

**UiO : Centre for Development and the Environment**  
University of Oslo

# **Women's empowerment in energy projects: What is the meaning?**

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**Engendering the Energy Transition**  
Theory meets policy and practice, South meets North  
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# EFEWEE (2015-2018)

Exploring Factors that Enhance and restrict  
Women's Empowerment through Electrification

- Comparing grid and decentralised systems
- Kenya, India and Nepal
- Mixed methods

# Consortium Members EFEWEE

- Tanja Winther University of Oslo, Norway
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- Raju Laudari AEPC, Nepal (collab. partner)



# Motivation 1: social change is complex



Invest in a lamp and let a girl read...

Invest in a cow ....('girl effect')

Multiply

**Empowerment**

**Potential for  
empowerment**



# Typical gender goals in energy projects/programmes

- Women's increased welfare
- Women's economic empowerment
- Women's political empowerment

Skutsch 2006  
Clancy et al. 2007  
IEG 2008

## Motivation 2: risk of more inequality



Men tend to be recruited in management/operation

Electricity and appliances: desired, high status



# Meaning of empowerment from below

- “To be educated”, “unity”, “political power”
- “No association electricity – empowerment”

Focus group discussions, Chhattisgarh, India 2016

- “To make somebody able to do something.  
Light empowers them to read”

Interview with female staff, Ikisaya Energy Centre, Kenya 2016

- “Nowadays, women have become empowered: they  
make an income and can just leave”

Man telling his life story, Homa Bay, Kenya 2016



# Meaning of empowerment

- “Achieve agency” (choice ➡ action)
  - Kabeer 1999, 2001:  
“Ability to make strategic life choices”  
Measure: agency + material, social, human resources
  - Friedman: 1992: Marginalised groups moving out of subordinated position
- Energy: How do we conceive women’s empowerment?

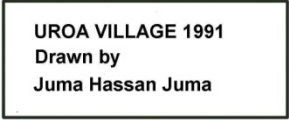


# EFEWEE Assumptions & definitions

Drawing on Friedman (1992) and Kabeer (1999 and 2001)

- **Women's empowerment:** A process towards gender equality
- **Gender equality:** Women and men's equal
  - rights
  - access to and control over resources
  - power to influence matters that concern or affect them

## A young woman stands in shallow, rippling water, holding two large, heavy bundles of harvested seaweed. She is dressed in traditional attire, featuring a white headwrap and a white short-sleeved top with a dark, intricate pattern. Her expression is calm as she looks towards the camera. The background shows the gentle waves of the ocean meeting the shore.



# Rural Zanzibar (grid)

Women did obtain improved welfare ('development') and more flexibility, but men's dominance was reinforced



## HOW:

- Men controlled houses, electricity and assets
- Discriminating rules for inheritance and divorce
- Women excluded from local electrification process

**Winther 2008**

# Cutwini, South Africa (grid)

Women obtained increased agency  
and control over resources



## HOW:

- Many single female households
- Government grants were given directly to women guardians
- TV: Alternative gender narratives and information about rights

**Matinga 2010**



# Rural Afghanistan (solar engineers)



Women gained increased agency  
Changed gender norms

## HOW:

- Women trained and recruited as solar engineers
- Changed perceptions of what a woman can do
- Fathers-in-law: continued control over household finances

**Standal 2008**

# Reviewing empirical literature I

## Qualitatively oriented studies

- **Explorations of electrification in local contexts,** with focus on ‘who, ‘how’ and ‘why’
- Process
- Design of electricity supply
- Social practices rather than single indicators
- Impact on
  - Organisation of daily life
  - Household finances, formal and informal economy
  - Decision making
  - Gender relations, norms and ideologies
- **Different paths to empowerment**



# Reviewing empirical literature II

## Statistical studies (incl modelling)

Gendered impact of **having access to electricity** on

- Employment rate
- Fuel use and cooking technology
- Welfare indicators
  - Time use (drudgery)
  - Fertility rates
  - Girls' and boys' study time and enrolment in school
- Attitudes to norms that discriminate women



How to bridge the various approaches so as to **accumulate** knowledge and understand the **mechanisms** at work?





