

**Report of the Round Table on Gender and Electricity
Prayas (Energy Group), New Delhi, September 26, 2014**

I. Background

A round table on “Gender and Electricity” was organised by Prayas (Energy Group) on the 26th of September 2014 at New Delhi. The objective was to explore how a specific focus on gender dimension in grid and grid interactive systems can improve electricity supply and end-use. To meet this objective, participants shared current knowledge and perspectives on the issues, identified some research needs, explored possible policy & regulatory interventions and listed ideas for implementation.

The background note prepared for the round table had raised key questions of enquiry, as listed below.

- What is the case for a gender lens to ensure that electricity access translates to positive impacts on well-being?
- What are the current and potential roles of women in three core areas: planning & policy, operation & end-use and regulation?
- What if any, are the gender considerations in design, implementation and monitoring of India’s recent rural electrification programs like RGGVY, 24 x 7 power for all, off- grid programs?
- What are the major lessons from international work in this area, relevant to India?
- What are current and future developments (technologies, policies or Institutions) in the electricity sector that can influence women’s roles, rights, and opportunities?
- What are the major lessons from gender sensitive service delivery systems in other sectors (like water, sanitation, health, microfinance or cooking), which could be relevant to electricity sector?

As part of the preparation, 8 researchers from various organisations prepared and presented notes during the round table addressing these questions. Details of the notes are given below:

1	Developing a gender perspective in electricity access and end-use	Ann Josey & Sreekumar N (Prayas)
2	Research Gaps and Data Needs: Some Thoughts	Narasimha D Rao (IIASA)
3	Grid-based electrification to increase women mobility and access to labour markets	Tejal Kanitkar (TISS)
4	Key issues in gender and water	Seema Kulkarni (SOPPECOM)
5	Gender and electricity: some thoughts on end-use, sustainability and technology	Asha Achuthan (TISS)
6	Gender equality in electricity sector operations: international experiences	Soma Dutta (Energia)
7	Gender and Grid Electricity : A livelihoods perspective	Sumi Krishna (Independent Scholar)
8	Influence of intra-household dynamics on gender and energy poverty	Shirish Sinha (SDC)

The 23 participants in the round table included people who have experience in grid and off-grid electricity, gender perspectives in other service delivery sectors, gender studies research and gender based service delivery in other countries. Discussions in the round table were on developing a gender perspective in electricity service delivery, experiences in other sectors and gender sensitive policies in electricity/energy sector in other countries. The participants also discussed implementable ideas which could be taken up in the Indian electricity sector. The key insights from these discussions are given in Section II. Section III outlines a framework for action ideas and Section IV presents some action ideas. This is followed by the agenda, background note and participant list.

II. Key Insights

Presentations and discussions in the round table provided many insights on grid and off-grid electricity, experiences from other sectors relevant to electricity and international experiences in ensuring gender equality in aspects of electricity service delivery. These insights are listed below:

1. Importance of gender and electricity
 - Attention to gender in electricity service is an important step towards democratisation of governance.
 - Gender is a crosscutting field of strategic importance in need of mainstreaming, especially in electricity sector, which has vital social, economic and political linkages.
2. Last mile supply & service quality is important
 - It significantly contributes to empowering women and communities, by improving quality of life and providing economic opportunities. A survey in an area with ground water irrigation showed that provision of electric pump sets significantly improved female labour force participation.
3. Gender is not just about domestic issues and domestic issues are not just women's issues
 - A gender focus on service quality is important not just in homes but also in the community. However, household issues like cooking or water collection should not be seen as just women's issues.
 - Women's roles in the electricity sector should not be limited to ensuring quality supply, but should be extended to democratise sector governance.
4. Need for a broader "gender issues" approach as against a "women's issues" approach
 - Socio-cultural rules, norms responsible for marginalisation based on gender should be the focus on interventions rather than focussing just on women.
 - Women are not a homogenous group. Policies which focus on women may ignore differential impacts across different groups of women.
 - Men are not the only promoters of marginalising norms. It can be promoted by women also.
5. Need to question the male-domination in electricity sector
 - Service delivery and infrastructure sectors have less female employees than male. There is a need to study the nature of the electricity sector, working conditions, organisation of knowledge and language used (in text books, policies, legislations) to understand the reasons for this and assess if there is a gender bias. It is also interesting to note that under-representation of women in engineering and science does not seem to be limited to developing countries. Consequently, the role of women in male dominated sectors needs further study. Do they struggle to overcome the gender bias? Or do they live with it, considering it to be a broader social issue to be resolved outside the sector? It is also to be studied if women are hesitating to claim certain spaces, thus perpetuating or strengthening the gender bias.
6. Urgent need for actors to come together from different sectors, agencies
 - There is little discussion on gender in energy circles just as there is little discussion on energy in gender circles. There is need for discussions between gender and energy groups, and these discussions should include government officials and policy makers.
 - Commitment from top management in electricity sector institutions is crucial, as shown from experience from some other countries.
 - Lessons from other sectors (like water, health) and other countries are important, since the Indian experience in gender and electricity is limited. Key lessons from other sectors and countries have been captured elsewhere in the report.
7. Need for careful strategy and prioritisation of efforts
 - With limited resources and many challenges, gender is not a priority area for electricity distribution companies. There is a need to evolve a win-win gender sensitive approach, which benefits the consumers, community and the distribution companies.

