

# GENDER AND ENERGY

BHARGAVI S. RAO

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## Gender Inclusivity a Long Pending Need if India Has to Achieve the Cop26 Goals

India's commitments at the 26<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (COP 26) held in Glasgow set clear targets for 2030: increasing non fossil fuel energy capacity to 500 GW, to draw 50 % of the country's energy requirements from renewable sources and reduce total projected carbon emissions by 1 billion tonnes from present levels. Commitments were also made to reduce carbon intensity of the economy by more than 45 percent from present levels and to achieve a net-zero targets by 2070<sup>1</sup>.

As the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest emitter of carbon emission, India's commitments translate to phasing out coal that currently produces 70 % of India's electricity, require switching massively to renewable forms of energy, substantial increase in use of electric vehicles, creating 'forests' to absorb carbon dioxide and also reduce carbon emissions from major polluting infrastructure and industrial sectors such as cement, steel and fertilizer production, and thermal power generation. In return, India sent an unequivocal message to the developed world that they must make a contribution of 1 trillion USD every year as climate finance<sup>2</sup>. The world was surprised at these ambitious commitments of India, for the country had declined to make net zero commitments until a few months ago. The Indian position was that the developed countries must make good on commitments made in the past, which had not been delivered.

While it is unclear how these national commitments will be achieved, and details of its implementation are awaited, what is worth noting is that none of these major commitments are grounded on making gender equality central to energy planning. Achieving such ambitious goals without clear commitments for women's participation, will only make it harder for these goals to be achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34466/National+Statement+by+Prime+Minister+Shri+Narendra+Modi+at+COP26+Summit+in+Glasgow>

<sup>2</sup> Koshy, Jacob. "India demands \$1 trillion as 'climate finance'" *The Hindu*, 11th November, 2021  
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-demands-1-trillion-as-climate-finance/article37438973.ece>

This is especially the case in the post COVID scenario where women have been disproportionately affected. This serious lack on the part of India must be seen in context of several countries, such as Bolivia, Canada, Ecuador, Germany, Nigeria, Sweden, UK and the USA, making bold commitments and taking impressive pledges for climate action enconced in gender-sensitive and responsive environment, and one that aims to improve women's participation and leadership in climate action. These countries' commitments go a long way in building focus on the need for a climate action plan with gender sensitivity, an issue that has been raised for lack of attention since COP25. It is worthwhile noting what Åsa Regnér, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, said about this: "Gender equality must be at the center of the world's response to the climate crisis. Women and girls are already shifting the climate discourse and implementing critical climate solutions. We need governments and all stakeholders to invest in their initiatives, energy and activism. Today's commitments are a step in the right direction, but we need many others to join us. Rhetoric is important, but reality change is the urgent focus now."<sup>3</sup>

## **Human Development Index and Patriarchy**

Human Development Index of India is at 131<sup>st</sup> position<sup>4</sup> as per the Human Development Report 2020. The Gender Inequality index (GII) in the report highlights the nature of gender based inequalities from markers such as economic activity, reproductive health and empowerment gauges. The GII value is 0.488 for India, ranking it 123<sup>rd</sup> out of 162 nations. India thus falls below Bangladesh and other developing countries in this indicator.

Women's ease of access to energy and how they shape decisions on addressing energy demand-supply situations, largely determines how these indicators work. A low index, that India's position reveals, highlights the yawning gap in making

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<sup>3</sup>"Bold, new commitments from around the world to put gender equality at the forefront of climate action at COP26". Press release: *UN Women* 9 November 2021. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2021/11/press-release-bold-new-commitments-from-around-the-world-to-put-gender-equality-at-the-forefront-of-climate-action-at-cop26>

