



21

Reflection on Engendering the Energy Transition

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Introduction

The chapters and discussant pieces in this book represent attempts at learning across disciplines and localities. The editorial team wanted to promote understanding between a broad cross section of people—drawn from academia, policy and practice—who are involved in research either as users or as generators of data and analysis. A commonality of the contributors is their involvement from a ‘gender’ perspective and not necessarily from an ‘energy’ perspective—there are chapters on experiences from water and climate change finance—so that from our different experiences we could contribute to engendering the energy transition. As the authors and editors of this book, we believe that through dialogue and working together we increase the likelihood of achieving a gender-equitable energy transition. Our common aim is to influence the way gender is interpreted in policy. Our expectations of an engendered energy

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transition are multifarious: from more gender-equitable outcomes, both in terms of promoting energy access and the impacts that this can have on everyday life, to changes in gender roles and relations at all levels of society.

This chapter is my reflection, as the lead editor of the book, on the contribution of the research presented in this book to engendering the energy transition. On reading the chapters and discussant pieces, I see two major overarching themes: (i) the way that gender mainstreaming is playing out in policy and (ii) how we do 'gender research'. These two themes provide the framework of the chapter which closes with some remarks about areas for future research and the way in which we should carry out that research.

Gender in Energy Policy

The research presented in this book shows a shared concern for women, in both the Global North and the Global South, of the connections between a lack of access to energy and its impact on women's health, time and overall economic and social development—not only as individuals but also in relation to men. Women in the North and in the South have to address the high cost of an electricity connection and the comparable consequences for the impacts on their lives and opportunities. There are similarities in the impacts of energy poverty on households that are headed by women, as well as on the lives of individual women depending on their age in the life cycle (Williams 2020). Nevertheless, Williams warns us that there are significant differences in the lived experiences and capacities to act of women in the South and the North which might limit the opportunities for cross-learning. Capturing these differences will require a set of indicators and measurement tools for energy access or energy poverty. However, there is South in the North and vice versa. Women in parts of eastern Europe cook and heat their homes with fuelwood (Bouzarovski 2009) and face similar health issues to women in the South, which appear to be largely unrecognised (Clancy et al. 2017). Likewise, women in the North can send a warning message that access to a sufficient and reliable electricity supply can power household gadgets

which reduce drudgery but do not necessarily reduce time poverty or change gender relations. This is a conversation we need to continue.

Energy policy does appear to have become more responsive to the gender differences in society, although the North has been slower to respond than the South. The motivations for mainstreaming gender in energy policy vary. There is an instrumentalist argument in which women are recognised as a key stakeholder group to be involved in energy sector governance and decision making at both the local and national levels, not only to share their knowledge and experience as energy users but also to make decision making more transparent and accountable (Rojas and Prebble 2020). There is a political argument related to social justice when addressing the significant negative impacts that energy poverty has on the lives of women and girls. This argument is seen in the way that legislation in the European Union must support social inclusion for all Europeans and to protect vulnerable consumers (Feenstra and Clancy 2020). There are similar arguments used to address gender issues in climate change programmes (Frenova 2020). As Goodwin (2020) emphasises, several countries from the Global South and the North have started to recognise ‘rights to nature’, which are aligned with, but not sufficient for, addressing the gendered impacts of climate change.

Nevertheless, there is a large gap between gender-aware text in a policy statement and the implementation of the policy as illustrated by a number of authors in this book (see Section 13.3.2 for discussion on implementation). Without an understanding of what causes this policy evaporation, policies will be incorrectly formulated and implemented and hence will not achieve any targets set (Rojas and Prebble 2020; Taylor 2020). Amongst policymakers there appears to be limited understanding that the many causes of gender inequalities are structural, with other deep-rooted issues such as racism, colonialism and neo-liberalism (Özerol and Harris 2020). The inadequate involvement of women in the planning process is considered a practical barrier to gender mainstreaming in policy formulation and implementation (Rojas and Prebble 2020). However, Helbert (2020) considers that there are broad institutionalised barriers, such as poverty and a culture of gender-based discrimination and violence, which also act as barriers to women’s effective engagement in policy processes.