- There are limited resources and many challenges in the grid and off-grid sector and therefore one should take up interventions which lead to maximum impact. While prioritising interventions, one should be aware of the social/economic hierarchies which tend to distort the prioritisation efforts.
8. Need for further research for more clarity and to address data gaps
- Given the myriad forms of marginalisation which co-exist in India, there is a need to study the interactions and impacts of different forms of marginalisation, especially gender and caste.
 - Intra-household dynamics with respect to decisions pertaining to appliance use and ownership is an under-researched area of tremendous importance. This should not be limited to the bargaining process between husband and wife, but also look at the roles of other adults in the households.
 - As appliances are demanded in dowry in many places, there is a need to understand the acquisition of appliances to reduce drudgery, as against acquisition as part of dowry, a manifestation of gender injustice.
 - There is a need to locate the gender and electricity discourse within the broader poverty transition discourse. In this context, beyond looking at time-saving impacts of modern appliances, the possibility of drudgery (due to lack of modern sources of energy or appliances) being pushed onto other women (younger women within the household, lower caste or poor women) is another area worth exploring. In the off-grid space, there are cases of involvement in women in planning and operating systems and one area for research could be to see if distribution and supply have improved.
 - Beyond end-use and service quality, there is also need to look at governance aspects and therefore to assess the gender impacts of the sector reform.

III. Framework for Action Ideas

The participants in the round table felt that any gender based intervention should be broadly guided by the following principles.

1. *Understand current roles as well as potential roles of women:* There is a need to understand current gender roles, factors which influence these roles (caste, gender, religion, location, politics, sector etc.) and actions which would make these roles easier. It is equally important to focus on changing the current marginalising roles to future roles which empower women. Lessons from other sectors show that it is inequitable to expect women, especially poor women to be the only carriers of sustainable access, preventive health care within the household etc.
2. *Recognise gender based differences in the use of time and spaces within the household and community:* Electrification efforts should keep in mind the gender based differences in use of spaces (placement of light bulbs etc.,) and time (use of electricity during evening hours) in the household. Even community spaces (Anganwadis are used more often by women than men) and time (women as opposed to men are free in afternoons rather than the evenings) are used differently by men and women.
3. *Specific efforts needed to make representation meaningful:* Some efforts to ensure representation have not been effective in other sectors. Representation is not just about having women present/visible but implies their effective participation. Way to ensure participation of women include:
 - Increasing knowledge about the sector and possible interventions.
 - Increasing gender sensitivity of committees and other institutions in which women participate, through gender training.
 - Ensuring women have the capacity to voice their concerns and the capability to represent their concerns despite patriarchal, political and cultural barriers.
 - Continuous evaluation to ensure proper representation (basis for selection and exclusion), promote democratic decision making and mitigate social biases.

IV. Action Ideas

Based on the insights and the framework given in previous sections, some implementable ideas were discussed and elaborated. These ideas are briefly presented below and needs elaboration through further analysis and consultations.