<sup>4</sup> India, Human Development Indicators. Human Development Report. United Nations Development Programme. <http://www.hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/IND> (Last accessed 28/12/2021)

women's energy needs central to energy planning in the county. Many studies have shown that access to energy is the key for women to be able to access economic activity, nutrition and secure good health. Independently and collectively, such factors influence and indicate the movements of overall socio-economic productivity, in particular of women. However, in a strongly patriarchal society that India is, where the patriarchal index<sup>5</sup> remains considerably high, it has greatly impeded women's equality in almost all spaces – be it at home, in public sphere and at work - and has ensured that women's access to resources such as healthcare, education, economic empowerment, political representation, among other such indicators of women's primacy, remained largely lopsided<sup>6</sup>. In such a situation, ensuring women's access to energy and due role in energy planning is critical. Fact is that in guaranteeing no woman is left behind in terms of her due role in energy planning and access, governments, industries and regulatory institutions have provided least emphasis.

## **Gender Insensitive Energy Policies**

The evolution of the energy policy in India since independence has largely focussed on building adequate supply of electrical energy, largely for industrial and urban needs. The energy crises and energy insecurity that resulted as the demand supply gap widened in recent decades, has again been addressed from a perspective of lifting industrial production, sustaining urban service demands and supporting the demands of infrastructure expansion. Even the farming sector, whose energy demands are increasing, has not been a key focus of governmental efforts. In this scheme, the importance of prioritising women's demands has largely been sidestepped.

Current efforts are focused on modernising energy generation and supply systems and more recently, towards mitigating climate change<sup>7</sup>. Such policies have always

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<sup>5</sup> Singh, A., Chokhandre, P., Singh, A.K. et al. "Development of the India Patriarchy Index: Validation and Testing of Temporal and Spatial Patterning". *Springer Link*, 09 July 2021.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11205-021-02752-1>

<sup>6</sup> "Seven Kinds of Deprivation That Women Face Everyday". *Economic & Political Weekly*, 18 July 2019.

<https://www.epw.in/engage/article/seven-kinds-deprivation-women-face-everyday>

<sup>7</sup> Bardhan R, Debnath R, Jana A. "Evolution of sustainable energy policies in India since 1947: A review." 2019. 8(5):e340. doi: 10.1002/wene.340. Epub 2019 Aug 15. PMID: 32030120; PMCID: PMC6999653. Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews.

<https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/wene.340>

been at the service of and in favour of large corporations and private companies to ensure a steady growth in GDP terms, while completely neglecting the need to include energy equity and women's access to energy. It is not surprising, therefore, that words such as 'women' or 'gender' rarely, if ever, find a place in any of the energy policies evolved since independence. A word search for 'gender' or 'women' or 'female' or 'girl child' in most energy related policies will reveal the awful neglect of women's empowerment, their role in the building of the country, and the critical importance of responding to their needs and demands.

Ivan Illich in his 1974 essay entitled 'Energy and Equity'<sup>8</sup> underlined the need for robust and progressive policies, and his analysis is considerably more significant 5 decades. He writes "The energy policies adopted during the current decade will determine the range of social relationships a society will be able to enjoy by the year 2000...", demonstrating the need for policies to be ahead of their times. The essay also highlights the need for energy reduction and dependence.

At the COP26 held in November 2021 in Glasgow, the Women in Finance Climate Action Group argue in their report<sup>9</sup> that "whilst climate change impacts women across the world significantly, women remain seriously underrepresented in climate policy, climate decision making and climate finance". The group calls for immediate action to improve gender equality in senior level decision making on climate issues particularly with reference to financial inclusion for women. When this statement from 2021 is compared with Illich's prognosis from 1974, the gap created in social relationships due to gender insensitive energy policies is clearly evident.

## **Missing Women: Historical Neglect of Energy Needs of Women, And its Implications**

Access to energy for women in order to ease their lives has not been considered for generations. Once households get access to electricity, it is often the men who

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<sup>8</sup> Illich Ivan. Energy and Equity. *DEBATE CENTRAL*, 1974.

[http://debate.uvm.edu/asnider/Ivan\\_Illich/Ivan%20Illich\\_Energy%20and%20Equity.pdf](http://debate.uvm.edu/asnider/Ivan_Illich/Ivan%20Illich_Energy%20and%20Equity.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>"COP26 – women excluded in fight against climate change". *Aviva*, 02 November 2021.

