareness generation, training, and maintenance.

Sectoral division of responsibilities without full coordination for integrated planning has been another reason for illogical energy planning, particularly since energy is not really a sector on its own, but an input into many other sectors. Women are more likely to be represented at policy levels in 'soft' ministries such as health and community development than in technical areas/agencies of water and energy; and again lack of cooperation between 'soft' and 'hard' ministries hinders the process of introducing more gender-aware approaches.

Even though the governments of all the three countries involved in the project have begun to incorporate women's issues in their five-year plans, especially since 1975, none so far has a clear policy for integrating the needs and role of women in W&E management at the household and community levels. Some of the common concerns identified in the country reports are listed below (see below for summaries of country-specific policy reviews).

- Women, especially in rural areas, face particular hardship due to lack of water and energy services.
- Energy planning processes, policies, and projects generally have not been gender sensitive.
- National energy plans need to focus more on rural electrification and to be coordinated better with other policies, such as those on land use, forestry, and women's development needs.
- Better analysis is needed regarding past and current energy projects and policies because too often pilot projects have simply been discontinued and new ones begun without any consideration of the lessons learned from what was tried before.
- Participatory approaches are needed in W&E project planning.
- Education and training of women is needed to increase their role in W&E plans and projects.
- More public information is needed about possible W&E options.
- Better affordability and financing arrangements are essential for project continuity, especially credit for women.

# Country-specific Policies, Issues, Lessons Learned, and Suggested Policy Directions

## Bhutan

Bhutan is at the inception stage in gender mainstreaming. As the present priority of the Royal Government of Bhutan is on local governance, gender mainstreaming as a strategy has not yet been developed fully and effectively. In an attempt to promote decentralised governance and people's participation in development, studies were conducted to understand the different needs, interests, and constraints on women and men; and their involvement in development processes. The First Gender Pilot Study (2001) was conducted to collect and analyse gender-disaggregated information on key sectors in selected districts (urban and rural) to deepen understanding of gender relations in Bhutan and feed the key findings into the planning processes of the 9th Five-Year Plan. Some of the constraints outlined in the report are outlined below (RSPN 2004).

### *Societal perception stacked against women's participation in decision making*

Community meetings are the men's domain. Men elect each other to management committees according to societal norms. The women, by contrast, are shy and diffident about speaking up or taking active roles, even though they are usually keenly interested in any discussion to do with energy and water. This societal bias against women's participation, even in matters where women have more experience and expertise than men, is one of the most serious impediments to women's involvement in energy and water management, for it has ingrained itself in the minds of both men and women over centuries and expresses itself concretely in the composition of local and national management and decision-making structures. For energy and water management systems to utilise the traditional knowledge and the concerns women have displayed, it is necessary to address these societal and power impediments.

### *Matriarchal relations do not necessarily express themselves in control over land rights*

Water rights are often closely tied to land tenure arrangements and are often transferred with land. Although women may have the legal right over the land, which is passed on from mother to daughter, they often have no right to participate in organisations that take decisions regarding its use and are culturally excluded from decisions and activities involved in water provision for irrigation. Irrigation is regarded socially as an activity for men. Women are not consulted when infrastructure work to improve irrigation projects is being planned, or when grants are being allocated, and in general they are denied participation in decision making and benefits, which further exacerbates the discrimination and insecurity they suffer.

*Women often lack skills relevant to participation, partly because of their lower access to education and resulting lower self-confidence*

Women are often less informed about technical projects because project staff and village men consider this a male topic. When women are able to attend meetings, they often feel restrained by their lack of education. Because of societal norms as barriers, the accepted role of a woman at public meeting is often to listen to the men talk. Women have little experience in public debates, and even women people's representatives have been found to express themselves less freely or frequently than men. Women's mobility is restricted largely to visits to relatives, to the dispensary, the market, or the flourmill. In many cases, energy and water projects involve the introduction, operation, and maintenance of new technology and construction work. These are not regarded as activities for women, and women are often not offered the training necessary to equip them to enter these fields.