1. Ensure and strengthen representation of women

- Better representation of women is needed in various committees (Panchayats, District Committee, Substation committee, CGRFs, Boards of distribution companies) and in various forums of the regulatory process (State advisory committee, consumer representatives and public hearings).
- Many of the committees and forums within the electricity sector are not working effectively to ensure effective participation. Amending existing policies and the electricity act to broaden the mandate of the committees and proactive steps by the regulatory commission will improve the situation.
- As representation needs to be effective, it should be followed by efforts to build the capacity of women and gender sensitise electricity institutions.

2. Make legal framework, policies and programs more gender sensitive

- With the Electricity Act, Tariff policy, Rural Electrification Policy and the Electricity policy coming up for amendment or revision, it will be good to make suggestions to make them more gender sensitive.
- Suggestions to make rural electrification programs (RGGVY or State programs) gender sensitive in design, implementation and monitoring could be given. This could include priority connections to institutions important to women, priority connections to women-headed households/farms/enterprises, easier billing and payment systems. BEE can use the inputs of women while planning efficiency campaigns, especially of appliances.
- Gender indicators should be developed and used for monitoring and evaluation of programs like RGGVY, 24 x7 power supply program, and Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana and off-grid electrification efforts.

3. Plan new surveys and studies to fill data gaps

- An occasional survey concentrating on electricity supply and service quality with a special focus on gender and end use is essential to address key data gaps. There is a need to concentrate on newly electrified households, states as well as states which have done well on the electrification front like Gujarat.
- Gender sensitive indicators on energy and electricity use and service delivery can also be included in large scale surveys by the NSSO or IHDS. Two indicators to capture intra-household decision making powers of women in large surveys could include the ability of the woman to send money to her parents and the presence of emergency money with a woman.
- Other methods to capture information (such as intense studies, informal interviews etc.) must also be designed and conducted even though they cover a much smaller sample, as large scale surveys often have limitations in capturing information about the marginalised.

4. Need for co-ordination and consolidation

- There is need for discussions between gender and energy groups, and these discussions should include government officials and policy makers.
- There is also scope to further the cause of gender in electricity service delivery via linkages with other large-scale programs outside the sector such as the NRLM.
- If cross-cutting policies are being planned which have implications in electricity (gender budgeting, increasing role of local governments), inputs should be taken not only from the Ministry of Power.

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Agenda for Round Table on Gender and Electricity

Time	Programme
10:00-10:30	Tea
10:30-10:40	Welcome by Kavita Ramdas and Daniel Ziegerer
10:40-11:00	Introduction to round table by Sreekumar N
11:00-12:15	<p style="text-align: center;">Session 1: Thoughts on grid and end use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a gender perspective in electricity access and end-use • Research Gaps and Data Needs • Grid-based electrification to increase women mobility and access to labour markets
12:15-12:30	Short Break
12:30- 13:15	<p style="text-align: center;">Session 2: Lessons from other sectors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Issues in Gender and Water • Some thoughts on end-use, sustainability and technology
13:15-14:15	Lunch
14:15-15:30	<p style="text-align: center;">Session 3: Lessons from energy and off-grid</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender equality in electricity sector operations: international experiences • Gender and Grid Electricity: A livelihoods perspective • Influence of Intra-household Dynamics on Gender and Energy Poverty
15:30-15:45	Tea Break
15:45-16:30	Session 4:Way Forward

Gender and Electricity – a Round table Background note

August 5th 2014

Context

This round table is an effort to explore the relationship between electricity access and development in the Indian context through a gender lens.

There is a clear correlation between electricity access and development, though this is not a straight forward cause and effect relationship. Electricity is definitely a necessary condition for development (by meeting social and economic needs) though not the sufficient condition. Figure 1 provides a schematic representation of the potential of electricity access to promote development.