<https://www.aviva.com/newsroom/news-releases/2021/11/cop26-women-excluded-in-fight-against-climate-change/>

get to use an abundance of electrical appliances and this in itself skews benefits away from women of the household. Studies indicate how simple appliances such as an electric bulb or a fan are rarely found where women toil all day, such as the cooking areas, but are always found in areas where men sit to chat or watch TV.<sup>10</sup> Be it communication, mobility, and ensuring comfort, it is more likely that the man is privileged with access to electrical energy dependent cell phones, motor vehicles, or a light and fan, essentially increasing convenience and comfort. . Although electric appliances have made an entry into the Indian kitchen, such as mixer-grinders, microwave ovens, and electric chimneys, these are essentially in middle class homes in metropolises. Women in rural India continue to toil in the absence of electricity and without access to clean cooking fuels.

A review of questions raised in the Lok Sabha<sup>11</sup> and the Rajya Sabha<sup>12</sup> over the past year indicate there is an absolute lack of interest in matters relating to securing for women their due place in energy planning and use, and thus in socio economic functions. Not one question nor has there been any debate about such matters. This is reflective of the role of women in the energy sector overall as well. A survey of key leadership roles in state and central power ministries unsurprisingly reveals that men dominate the sector. Women are comprehensively missing in key positions in critical regulatory authorities such as the Central Electricity Authority<sup>13</sup> and the Central Energy Regulatory Commission<sup>14</sup>. The Solar Energy Corporation of India<sup>15</sup> has mostly men in senior positions and in fact, recently appointed a Managing Director as of August 2021 who happens to be a woman. SECI has merely 14 women employed (The total permanent manpower as on 31.03.2019 is 73)<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Robinson, Ellis. "Gender inequality persists in electricity use". College of Engineering. Carnegie Mellon University, January 2020.

<https://engineering.cmu.edu/news-events/news/2020/01/09-gender-electricity-use.html>

<sup>11</sup>Parliament of India Lok Sabha House of the People

<http://loksabhaph.nic.in/Questions/Qministrysearch.aspx> ( last accessed 28/12/2021)

<sup>12</sup>Parliament of India Rajya Sabha Council of States

<https://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/Questions/qsearch.aspx> ( last accessed 28/12/2021)

<sup>13</sup> Government of India, Ministry of Power, Central Electricity Authority

<https://cea.nic.in/organization-chart/?lang=en> (last accessed 28/12/2021)

<sup>14</sup> Central Electricity Regulation Commission [https://cercind.gov.in/2012/organization-chart/ORGANIZATION%20CHART\\_recent.pdf](https://cercind.gov.in/2012/organization-chart/ORGANIZATION%20CHART_recent.pdf) (last accessed 07/01/2022)

<sup>15</sup> Solar Energy Corporation of India Limited <https://www.seci.co.in/about/organizational-structure> (last accessed 07/01/2022)

<sup>16</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report 2018-19 SECI [https://www.seci.co.in/web-](https://www.seci.co.in/web-data/docs/Final_Annual%20Report%202018-19%20English%20for%20web.pdf)

[data/docs/Final\\_Annual%20Report%202018-19%20English%20for%20web.pdf](https://www.seci.co.in/web-data/docs/Final_Annual%20Report%202018-19%20English%20for%20web.pdf)

It is normative to public administration that women are rarely found in senior leadership positions. Typically, 'women' are assigned to CSR sections, and with the task of identifying projects to hand out sewing machines, set up beauty salons, reinforcing societal gendered and patriarchal stereotypes. The underlying unstated text appears to be that women shouldn't be trusted with core functions of shaping the energy sector. A survey of corporates in the energy sector reveals there are very few women leaders and women-led enterprises.<sup>17 18 19</sup> Work sites are so structured and designed that they are rarely, if ever, made safe and secure for women to work independently and comfortably. This evolves from a corporate governance culture which is largely patriarchal. There is also an active discouragement and blocking of unionising, which denies women their due right to organise and express their views and grievances. It is clear from this the energy sector overall is designed by men for men.