In trying to bridge the policy gulf and implementation evaporation, we can learn from experiences linked to addressing climate change in making policymakers more gender *responsive* rather than gender sensitive (Frenova 2020). A policy which is gender responsive not only identifies and acknowledges the existing differences and inequalities between women and men but also articulates policies and initiatives which address the different needs, aspirations, capacities and contributions of women and men. In other words, gender responsiveness takes the concept of being gender sensitive a step further, moving from policy statements to action. Global financial initiatives to address climate change, such as the Green Climate Fund, require proposals to include a gender perspective when designing project activities and estimating potential impacts. Project proposers are also required to hold gender-responsive stakeholder engagements for the preparation and implementation of projects.

Throughout the book, there are examples of how gender is mainstreamed into policy on the basis of implicit and explicit assumptions about the characteristics of a situation and what works to promote a gender-equitable energy transition with little attempt to verify these assumptions theoretically or empirically. An example from the water sector is that when gender and other forms of inequality are addressed, water resources will be managed more equitably and sustainably (Özerol and Harris 2020). As a consequence, certain management models, such as participatory water management, are often proposed as universal panaceas, which are seen as applicable irrespective of the social and political contexts. Increasingly women's participation in service delivery is advocated either from a gender equality goal or from an efficiency goal. However, does participation reflect the priorities of women? If they do get involved, then what are the consequences of participation? Özerol and Harris draw attention to a rather underexplored aspect of women and water management—the stress associated with not being able to access safe water. Providing water for the household has an emotional dimension linked directly to gendered norms and expectations—failure to meet the family's water needs means that women are not fulfilling the gendered expectations of what it means to be a good mother. Matinga has made a similar observation in respect of fuelwood collection in rural South Africa which continues despite government efforts to promote

alternatives. Where gender norms are strongly embedded fuelwood collection enables having a neat wood stack next to your home as a visible measure of your capacity as a good wife or mother (Matinga 2010). From a different perspective, having insufficient energy to meet your daily needs can be a contributory factor in stress, anxiety and depression, as well as contributing to social isolation (Feenstra and Clancy 2020).

An outcome of improved energy access is the reduction of women's time and effort spent on fetching fuelwood and water which is lamented as a missed labour source or an 'opportunity cost' to the household since women cannot participate in income-generating activities. However, it is widely assumed that women feel that swapping one task for another is a benefit—that perhaps they might prefer to rest or spend time with their children seems not to be part of the argument. It is also not clear as to whether participating in income-generating activities takes any less time or effort than the substituted tasks of fuel and water collection. In other words, there appears to a reluctance to ascertain if there is any reduction in women's burden of labour (Ray 2020). To run an enterprise outside of the home requires the agency of being able to leave the house, which for women is governed by the prevailing gender norms that differ across societal groups. There are other institutional barriers to overcome such as financial organisations' assumptions that, despite evidence to the contrary, women are only interested in loans for consumption and not production (Rodriguez Osuna 2020). Context matters (Kooijman 2020, Özerol and Harris 2020)!

There are also assumptions about the outcomes of participating in income-generating activities including enabling women to meet the basic needs of the family (e.g. food and water) and gaining respect and status within households and in society, which in turn enables them to contribute to decision making (Diouf et al. 2020, Özerol and Harris 2020). However, the consequences of women's income generation may not always be what feminist researchers aspire to. Van Aelst and Holvoet (2020) provide evidence from rural households in Tanzania about income generation and intra-household decision making related to investment in adaptation options for agriculture in response to climate change. When both the wife and husband are earning an income, if the wife's income contributes to meeting the household's basic needs, then male decision-making power over cash-related agricultural adaptation decisions can

increase since more money remains available for investment in the adaptation options. Women's influence over adaptation decisions is particularly high when they are involved in non-farm activities while their husbands are not. However, when men's income comes from non-farm activities, women's influence over adaptation decision making tends to be lower, particularly when they are not involved in non-farm activities themselves. An issue of concern from research reported elsewhere is that when women start to contribute to household basic needs, men can absolve themselves of responsibility to financially support their families (Pueyo et al. 2018).

