



## Technical Guidance Note

### Three Thematic Areas for Gender and Energy Innovation: Entrepreneurship and Employment, the Care Economy, and Policy and Practice

Progress towards sustainable energy for all has gained significant momentum in the last decade. Between 2010 and 2018, more than a billion people gained access to electricity. Yet closing the access gap, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, is increasingly challenging. About 2.8 billion people still lack access to clean cooking fuels and technologies. The urban and rural divide persists, with access much higher in urban (83%) than rural (37%) areas, and high levels of stacking with polluting fuels in urban areas. Serious and urgent policy efforts were called for in the most recent Tracking SDG 7 Energy Progress Report 2020, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. With COVID-19, sustainable energy advocates are calling for governments to put clean energy at the heart of their economic stimulus packages. Recovery programs can be a unique opportunity to drive economic development by accelerating transitions towards more secure and sustainable climate-friendly energy systems.

Opening opportunities for gender equality in the transition to sustainable energy should be an integral part of this energy sector reform and transition in the pandemic recovery. Through their operational and research programs, ENERGIA, Energising Development (EnDev) and Modern Energy Cooking Services (MECS) have identified a number of areas where innovation is needed, in order to scale up energy access while promoting gender equality. More experimenting, deviating from the norm, thinking outside the box, and reconsidering and transforming business-as-usual approaches are needed to spur progress towards a more inclusive, gender-sensitive and clean energy sector.

ENERGIA has already experimented with innovative approaches in its Women's Economic Empowerment program. For example, ENERGIA has worked with savings and credit organizations instead of microfinance institutions, and applied women's empowerment training as a key element in entrepreneurial success. MECS is dedicated to sparking a cooking revolution by catalyzing Africa's transition to really clean electric/gas cooking rather than improved biomass stoves, breaking out of 'business as usual' by embracing more innovative approaches. EnDev's goal is to improve the lives of the most vulnerable people and to build markets for modern, renewable energy, to ensure that no one is left behind. EnDev has identified a number of areas for innovation work streams needed for scaling and mainstreaming energy access, including: higher-tier cooking, in particular e-cooking; productive appliances; village grid interventions; inclusive energy services in displacement settings, including income-generating activities; and access to finance.

All of these areas offer opportunities for innovations that contribute to gender equality. The starting point for the Gender and Energy Innovation Facility (the Facility) is that no energy policy or project can achieve its potential or meet the challenges of sustainable energy for all, without the full and equal participation of women and men, girls and boys. Gender actions by energy projects and policies should result in measurable increases in gender equality, by closing gaps between males



and females, at the welfare, productive and/or strategic levels. These actions should enable women's agency as active participants in off-grid and clean cooking projects. With this in mind, the Facility is structured around opportunities for project proposals that will innovate and address long-standing gender inequalities and promote women's empowerment in the energy sector in three specific thematic areas:

## 1. Gender and Energy Entrepreneurship and Employment

*Women should get equal opportunities to participate in and support the clean energy economy, as entrepreneurs and employees. This includes getting equal access to funding and investment for their businesses.*

### **Entrepreneurship**

Innovations in this area could look at supporting women as entrepreneurs of off-grid and cooking solutions, allowing them to set up successful businesses, build careers and grow their businesses on par with their male counterparts. Women's productive use enterprises (PUEs), for example as food sellers and processor, also need new approaches to enable access to modern energy services. Innovation areas could include for example: improving women's access to finance and to entrepreneurship opportunities, such as digitalizing business development support (BDS); customer outreach; mentoring and coaching; access to transport to reach new markets; targeted recruitment; quotas for salespersons and technicians; leadership training; and so on. All businesses have suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic, but many women-led businesses are in the informal sector and therefore more vulnerable and difficult to reach. If these businesses do not survive, universal energy goals are threatened - women-led businesses have frequently been the most effective in reaching households at the last mile of energy distribution. How can women get funding, support and investment from economic recovery packages for their clean energy businesses, in a scalable way?

Both businesses that sell energy services and products, and women's businesses that use energy for income-generating activities (Productive Uses of Energy, PUE) can be targeted for innovation. Promoting decentralized, productive appliances, such as for irrigation and agro-processing or small-scale industrial purposes, requires support beyond the traditional sector boundaries and mandates, and requires new partnerships. Innovative ways to link women's income generation with other development outcomes are also of interest. For example, proceeds from enterprises can be used for children's education, or result in more positive family attitudes to girls' careers.

Innovations could also look at addressing broader contextual factors and enabling environments that hamper women's participation in the clean energy sector. This could include for instance addressing the lack of knowledge by banks and other financial institutions about women's bankability, or how to overcome gender norms about women as energy entrepreneurs and workers and their capacity to work with energy technology.

### **Employment**

Innovations are needed to increase women's employment in the clean energy sector. Innovations could on fostering women's participation in careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), as well as workforce training, mentoring and coaching, work-life balance



policies, and so on. As energy companies adjust to the 'new normal' with remote working arrangements, attention to employee safety and welfare, and family-friendly work policies, they have a prime opportunity to innovate and use these practices to promote gender equality and diversity in the workplace. The transformation of the energy system brings vast opportunities to develop local capabilities and value chains that include women. Women currently make up only about a third of the sustainable energy labor force, and even less in STEM jobs. There is ample evidence that including women more equally in the workforce is good for the economic bottom line, for social development and for the environment. How can employers innovate to encourage and promote women's participation in the clean energy sector?