## **Several International Commitments to Secure Women, None Delivered at Home:**

There are several international commitments prompting governments to take steps and address issues of inequality, inequity, and resultant dis-empowerment and violence, particularly focusing on planning for energy security and addressing climate change. Broadly all of these highlight the importance of upholding human rights, rights to health, rights of indigenous people and local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and those in vulnerable situations. Women's vulnerabilities and the need to address that, is central to all of such categories.

The international commitments include Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women 1995, the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979, the

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<sup>17</sup> Adani Power <https://www.adanipower.com/about-us/board-of-directors> (last accessed 07/01/2022)

<sup>18</sup> Tata Power <https://www.tatapower.com/corporate/leadership/board-of-directors.aspx> (last accessed 07/01/2022)

<sup>19</sup> Reliance Power <https://www.bseindia.com/stock-share-price/reliance-power-ltd/rpower/532939/corporate-governance/>

2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts), the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan, the specific focus on role of women in energy planning during COP 25, Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender, the Climate Investment Funds Gender Action Plan and the preamble of the Paris Agreement. Further, the Indian constitution guarantees several rights for women which are included Right to Equality (Article 14), to Life, Personal Liberty irrespective of Gender, and for Livelihoods and a Clean Environment (Article 21) and to the Right of Expression (Article 19). Such hortatory commitments rarely translate from the paper they are printed on into praxis.

## Women's Movements

Women's movements over time have highlighted several such significant socio-economic and environmental justice gaps which are largely due to gender based discriminations. Such efforts have brought social and political focus to address issues of gender violence, to guarantee rights for women over their body, ensure they have access to health and to provide them means of economic empowerment. It can be said that women have secured nothing at all without such struggles and protests. For example, women were the key force in the success of the Chipko movement<sup>20</sup> to save forests in Uttarakhand, the Jagmati Sangwan's Movement<sup>21</sup> was women led against the horrific Khap Panchayats, the naked protests<sup>22</sup> by mothers in Imphal against atrocities committed by Indian Army against Manipuri women, anti-liquor movements in North Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are women led, and the Gulabi Gang<sup>23</sup> in Uttar Pradesh is women powered and fights against social evils. Despite such movements and ongoing struggles, the

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<sup>20</sup> Mitra, Amit, "Chipko: an unfinished mission, 30<sup>th</sup> *Downtoearth* April 1993.

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/chipko-an-unfinished-mission-30883>

<sup>21</sup> Jacob K.J., "Jagmati the fighter takes on khap panchayats in their lair" *Deccan Chronicle*, March 8, 2018. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/in-other-news/080318/jagmati-the-fighter-takes-on-khap-panchayats-in-their-lair.html>

<sup>22</sup> Sirur Simrin, "17 years since their naked protest against Army, 'Mothers of Manipur' say fight not over yet" *The Print*, 22 July 2021. <https://theprint.in/india/17-years-since-their-naked-protest-against-army-mothers-of-manipur-say-fight-not-over-yet/700093/>

<sup>23</sup> "Gulabi Gang faction forms teams in UP's Mahoba to stop crime against women" *The New Indian Express*, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2021.

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2021/feb/21/gulabi-gang-faction-forms-teams-in-ups-mahoba-to-stop-crime-against-women-2266989.html>

due role of women in decision making and their due place in the negotiation landscape of public and energy policies remains largely invisible. Women's movements have not as yet been able to draw necessary focus to the critical importance of women having their due and central role in discussions and debates shaping India's energy policies.