The challenge in Bhutan is to eradicate the more subdued and indirect forms of gender bias existing within society or emerging as a consequence of change. Despite equal opportunities and entitlements, and equal legal status for women and men, differences are seen in equitable access, particularly in education, enterprise development, and governance, leading to lower levels of achievement for Bhutanese women and girls. Societal perceptions that women are physically weaker and more vulnerable has greatly influenced women's access to educational and employment opportunities. Cultural barriers stand out as the major constraint preventing women from coming forward to participate in public functions. Women's own perceptions of themselves also seem to be based on these two factors. Women are now active participants in decision making in the programme areas of the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (the implementing partner) as a result of its social mobilisation compulsion rules.

### **Lessons from project experience**

- Focusing on women's water and energy needs as an entry point leads to multiple benefits that go beyond good project performance and are manifested in improved hygiene and awareness about nutrition. An important benefit is the intergenerational impact of children's schooling.
- Better access to energy and water gives women more time for income-generating activities, the needs of family members, or their own welfare and leisure.
- Project beneficiaries are likely to have a stronger sense of ownership when the project gives them enough time, design flexibility, and authority to take corrective action.
- Provision of project seed money for establishing a group 'revolving fund' and mobilisation of group savings on the basis of criteria set by the groups themselves can serve as an effective way of financing and ensuring financial sustainability.
- The community mobilisation process has encouraged women's participation in public life and provides them with a voice in the affairs of the community. The men have started realising that women are equal partners in family affairs as well as development activities.



- The formation of separate community organisations for women enables them to discuss the specific problems they face: in mixed groups women shy away from discussions and decisions. But to give them a voice in community affairs and integrate them into the decision-making process, it is necessary that all village-based activities have equal representation.
- The design of technology such as ICS is not viable given the structure and design of Bhutanese houses and modifications to the technology would require extra financial support.
- The feasibility of a new technology and comparative studies with existing technology are essential. In the case of ICS, the cost of the existing technology, 'burkhart', is lower than that of the introduced technology, and beneficiaries are not keen on accepting the new technology.
- The project duration was too short to meet the objectives effectively, considering that participatory initiatives and management are new concepts in Bhutan.

### Policy directions

Women specific projects such as Women, Energy and Water are needed to promote gender equality because gender equality has not yet been attained and gender mainstreaming processes are not well developed. Such projects are important for reducing existing disparities, serving as a catalyst for promotion of gender equality and creating a constituency for changing the mainstream. Suggested policy directions are:

- Establish gender disaggregated data on energy and water collection and use patterns by end use activities covering the time, drudgery and health impacts associated with their collection/use, and on decision-making processes on household energy and water using standard gender analytical tools
- Promote technologies that reduce the time and drudgery spent, and also provide opportunities for women to assist in developing renewable energy forms by involving them in the design, construction and maintenance of the technology
- Invest in women's organisational capacity building and empowerment through social mobilisation to raise awareness, build self confidence, expand choices, increase access to and control over resources, improve logical sharing of burdens, benefits and responsibilities between women and men, and initiate actions to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality.
- Establish and strengthen mechanisms at grassroots, and national levels to facilitate the required participation of all stakeholders.
- Efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and affordability are the main gains of adopting a gender approach towards energy and water management. Reaching them requires detailed attention to social realities during the design, and throughout the execution, of energy and water delivery systems.

## India

The Government of India is committed to mainstreaming gender perspectives in the development process and has taken various proactive measures to create such capabilities and opportunities for women. It is necessary to further facilitate the participation of women in the development process by first addressing their immediate concerns. This calls for an understanding of their needs and concerns as well as their resources, and the creation of time and energy through the introduction of drudgery-reducing and productivity enhancing technologies in rural areas. Until recently, programmes have mistakenly based their success on the number of units given out rather than the number used. The emphasis on numbers does not reflect user requirements. In a hurry to achieve the allotted targets, aspects such as awareness generation, training, and maintenance are often ignored. It is necessary to ensure that targets flow from bottom to top (TERI 2004).

Gender mainstreaming has been included in different ways in periodic plans. The Seventh Plan (1985-1990) declared for the first time the objective of bringing women into the mainstream of national development; while the Eighth Plan (1992-1997) projected a paradigm shift from development to empowerment to ensure a flow of benefits to women in the core sectors of education, health, and employment. The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) again declared the empowerment of women as its strategic objective, making assurances that at least 30% of funds/benefits from all development sectors would flow to women. The current Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2009) has suggested specific strategies, policies, and programmes for the empowerment of women. Chief among them are the targeting of women-headed households and disadvantaged groups on the basis of deprivation parameters; the formulation of gender sensitive development indicators as a tool for monitoring progress toward human development; and the devolution of authority to the panchayats and municipalities to administer progress at the grass roots level.