## 2. Gender and energy in the care economy

*Both women and men need support in their roles in the care economy, given their key roles as care-givers, and as breadwinners. Better energy access and suitable appliances can make a major contribution to time- and labor saving, to essential health and sanitation, and to closing the digital divide between men and women. Access to clean cooking is especially critical, for health and for the environment, and for gender equality. Addressing broader contextual issues is also important to achieving a gender-equitable enabling environment for energy access.*

### **Appliances**

Both women and men need more secure energy access and better appliances, to support their roles in the care economy, where home now serves as a center of work, care and leisure combined. Innovation is urgently needed around energy access and the provision of appliances. Innovations could address, for example: affordable and efficient appliance design and supply; flexible finance and payment methods; targeted subsidies, and freedom from cut-offs. Before COVID-19, women already did three times as much domestic and unpaid work as men. Women also constitute a disproportionate share of COVID-19 frontline workers who need extra labor-saving options at home and better sanitation services, both at home and in the workplace. Teleworking and home-schooling have further increased burdens, with working mothers of school-aged children particularly affected. Having hot food and clean water, food storage and refrigeration, lighting, a smoke-free environment, clean and sanitized clothes, homes and hands, all rely on adequate energy supplies and suitable appliances.

Moreover, the 'digital divide' in communications between women and men is even more important to bridge now. Without electricity access, women could be excluded from the digital economy, just when COVID-19 requires participating in a digitized labor market. Connectivity is also essential for education and health messaging, including for the prevention of gender-based violence which has increased during lockdowns. Hence, both village grids and solar home system solutions need to innovate to specifically address gender equality in energy access and the affordability of appliances. How can women get better energy access and suitable appliances to support their roles in the care economy, which they can also leverage for home-based work and to enable their labor force participation?



### ***Clean cooking***

It is imperative that innovations in access to clean cooking be sparked and accelerated, to go beyond 'business as usual'. Household air pollution causes more than 4 million premature deaths each year. Globally, progress on SDG 7's cooking energy target has fallen behind, and progress is not even keeping up with population growth. Current economic burdens could even cause a return to firewood for cooking.

Multi-fuel use (fuel stacking), as well as dietary, cooking demand and behavior change, have been identified as particular challenges in need of innovative solutions. One of the lessons emerging from the behavioral change literature on cookstoves is the gendered nature of household decision-making over capital purchases. For example, in the case of existing improved cookstoves, the men who frequently control household budgets have proven reluctant to invest in such products, demonstrating a clear conflict between women's needs and men's authority. Clean cooking may mainly benefit women (and children), due to them tending to be more heavily involved in cooking and fuel collection, and there can be a dissonance between the needs of the woman and the decision-making authority of the man (often head of household). Clean cooking innovations will need to take such challenges into account when discussing business models and the financing of clean cooking, with dialogue among all stakeholders and the involvement of men as to how best to overcome gender-biased intra-household decision making. One particularly significant opportunity that we envisage here involves the ways in which the promotion of electric cooking may help to overcome some of these challenges and we encourage applications that focus on innovations in this area.

Clean cooking innovations are also needed in the other two thematic areas presented here: entrepreneurship/employment, and policy and practice. However, we want to emphasize that cleaner cooking fuels and technologies are of special importance in the care economy, to save women's labor and also because of the co-morbidity between COVID-19 and a range of existing diseases impacted by high levels of household air pollution. How can cleaner cooking services break out of the 'business-as-usual' cycle and rapidly accelerate a transition from biomass to genuinely 'clean' cooking, while at the same time promoting gender equality?

### ***Contextual factors***

Innovations are also needed that can address broader contextual factors and lack of enabling environments that hamper women's access to off-grid solutions and cooking. Initiatives could include:

- Promoting ways of overcoming women's lack of assets for collateral through rentals or payments programs;
- Countering views of energy as primarily important for outside the home (businesses) rather than for in-house activities;
- Addressing women's lack of access to property, which affects both their access to finance and their ability to make decisions around household-level energy priorities.
- Capitalizing on how improved access to off-grid solutions and modern cooking can address a broader gender agenda (by, for instance, freeing up time from household work so that women have time for other things).



Displaced women and girls are a specific target group for all the challenges in this section.

### 3. Gender in energy policy and practice

*Women need to have a place at the table - or create their own tables - when strategies about energy transitions and economic recovery are planned and decided.*

At the political economy level, we are looking for innovations that contribute to increasing women's agency, and that look at changing women's positions (as well as perceptions about women and men) within and beyond the energy sector. Examples of these types of innovation might include:

- Projects that enhance participation of both male and female gender champions at the decision-making level around the design of energy strategies;
- Improvements to governance and financial outcomes in the energy sector via greater diversity;
- Innovations in engendering energy institutions and policies;
- Improving the participation of women's community-based organizations in local energy decision making.

Innovations are needed on how women's experiences and voices can be mainstreamed into planning and implementation, for example:

- How to meaningfully integrate gender assessments into energy planning;
- Ways to better measure and use sex-disaggregated data for monitoring investments in off-grid solutions and modern cooking;
- Ways to best carry out gender training and increase gender awareness for energy institutions and their staff.

Large-scale implementation of decentralized higher-tier energy services while also opening up opportunities for gender equality does not happen overnight. Innovations are needed to find ways to move this process forward faster and address the reality that energy policies that do not consult women or include them in decision making are simply less effective, and can even do harm. Innovation is urgent, because gender-blind energy policies, strategies and projects will be unable to achieve universal access to energy and reach the SDG 7 targets. How can women get a place at the table – or create their own tables – to ensure equal and equitable access to and control over sustainable energy services for both women and men as an essential right to development?

