



The Global Initiative
for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

SUMMARY FOR POLICY MAKERS

Women's Participation in the Renewable Energy Transition: **A Human Rights Approach**

TOWARDS A GENDER-JUST TRANSITION





The energy transition is imperative to halting climate emergency. To guarantee the transition is more equitable, and just, than in previous instances, States and other stakeholders must ensure women’s rights to participate in that transition.

The right to participation involves having a say, being heard and taking part in decision-making that affects one’s life and interests. Though energy policy can sometimes reduce gender inequality, many barriers remain to ensure women’s full, real and effective participation in the energy transition. With this global energy-paradigm shift, we have a chance to re-evaluate the relationship energy has with social and gender justice to ensure women’s voices are at the center of the global energy transformation.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

To achieve women’s meaningful participation in the energy transition, one need to leverage international human rights law. The international human rights framework provides a wide range of norms, standards and principles that offer guidance to States and other stakeholders to articulate effective and meaningful

mechanisms for rights-holders, especially in marginalized communities, as well as to participate in and shape the policies that affect their lives. At its core, the framework provides normative and analytical tools to deliver energy justice by identifying and understanding how asymmetrical power relations operate as well as articulating responses to *transform* them. Human rights law provides a compass for developing energy systems that are not only renewable, but socially just.

WOMEN’S RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION

Given the energy transition’s vastness, we should not homogenize women’s experiences and needs participating within the transition. Nevertheless, we can make three important points. First, we must engage with the substance of energy policies or projects that purport to be “participatory” to identify how this participation took place and if it was truly effective. Secondly, we must acknowledge that certain energy projects—*i.e.*, solar cookers—may be premised on gendered and unequal assumptions and reproduce gender inequality rather than contest it. We must

ensure intersectional concerns are adequately addressed. This requires, for example, undertaking a gender intersectional analysis and searching for “participatory exclusions,” disaggregating gender itself so women are also empowered to engage. Finally, questions of women’s participation must openly engage with questions of power and politics.

WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION STATUS AND TRENDS IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION’S KEY DECISION-MAKING SPACES

Huge gaps remain in ensuring women’s meaningful participation in energy planning and policymaking. Women are largely underrepresented in leadership positions, in every sector from corporate to diplomatic at international negotiations. This lack of women’s participation in leadership positions is a critical factor that continues to replicate gender inequalities and an inadvertent male bias in global efforts to decarbonize energy systems. Even though the renewable energy sector has great potential for increased employment opportunities, women are largely underrepresented in the sector and often hold traditionally female perceived positions—secretarial, administrative—rather than having technical and operative responsibilities.

At the community level, energy policies and projects are rarely open to public participation. As well, stakeholders engaged in these industries typically fail to provide local communities, especially local women, with relevant information or mechanisms to meaningfully participate. The negative impacts of large-scale renewable energy projects on



local communities have resulted in differentiated and often disproportionate impacts on women’s livelihoods and the local ecosystem. They spring directly from a lack of gender-responsive local-community participation or engagement and commonly fail to adopt an intersectional gender lens. They also do not implement measures to remove barriers that prevent local women from participating in the transition, such as recognizing women’s rights to land, providing relevant information on the project, and conducting consultation processes at times that do not conflict with women’s care and domestic tasks. If targeted gender-transformative interventions are not implemented, existing patterns of gender-segregation and -discrimination in the traditional fossil-fuel energy sector will continue to be replicated in the renewable energy system.

That said, in contrast with large-scale energy projects, decentralized renewable energy systems provide innovative opportunities to develop energy solutions responsive to local and gender differentiated needs. This alternative form of organizing energy systems provides better opportunities to bridge the gaps in energy access, enhance the democratic control of energy resources and engage women in renewable energy solutions management, generation and distribution.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PRODUCTIVE ENERGY USE

Gender norms and social practices often relegate women to an association with housework and as the main consumers and suppliers of community and household energy. And women are indeed largely responsible for biomass energy provision when their households do not have electricity access. These energy poverty conditions often have severe consequences on their health, since biomass fuels used for cooking cause respiratory diseases that often end fatally. Annually, close to four million people, mostly women and children, die prematurely from illnesses attributable to household air pollution, such as pneumonia, lung cancer and chronic respiratory diseases from biomass combustion and kerosene use.

While women tend to be responsible for *providing* household energy, men are commonly the main *decision-makers* when energy and electrical appliances must be acquired. Traditionally women have also had less energy access and electrical appliances needed to mechanize housework and other tasks. Women's energy poverty compounded with their lack of power over automation compels many women to perform low-productivity-level work, in precarious work environments that imply pronounced drudgery. Ensuring women's equal participation in productive energy and technologies use and control is essential to ensure the realization of women's economic and social rights.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN FINANCE AND BUDGETING

Overall investments in energy transition and energy access at the local, national and international levels are not flowing toward sustainable energy solutions that promote women's energy sector participation. The finance realm's current interest still skews to large-scale energy projects and does not consider small-scale, decentralized renewable energy projects that enhance women's participation while fostering co-benefits that open new economic opportunities and combat energy poverty. At the State level, too, energy projects and policies fail to incorporate a gender perspective when it comes to tax policies and energy budgets that direct resources to advancing gender equality. Women face further structural, gendered barriers to financial and banking services access and often cannot get adequate credits or loans. These restricted financial conditions significantly limit women's energy transition participation.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Currently, cities contribute to 71-76% of all energy-related greenhouse gases driving the climate emergency. Local governmental action is therefore key to addressing these challenges and leveraging opportunities arising from energy transition. Sadly, women's participation in key decision-making spaces in local governments alongside gender-sensitive responses to urban planning and climate policy are still absent in most cities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: THE WAY FORWARD

Taking the above into consideration, the study makes the following significant policy recommendations for stakeholders to adopt a rights-aligned approach to women's energy transition participation.



1. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- **Establish legal and institutional energy frameworks that explicitly include principles of non-discrimination, gender equality and women's rights,** to participate on equal footing with men in every energy sector area.
- **States have a positive obligation to regulate private actors** and ensure their activities do not encroach on fundamental rights, including women's right to participation. States' obligations to regulate private actors' activities should also address business-related human rights impacts to the right to participation throughout the energy supply chain and in all territories under their jurisdiction.
- **Establishing participatory processes and mechanisms in the energy transition must be subject to oversight and accountability to ensure human rights standards and gender equality principles compliance.** This involves everything from instituting effective participatory process monitoring and evaluation to providing sufficient resources as well as training judiciary and law

enforcement systems to enhance judicial oversight to avoid or, in any case, redress any encroachment on women's right to participation.

2. DATA COLLECTION, INFORMATION ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY

- **Develop and compile gender disaggregated data with an intersectional lens** to adequately consider the full scope of gendered impacts in energy transition policies and projects, as well as women's roles in renewable energy technologies development, design, adaptation and use.
- **Ensuring transparency and information access makes it crucial for women to participate at all the energy transition's levels.** States and corporate actors leading renewable energy policies, programs and projects should provide timely, sufficient and objective data to the public. These should take the form of accessible formats, via appropriate channels, to foment participation in decision-making. To be effective, these efforts need to consider gender rights-holders' differentiated needs, that these measures particularly affect.

3. EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

- **Combat harmful gender roles and stereotypes in the energy sector.** This includes how women perceive themselves and how the State, families and communities perceive women in the sector, in order to change harmful social practices and norms that exclude women from energy systems participation.
- States and relevant stakeholders driving the energy transition must **provide quality STEM education and training services** as well as other key energy-related education programs to ensure women in all their diversity develop skills as managers, negotiators, technicians, administrators and providers of sustainable energy solutions. Women in all their diversity, especially marginalized women, must be allowed to participate meaningfully at all decision-making levels in energy systems' global transformation.
- States and other stakeholders **must remove barriers from women's employment at all levels of the renewable energy sector**, to provide more flexible work arrangements and enhanced life-work balance, training opportunities and mentoring programs that combat energy-sector gender stereotypes.

4. ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLE ENERGY AND APPLIANCES

- **States must provide universal access to safe, reliable and sustainable energy sources.** They must prioritize communities now living in energy poverty. They could

achieve this by fostering different forms of decentralized, locally owned and women-led renewable energy systems that provide better opportunities to bridge energy-access gaps as well as for women to participate meaningfully in sustainable energy production and distribution.

- States **should adopt holistic approaches to accessing sustainable energy, not only by ensuring renewable energy source provision but also energy-efficient electrical appliances' acquisition and use** (*i.e.*, clean cooking stoves, lights, fans, grinders, water pumps, refrigerators, washing machines, etc.) that transform energy into productive energy services in households and in other significant economic activities.
- **Support women's local and traditional knowledge as well as inherent skills to develop appropriate renewable energy systems** alongside energy efficient technologies and infrastructure.

5. GENDER-SENSITIVE AND PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING

- **States should take necessary steps to gender-balance the composition of intervening bodies at all stages of energy decision-making.** This should be promoted through multifaceted approaches that respond to the challenges women face due to intersectional discrimination.
- **Renewable energy projects' impact evaluation assessments must be participatory and comprehensive.** They must evaluate gender differentiated

impacts, incorporate human rights principles and develop the meaningful participation of all women and girls, especially those whom energy policies or projects most affect.

- **Consultations must be made with indigenous and local communities most impacted by energy projects and policies.** The consultations should be designed and implemented according to international human rights standards in a way that allows all persons, regardless of gender, to equally participate.
- **States should support and protect platforms for women to learn, exchange experiences, strategize and organize.** This is critical to ensuring their meaningful participation in the energy transition. It involves creating spaces and platforms where women feel comfortable sharing views, having peer-to-peer exchanges, organizing, identifying common challenges and demands and coordinating with others to influence decision-making.
- **Cities should foster new urban planning and development by**

incorporating mechanisms that enhance women's participation in local governments and promote measures that encourage energy efficiency measures in buildings and public facilities, support decentralized, women-led renewable energy infrastructure in urban settings and organize public campaigns to encourage transformative changes in citizens' consumption patterns as well as to reduce energy consumption among high-income earners.

6. FINANCE AND BUDGETING

- States and other stakeholders must promote gender-responsive energy-project financing as well as policies that deliver gender-equal outcomes. They must promote women's participation as key agents of change in the articulation of socially inclusive and sustainable energy solutions. These are essential to incorporating a gender approach to tax policies, State budgeting and financial services that provide credit and loans for renewable energy projects.

Website: www.gi-escr.org

Twitter: [@GIESCR](https://twitter.com/GIESCR) (General account) [@GIESCR_LatAm](https://twitter.com/GIESCR_LatAm) (Latin America)

Facebook: [@GIESCR](https://www.facebook.com/GIESCR)

Instagram: [@giescr](https://www.instagram.com/giescr)

LinkedIn: [Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](https://www.linkedin.com/company/global-initiative-for-economic-social-and-cultural-rights)