In a discussion paper titled "*Energy for Women and Women for Energy*"<sup>24</sup> written over two and a half decades ago, Srilatha Batliwala and Amulya K N Reddy discuss energy consumption patterns with a focus on women. Drawing attention to rural energy consumption patterns, they highlight how women expend enormous energies performing back-breaking tasks, such as of gathering firewood and water, apart from working on the field and cooking. The paper throws light on how mechanisation displaces women's roles in securing livelihoods, even as their energy intake with nutritious food remains low, while their exposure to pollution from biomass-based energy deteriorates their health. While this was the case decades ago, several recent studies underscore such challenges persist. It is a truly deplorable state that such studies and recommendations have received scant attention in public policy and administration, and the continuing absence of women in leading roles in energy policy decision making is the result, as is widely evident in the continuing struggles of women in homes, fields, construction sites, shop floors, in maintaining cleanliness of cities and just about everywhere across the country.<sup>25</sup>

Given that women contribute such a major part of the human effort in the country, their structural involvement to any transformation is key. A just and equitable transition towards a target of generating 50 % of energy from renewable sources would need to ensure women have a key role in different spheres of this transition. Women employed and dependent on the coal mining sector, women employed in thermal power plants, women farmers and landowners (although a small number) need to be part of this transition to

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<sup>24</sup> Batliwala, Srilatha., Reddy, Amulya. "Energy for Women and Women for Energy". Draft for Discussion only, June 1996 .[http://amulya-reddy.org.in/Publication/1996\\_05\\_dtaft\\_WENERGY961.pdf](http://amulya-reddy.org.in/Publication/1996_05_dtaft_WENERGY961.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Power for All. "A glaring omission in India's energy policy: gender justice". *Medium*, 13 October 2017. <https://medium.com/energy-access-india/a-glaring-omission-in-indias-energy-policy-gender-justice-afc63375eb20>

renewable energy, as do women who are landless labourers, pastoralists, dependent on forest based livelihoods.

It is to be noted that the 2019 amendment to the Mines Act 1952 was undertaken to allow women to work in the underground coal mines, work in night shifts and in opencast mines. Women thus form a major part of the workforce in India's coal mines as well. But there is little clarity on the numbers of just how much of the workforces constitutes women, especially as casual labourers. What will happen to these jobs if there is a transition away from the coal sector to renewable? How will these women be able to sustain their families? Will they be part of decision making processes about such transitions? Such questions remain unanswered in just about every debate and discussion in the ongoing energy transition situation.

## **Renewable Energy Projects and Impacts on Women**

The country's solar installations have shown that land for such installations have never been obtained justly. Those who lose land to these projects are mostly small and marginalised farmers who have been ingeniously persuaded to part with their land, as is the case in Pavagada Solar Park in Karnataka<sup>26</sup> threatened to part with it as in Bandalli in Chamarjnar district of Karnataka,<sup>27</sup> or forcefully and violently taken away as in Mikir Bamuni in Assam's Nagaon district.<sup>28</sup> In all such cases it is women who bear the brunt of the suffering, as they have to take care of households, children and livestock, while men migrate in search of jobs. Women, as a consequence, have had to deal with reduced food intake, considering the patriarchal practice where women are the last to eat, and end up eating what is left. As a result, malnutrition is common among women, and impacts their health significantly. Highschool dropout rates is also high among girl children in

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<sup>26</sup> Rao, Bhargavi. "Flip side of large-scale solar power". *Deccan Herald*. 12 December 2019. <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/panorama/flip-side-of-large-scale-solar-power-785028.html>

<sup>27</sup> Rao, Bhargavi. "When the sun sets this year, a small village weeps". 22 December 2020. Centre for Financial Accountability. <https://www.cenfa.org/energy/when-the-sun-sets-this-year-a-little-village-weeps/>

<sup>28</sup> THE ANATOMY OF A SOLAR LAND GRAB – Report Of A Fact-Finding Committee. 30 April 2021. Environment Support Group – Trust. <https://esgindia.org/new/esg-publications/other-reports/the-anatomy-of-a-solar-land-grab-report-of-a-fact-finding-committee-relating-to-human-rights-violations-and-environmental-and-social-impacts/>

such areas impacted by renewable energy installations. Further, access to schools, markets, hospitals, banks, etc, is made more arduous as the solar parks are fenced out, forcing villagers to go miles more to reach across to such facilities which was only a short walk away. All these leaves women and girl children particularly vulnerable. In many cases, girl children are forced into early marriage, and thus the vicious cycle of their suffering – malnutrition, early child bearing, low food intake, and lack of social and economic security – is perpetuated.