Evidence from the evaluation of national programmes for promoting renewable energy technologies like biogas, improved cooking stoves, and solar cookers shows a wide variation in functionality rates and long-term acceptability of the technologies. A lack of women's involvement at all stages in the project cycle was identified as one of the major causes of a project's limited sustainability. The experience further indicates that a lack of local involvement and capacity, especially women's, is one of the biggest constraints to the success of rural energy interventions in India (Dutta 1997).

### Policy gaps and issues

- The disconnection between policy and implementation is amplified in cases where gender sensitivity is required.
- Women are not aware of their rights.
- There is a lack of synergy on gender issues between different programmes
- Policy does not factor in micro-complexities.
- There is no systematic approach to advocacy.
- More models are needed to convince policy makers.

## Lessons from project experience

- Recognition of efficient energy/water provision is fundamental to women's empowerment.
- Actual needs should be incorporated. leading to local solutions.
- User needs and the changes desired in the traditional system have to be studied carefully before disseminating biogas, ICS, or any other technology. For example, ICS will be more relevant in areas where there is a perceived scarcity of fuelwood (arid areas where trees grow very slowly).
- Programmes should have a larger component of awareness generation.
- The water-energy nexus emphasises productive aspects.
- Women can be the catalyst and agents of change in the process of reform.
- Women's institutions can be given lead roles in entrepreneurship.
- Subsidies should be redirected to target women specifically (entrepreneurs).

## Policy directions

Since water and energy are women's most immediate concern, appropriate interventions must include a comprehensive 'package' covering all aspects of household energy and water provision. Technological solutions should be arrived at by consulting women and preference should be given to their needs, aspirations, and convenience. Technological interventions should encourage and support women in looking at their lives as dynamic and progressive and should contribute to (self)-confidence building.

The needs are summarised below.

- Menu of technology options to address the water and energy needs of women
- Provide capacity building support for entrepreneurship
- Facilitate micro-planning with a focus on indigenous solutions
- Legal and policy support for giving a leadership role to women and increasing their empowerment
- Expand project activities to make an impact at the policy level through working jointly with the government and presenting 'model cases'
- Need for a programme approach to establish a demonstration model (e.g., entrepreneurship, technology options, credit and women-centric institutional mechanisms, and a deliverable, larger, and more structured component of advocacy and outreach) and a framework on gender mainstreaming across different programmes
- A bottom-up approach functions better than the centralised approach. A strong local NGO will help the government to design and implement the programme more efficiently at the local level.
- Technology should be implemented according to needs, aspirations, and convenience: points to consider are familiarity, simplicity, durability, aesthetic appeal.
- Needs assessment is necessary before implementation.
- Provision of soft package loans to address the problem of affordability
- Assessment of social structure of caste, gender, kinship and land holding, leadership etc.

- Energy services for the use of women requires that they have awareness – education, awareness and technological training required
- A single body is essential at the village level (which has adequate women's representation), other than the main implementing government organisation at the centre, to plan, implement, and manage energy programmes
- Increased involvement of NGOs will help in designing programmes that are closer to the social and cultural realities of rural society

## Nepal

In Nepal the need to overcome the legal impediments to women's involvement in most economic activities and empower them was not recognised until the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-1985). The Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992-1997) also recognised the need for increasing women's participation at each decision-making level in government, non-government, and semi-government set-ups. It also gave major importance to the development of rural energy technologies (RETs). While the present Tenth Plan (2002-2007) attaches importance to gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting issue across all ministries, it does not explicitly link gender concerns with energy and water-related policies. The focus of the energy sector strategy is on alternative energy development and environmental conservation rather than on reducing women's drudgery and addressing health hazards. However, many donor-supported programmes such as Rural Energy Development Programme (REDP), improved cook stoves, integrated water management (IWM) and the biogas programme have included women's concerns in their operational guidelines (CRT/N 2004).

The forestry sector policies are gender-blind, ignoring any gender implications. Rather than emphasising women's role as procurers, users, and managers, the Forestry Sector Policy 1996 categorically identifies women as 'woodcutters' and for this reason the policy emphasises extension activities for women in users' committees. In order to promote RETs, the government has introduced a separate subsidy policy on RETs channelled through the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC). The subsidy policy (except for the biogas sector) needs to be simplified.