# Analysing women's empowerment through electrification

Categories	Dimensions
<b>1 Overarching issues</b>	<p>Women and men's rights</p> <p>Gender ideologies and norms</p> <p>Women and men's social positions</p>
<b>2 Access to and control over resources</b>	<p>Material opportunities (short term)</p> <p>Material endowments (long term)</p> <p>Social resources (e.g. social networks)</p> <p>Human resources (education, drudgery, health)</p>
<b>3 Power to influence decisions (Agency)</b>	<p>Life decisions (incl. political power)</p> <p>Everyday decisions</p> <p>Decisions on electricity's uses at home</p> <p>Involvement in system of supply</p>
<b>4 Impact of women's involvement in supply</b>	<p>The impact of women's involvement in supply on the empowerment of women in the wider community</p>
<b>5 Negative effects</b>	<p>Signs of negative impact of electrification on any of the above dimensions</p>

# Kitui, Kenya (energy centre)



# Endau, Kenya (grid)



# Available results, EFEWEE

From the scoping phase (literature review and review of policies)

- EFEWEE Web and Blog <http://www.efewee.org>
- ENERGIA <http://energia.org/research/>
- [tanja.winther@sum.uio.no](mailto:tanja.winther@sum.uio.no)
- [mmat\\_001@yahoo.com](mailto:mmat_001@yahoo.com) (*Magi Matinga*)

In progress (academic journals):

- Palit, D., Govindan, M. et al.: **“A gender review of electricity policies: Perspectives from Kenya, Nepal and India.”**
- Matinga, M., T.Winther and K.Standal: **“Electrification and women’s empowerment: What is the evidence?”**
- Winther, T., M.Matinga and K.Ulsrud: **“Electrification and women’s empowerment: Proposal of a framework of analysis”**



# Thank you



- Extra (only if time)

# Examples I, indicators (survey)

Dimension	Concept	Indicator/question
Material opportunities	Access to using electricity	<b>In which rooms do you keep/use electric light?</b> (kitchen etc)
Material opportunities	Access to using electricity	Mobiles and appliances: Who in the hh uses the item on a daily basis? For what purposes?
Material opportunities	Access to income	How much income do members of the hh make per month? (w/m)
Material opportunities	Access to food	How many months during the last year did your hh not have enough to eat? (hh)
Material opportunities	Access to food	In times of food scarcity, who in the household is more likely to go to bed on an empty stomach? (w/m, g/b)

# Examples II

Dimension	Concept	Indicator/question
Human resources	Drudgery/time poverty	Time spent collecting firewood per week (w/m, g/b)
Material opportunities Human resources	Access to using electricity Access to information Time to relax	How many hours per day do hh members watch television? (w/m, g/b) Which channels do you watch and which programs do you prefer? (w/m)
Human resources	Drudgery/time poverty	Spending the evening: From 8 pm until you go to bed, do you usually do household chores, read/study, work outside or watch television/relax in other ways? (w/m, g/b)
Human resources	Safety	Who in this hh can safely walk outside in the neighbourhood after darkness (w/m, g/b)



# Examples III

Dimension	Concept	Indicator/question
Material endowments	Long term financial security	<b>Who owns the land, the house, the mobiles and the el. appliances?</b> (w/m)
Material endowments	Long term financial security	Who in the hh keeps a bank account and/or is member of a savings group (w/m)
Agency: Everyday decisions	Decisions regarding household finances	When a person earns an income, to what extent are they free to decide on how to spend the money? (scale, agegroups, w/m)
Agency: Electricity	Decisions regarding electricity	Who decided to obtain electricity access? Who decided to purchase the appliances? Who paid for subscription and consumption?
Gender norms	Attitudes to discr. norms	Do you think that a husband may be entitled to beat his wife?
Gender norms (and practices)	Gender division of responsibilities	<b>How many times during the last week did a male member prepare a meal for the hh?</b>
Gender norms	Gender division of responsibilities	Do you think that women and men have the same capacity to serve their country?



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