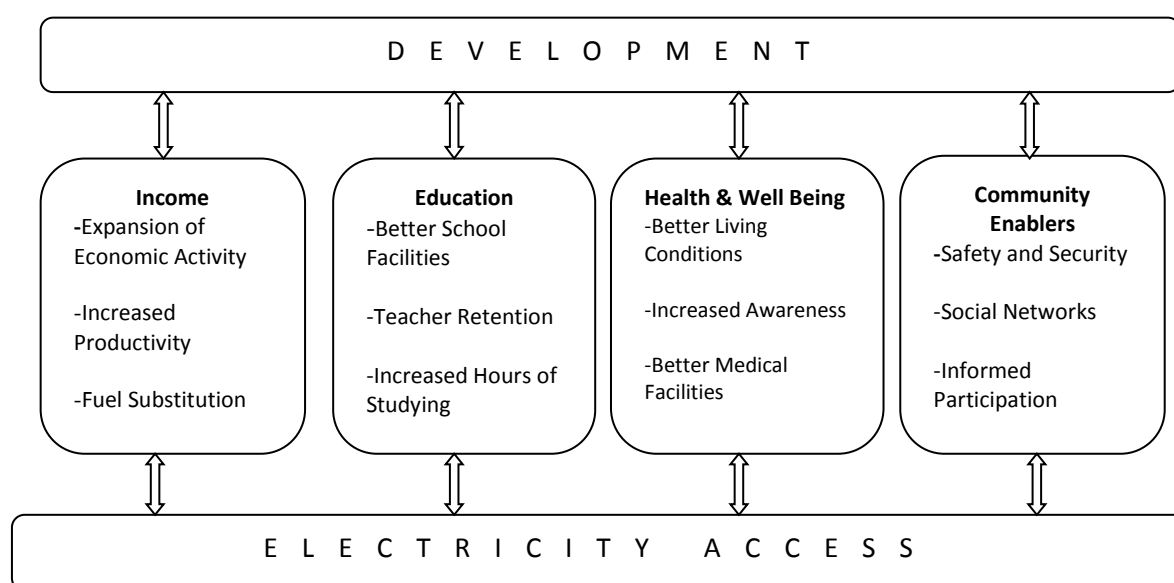


Figure 1: Potential of electricity access to promote development

Electricity access through grid based and grid interactive systems can ensure equitable, sustainable development if a balanced, participatory approach is followed in three interrelated core areas, namely policy & planning, operation and end use.

To develop such an approach, it is important to pay specific attention to the role of the marginalised (in gender, social or economic aspects) in these three areas. Informed participation by the marginalised is to be explored not just to make amends for historical injustice, but also to improve matters for all.

Electricity sector involves production, distribution, supply and end-use. Since the current focus is on last mile connectivity and end use, this round table will explore the role of gender in the three core areas from the electricity supply and end-use perspectives.

Roundtable plan

Objective & broad approach

Elaborate the gender lens and its positioning in the electricity access & development discourse in context of India. Explore how a specific focus on gender dimension in grid and grid interactive systems can improve supply and end-use.

Round table plans to meet this objective by:

- Sharing current knowledge and perspectives
- Identifying research needs
- Exploring policy & regulatory interventions
- Short listing action ideas and expected outcomes

Key questions of enquiry

To prepare for the round table and structure the event, we identify a few key questions of enquiry.

1. What is the case for a gender lens to ensure that electricity access translates to positive impacts on well-being?
2. What are the current and potential roles of women in three core areas: planning & policy, operation and end-use?
3. What if any, are the gender considerations in design, implementation and monitoring of India's recent rural electrification programs?
4. What are the major lessons from international work in this area, relevant to India?
5. What are current and future developments (technologies, policies or Institutions) in the electricity sector that can influence women's roles, rights, and opportunities?
6. What are the major lessons from gender sensitive service delivery systems in other sectors (example- water, sanitation, health, credit, cooking etc.), which could be relevant to electricity sector?

Methodology

4-5 presenters shall prepare short notes which would elaborate the key questions. These notes and important reference papers will be circulated to participants for comments one month before the event. These comments will be consolidated and if necessary, the notes revised. Based on the revised notes, short presentations will be prepared, which will be presented and discussed in the round table. A short report of the round table will be prepared, which will explain the context and elaborate some action ideas.

Participants

About 20 researchers, policy makers, civil society representatives etc., from electricity sector will be present for the discussions. A few participants will also bring in lessons from gender sensitive work in other sectors.

Participants for the Gender and Electricity Round Table		
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* Contributed notes but could not be present at the event