Although the draft water resources strategy has categorised women beneficiaries as a 'vulnerable group', there is as yet no strategy to mainstream gender in water resources. While the Irrigation Policy (2049 B.S {1992} Amended 2053 B.S.) emphasises that at least 20% of women beneficiaries should be included in the executive bodies of water users' associations (WUAs), there is a lack of policy on how to promote the participation of women in the WUA's decision-making process. The National Water Supply Sector Policy 1997 has given due importance to the gender equality aspect, primarily to enhance women's involvement in the development of water-related projects.

Issues concerning women have not been adequately dealt with at the policy level. In the name of gender mainstreaming, policy documents write the term 'gender' and forget it completely during programme formulation and implementation (Bhadra 2002).

In 1995, the Water and Energy Commission Secretariat (WECS) published guidelines for the incorporation of gender issues in the water and energy sector. In 1997, WECS recommended having gender sensitisation, a gender desegregated database, and the commissioning of gender experts for the planning and programming of water and energy projects. However, they have not yet been translated into practice.

## Policy gaps and issues

- Lack of a critical mass of women in policy/decision making positions from the central to the local level
- Lack of information about women's essential roles for project planning
- Lack of the site-specific data on women's roles needed for project preparation
- Technologies relevant to women's practical needs in the water and energy sector under-researched
- Lack of serious attention in government plans, policies, and programmes to integrate women's active participation, both at the grassroots level and the programme and policy level
- The latest draft paper on Rural Energy Policy, 2060 B.S (2003) fails to incorporate gender dimensions (gender equity in participation and benefit sharing) in rural energy policy (CRT/N 2004).

## Lessons from project experience

- Formation of project implementing and coordinating committees at the project, district, and national level is crucial.
- A gender-oriented participatory approach should be internalised at all the stages of the project cycle.
- Full participation of local people is necessary (men, women and community organisations).
- Needs and impact assessment is essential to determine women's roles and needs with regard to energy and water interventions and to prioritise technological interventions that address women's needs (practical, productive, and strategic) for improving their livelihood assets.
- Integration of drudgery reducing technologies with micro-enterprises is critically important to harness the saved time for income generation.
- Women should be targeted not as beneficiaries but as active participants at all stages of the project.
- Setting up of village technology and resource centres is an effective strategy for widespread dissemination of technology and operational know-how and effective 'learning ground'.
- Women should be made aware of and knowledgeable about the importance of water and energy, their impact on their lives, and their proper management and uses.
- More resources should be invested in women's capacity development and confidence-building measures to enhance skills, knowledge, and empowerment.
- Women's entrepreneurship can be enhanced through the integration of water and energy management initiatives with possible micro-enterprises and through

the provision of providing training and extension services for entrepreneurship development.

- Concerned agencies should facilitate women's access to credit and 'fair trade' marketing networks by providing entrepreneurial, managerial, and marketing know-how.

## **Policy directions**

- Active involvement of district line agencies and women's organisations and other village bodies would be the best approach for identifying and selecting a project site
- Partnership and joint effort among national, district, and project-based implementing committees would be the best way to manage a project
- A gender-oriented participatory approach is the most desirable approach for any action plan or project
- Gender-sensitive policies and practices should be initiated following the 'bottom up' approach.
- Gender-sensitive water and energy interventions should be integrated in VDC and DDC-level project planning with fair representation of women at both VDC and DDC levels to enable them to articulate their concerns and needs.
- Replication of 'village technology centres' should be promoted as a programme component of DDCs.
- An enabling support mechanism should be created, focusing on easy access and the provision of credit, a market, and information including linkages of women's groups with financial institutions
- Micro-financing and banking policies and procedures need to be geared towards providing credit services to address rural women's needs.
- 'Revolving funds' and 'group savings' should be mobilised in the project areas as exemplary financing mechanisms.
- Effective participation of local and district line agencies and national organisations is crucial for strengthening the technical and institutional capabilities of women and their organisations in a project.
- It is vital that project management committees are supported and strengthened and that an operational mechanism is built from project level to national level.
- Documentation of all processes of project development and implementation, including good practices, is essential for future planning and policy formulation.
- Video documentation can be a very good visual aid for project promotion.
- Gender issues should be addressed at each and every step of a project cycle, in order to incorporate gender concerns successfully in the water and energy sector.