While most RE projects generate power to keep the megapolises up and running, rural electrification to lift water, light homes, heat water, and provide cleaner means of cooking, all of which lessen the burden on women, are still far away. Although 96.7 percent of Indian households are now connected to the grid,<sup>29</sup> power outages are common across rural landscapes and smaller urban areas across the country.<sup>30</sup> Such lack of electricity and access to clean cooking fuels has hampered education, health and well-being in rural areas, especially of girl child, a situation that has worsened over the last two years due to Covid-19.<sup>31</sup> Such structural problems that continue to persist without any effort in remedying them will drive gender-based indicators to an all-time low, and it may only be years before it shows up in studies.

Of late Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives focus on skill building of women at the village level. But here too gender stereotypes are reinforced. Some programmes involve women to receive training in promoting clean cook stoves or solar lamps, and have brought slight change in the rural landscapes wherever they are piloted or implemented. This has helped a small percentage of women to shift to cleaner cooking stoves and also in earning a small amount from commissions.

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<sup>29</sup>Agrawal, Shalu., Mani, Sunil., Jain, Abhishek., Ganesan, Karthik. “State of Electricity Access in India: Insights from the India Residential Energy consumption Survey (IRES) 2020”. *Council on Energy, Environment and Water*. October 2020.  
<https://www.ceew.in/sites/default/files/ceew-research-on-state-of-electricity-access-and-coverage-in-india.pdf>

<sup>30</sup>Sun, Shangliao. “Frequency of power outages in grid-electrified Indian households between 2019 and 2020, by region”. 5 July 2021. *Statista*.  
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1245470/india-frequency-of-power-outages-in-households-by-region/>

<sup>31</sup>Mukherjee, Jaideep. “To Improve State of Education in Rural India, Let’s First Provide Reliable Access to Electricity”. *News 18*. 28 August 2021.  
<https://www.news18.com/news/opinion/to-improve-state-of-education-in-rural-india-lets-first-provide-reliable-access-to-electricity-4137710.html>

Employment of women at RE projects has been poor and is mostly limited to cursory and itinerant jobs through highly exploitative contract labour. Mechanisation of the maintenance of such RE project has further eliminated these jobs. Even on the training side, technical training institutes are largely designed to attract and accommodate male students, women are side-lined.<sup>32</sup> The Union Ministry of Skill Development is predominantly filled with male members at the senior positions<sup>33</sup> and until women are part of senior decision making levels, it is highly unlikely that women oriented skill development programs will find prominence.

## Blue Flame Revolution

The Pradhan Mantri Ujwala Yojana launched in 2016 has largely been unsuccessful in weaning rural households away from wood and coal burning.<sup>34,35</sup> With refills of cooking gas cylinders expensive and largely unaffordable, LPG cylinders serve as props for various household chores in rural households. Women and girl children particularly risk their lives every day by walking long distances in search of fuel, carry heavy loads making them vulnerable to health risks, and also vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. Some are also victims to crossing busy highways and other difficult terrains. And then they spend several hours over rudimentary stoves to heat water and cook for their households, all the while inhaling toxic gases, and every day. The time spent over just this one activity restricts them from being part of any other preoccupation, and of building their social and economic status by accessing paid work, going to school,

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<sup>32</sup> “Girls getting side lined during campus recruitment in ITIs”. *The Hindu*. 29 April 2016. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/girls-getting-sidelined-during-campus-recruitment-in-itis/article8534374.ece>

<sup>33</sup> Who's Who. Minister of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship. <https://www.msde.gov.in/index.php/en/about-msde/whos-who> (last accessed 28/12/2021)

<sup>34</sup> Jacob, Hemant. “Goghat villagers use wood & coal as PMUY fails to give cheap LPG”. *The Statesman* [Hooghly]. 11 September 2021. <https://www.thestatesman.com/bengal/goghat-villagers-use-wood-coal-as-pmuy-fails-to-give-cheap-lpg-1503005809.html>