Given the attention paid to promoting women's income generation by many development agencies, there seems to be comparatively little attention given to understanding women's requirements and aspirations. Women's enterprises are often located in the informal sector and a widely held view in the literature is that these enterprises are 'survivalist' with little aspiration to grow (Mohlakoana et al. 2018). Nevertheless, as Diouf and her co-researchers show, at least in the case of the street food sector (SFS), surviving is far from the minds of the women (who dominate the sector) and the men running informal enterprises. SFS entrepreneurs want their businesses to grow and they have ideas about what they need in terms of modern energy services. However, this not insignificant group of service providers (in terms of both the numbers of people working in the sector and the numbers of people who use their services) are overlooked by policymakers and other institutions, for example, from the business and finance sectors, which could help entrepreneurs realise their aspirations to up-grade their businesses. Energy policy has tended to focus on delivering access to grid electricity, which is not the most widely used source in the African informal SFS, at least not for cooking and food preparation. Rather, the SFS fuel-use patterns are similar to low-income households in the South, in which fuel stacking using multiple energy sources and services is common. The reasons for fuel stacking vary but are not always price-related (Kooijman et al. 2018). This, as Romijn (2020) points out, should send a signal to policymakers that it is unrealistic to aim for the wholesale adoption of modern energy devices and expect traditional ones to be discarded quickly. There is a need for policymakers to better understand the lived experiences of the intended beneficiaries.

For example, an analysis of the chain of production and food distribution of the SFS would show variations in the demand for modern energy services for specific uses at each link in the chain (Practical Action 2014).

Generalisation can also lead to incorrect actions. The authors in this book and elsewhere point out the importance of gender differences in energy priorities and needs. These differences between women and men about energy choices are found in the SFS in Senegal and South Africa. However, it would be a mistake to consider that gender differences related to energy are universal in the SFS as the evidence from Rwanda shows there women and men appear to have very similar energy priorities. These differences in the evidence are an argument for providing more data and being cautious with generalisations. This point about data leads to the second theme running throughout the book—the nature of the data and how data are produced.

How We Research Gender in the Energy Transition and Why It Matters?

Meanings of Gender and Its Operationalisation in Energy Research, Policy and Practice

In this book, it is possible to see two important developments in feminist and gender research in the way we conceive the concept of gender and how we operationalise it. Gender is not a binary classification of people into two homogeneous groups called ‘women’ and ‘men’. Real life is more complex. Women and men differ across a range of social categories (such as age, class, ethnicity, social status, marital status, economic group and sexual identity) which influence the choices they make. Choices are influenced by time, place and the multiple dimensions of context (social, cultural, ecological, environmental, economic and political). Özerol and Harris (2020) draw attention to another dimension of context—that of history—which they illustrate using the concept of coloniality, bringing into focus the particular vulnerability of indigenous peoples and communities. Many of the authors in this book argue for the use of

intersectionality to bring a more focused understanding of how gender intersects with other axes of power and identities together with associated social processes and outcomes. Such an approach helps highlight differences not only between groups, but also within them, which may require specific targeted forms of action rather than generic policy instruments. In the broader realm of human–nature interactions, the relationship between a specific community of humans and nature is by necessity defined by other humans, and these definitions are inevitably gendered and context-dependent (Goodwin 2020).

However, Feenstra and Clancy (2020) voice a frustration faced by many researchers: that we are rather constrained by the available data being expressed mainly in terms of ‘women and men’ or only providing data on women. Özerol and Harris (2020) point out that even if an intersectional and processual understanding of gender is favoured in the analysis, there is a methodological tendency (particularly in quantitative studies) to use ‘gender as a discrete variable’ narrowly construed in terms of ‘women’ and ‘men’.