<sup>35</sup> Pandey, Kundan. “Ujjwala scheme had a great start, but it failed to maintain momentum”. *The Federal*. 27 January 2021. <https://thefederal.com/news/pradhan-mantri-ujwala-yojana-has-claimed-success-with-almost-98-percent-coverage-of-lpg/>

or in engaging in political, cultural and other social activities. The lack of accessible, affordable, safe and clean energy to sustain household needs is thus a cross cutting factor that contributes to widening the age-old chasm of gender inequality, which in turn adds to social and economic disempowerment of women, a vicious trap that they are caught in and with little being done to remedy the situation.

## **Fixing the Gender Gaps to Move Forward**

To keep with the commitments made at COP26, it is important to make women central to decision making on energy. It is imperative that we address challenges of not just switching to renewables and reducing carbon emissions, but also deeply considering ways to ensure energy needs, access, and distribution is gender sensitive. Renewable energy is not completely carbon neutral, as the mining of lithium, cobalt, copper, iron ore, aluminium, limestone and nickel will increase over time, to manufacture photovoltaic panels and wind turbines – they will have a very heavy environmental and social footprint. This also means increased mining, destruction of ecologically sensitive landscapes, farmlands and pasturelands, and consequently displacement of communities. World over, poverty and inequality, particularly gender inequality, has increased due to development-induced internal displacements causing a variety of challenges in access to housing, nutrition, education, and health care. It is therefore urgently needed to address energy inequality from the lens of intersectionality,<sup>36</sup> where a range of recessive factors such as religion, caste, class, language, education, ability, sexual orientation determine access to such resources.

Furthermore, it is vital to involve local communities and governments in energy dialogues and decision making. Civil society plays a key role in identifying and tackling hurdles to gender equality. It must, therefore, become a norm to ensure at least 50% women participate at all levels of decision making – village and urban governments, corporates, government agencies, etc. Women must be in a

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<sup>36</sup> Sen, Gita. “Commission on the Status of Women Sixty-third Session”. UN Women. 15 March 2019.  
[https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/63/official-meetings/Gita%20Sen\\_written%20statement\\_CSW63%20Interactive%20Expert%20Panel%20on%20PT.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/63/official-meetings/Gita%20Sen_written%20statement_CSW63%20Interactive%20Expert%20Panel%20on%20PT.pdf)

position to make informed decisions. This can be made possible only when governments, financial institutions, philanthropies, international funding agencies and civil society design and implement programs to empower, coach, and guide women. It is also important to ensure all STEM courses enroll 50 percent women participants, and encourage them with scholarships and by relaxing age barriers. Government budgets must have a specific Gender focus to ensure raising awareness, mentoring, training, skill building and more for women at all levels.

Strengthening rural agricultural economies, ensuring water food and energy security and bringing in innovation for women to ease their time is need of the hour. Building coalitions, networks and advocacy forums for women's rights will certainly aid the process of empowerment. To reserve minimum 50 % percentage for women in senior roles must be the new standard everywhere. Manels must be barred at all workshops, conferences and other spaces of dialogue and discussion. Positive measures with flexible hours, childcare, safe working conditions and more should be fostered to increase women's participation in all spheres including the energy landscape. Amplifying women's voices must be undertaken and called for in all forums of governance and administration - in public and private sectors.

The next generation of women and men in all spheres have begun to understand that gender is the key to achieving all the goals. New initiatives however small are opening up possibilities for change and a lot remains to be done.



Centre for Financial Accountability (CFA) engages and supports efforts to advance transparency and accountability in financial institutions. We use research, campaigns and trainings to help movements, organisations, activists, students and youth to engage in this fight, and we partake in campaigns that can shift policies and change public discourse on banking and economy.

We monitor the investments of national and international financial institutions, engage on policies that impact the banking sector and economy of the country, demystify the world of finance through workshops and short-term courses and help citizens make banks and government more transparent and accountable, for they use public money.

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