To promote learning from each other, two approaches could be usefully employed by gender researchers. Taylor (2020) considers that the three-dimensional gender framework (economic, biological/physiological and socio-cultural) used by Feenstra and Clancy (2020) in the context of energy poverty within the EU could be applied in the South as well. Each dimension has a range of factors which are either causal or consequential. The factors can be linked both within and between the three categories. Feenstra and Clancy consider that this presentation of the data not only assists in the framing of the policy responses but also helps identify where responsibilities to act lie which are not always in the energy sector but in other areas such as health, education, buildings and economic development. The recognition of shared sectoral responsibility for addressing gender and energy issues can be seen in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are framed with a mutually supporting structure, which indicates that responsibility in the first instance for reaching SDG7 may not be within the energy sector while the energy sector has a significant part to play in reaching SDG5. There are a number of drivers and causes of energy poverty, for example, low income which results in households struggling to pay bills and having to make

difficult choices, such as cooking less frequently and switching off cooling/heating systems. Governments' economic policies influence income distribution and employment and hence a household's capacity to pay.

The second research approach comes from outside of the energy sector. Özerol and Harris (2020) describe four core themes used in a gender analysis of water governance which has parallels in conducting gender analysis for the energy transition:

1. Differentiated access to and uses of water
2. Knowledge production and expertise in water management and governance
3. Participation in decision- and policy-making processes for water management and governance
4. Experiences and emotions in relation to water use, access and governance

In terms of the energy transition, themes (1) and (3) focus on research, policy and practice, as can be seen in this book, while themes (2) and (4) are under-researched but are commented on elsewhere in this chapter.

What We (Don't) Count

The book is written in the context of informing and influencing the way progress towards reaching the SDGs—particularly SDGs 5 and 7—is implemented. For policymakers, an important step in the planning process is to develop indicators and metrics in order to establish baselines and measure progress towards the set policy objectives. What we count and how we count have important implications for outcomes. A lack of certified and disaggregated quantitative and qualitative scientific data results in ineffective implementation (Diouf et al. 2020). This section raises issues about what we count, and the next section looks at how we count.

While most of the research which forms the basis of the book uses qualitative data, there is a recognition that quantitative data have an important role to play in informing policymakers. Large surveys are, in principle, a good instrument to discover evidence of the presence (or absence) of gender-inequality scenarios (Romijn 2020). On the other

hand, Nelson (2020), supported by Kooijman (2020), warns that an over-reliance on numbers can depersonalise decision making by moving political spheres of governance away from impacts to “a technical realm of algorithms, experts and administrators” and remove discussions about the roles and contributions of people involved as makers, implementers and beneficiaries of energy policy. Another danger of quantitative indicators is that they can be reduced to mere box ticking. For example, taking a measure of gender equality in the workplace as the availability of a company policy and monitoring framework rather than undertaking a more detailed gender analysis of organisational policy and practice (van der Vleuten 2020). Such an approach misses opportunities for learning about and improving gender mainstreaming.

The requirement for quantitative data is in part driven by funding agencies setting performance indicators for project monitoring which are often linked to outputs or short-term outcomes, such as the number of solar panels installed in homes. However, there are consequences of neglecting to monitor long-term performance of project outputs and the extent to which they contribute to reaching predicted outcomes. Project beneficiaries and participants in service delivery may need longer term support than the duration of a project. For example, what are the outcomes of women’s participation in project committees—does it contribute to their empowerment? A recent study which looked at the lessons learnt from mainstreaming in 40 gender and energy projects could not find evidence of the collection of monitoring and evaluation data by the implementing organisations after the formal ending of the project (Clancy et al. 2016). This is an issue of concern since implementing organisations are not learning about what works and does not work, with consequences similar to those mentioned at the end of the last paragraph: ensuring that we do not make the same mistakes in policy formulation and implementation.

To counter the reliance on numbers, Feenstra and Clancy (2020) describe two alternative types of indicators to a metric approach: a consensual one using self-reported experiences and an outcome-based approach. The use of these alternative indicators would be supported by a switch from a supply-oriented approach towards a demand-driven one, which requires a more holistic understanding about energy users. Such an understanding needs a different type of data which would allow insights

into the dynamics within households together with other relations of importance in daily life (Nelson 2020, Romijn 2020). Indeed, it also requires a rethinking of the unitary model of the household which forms the basis of much thinking around policy making. For example, to move beyond a model of the household as a homogenous entity with only household income as a variable that influences energy poverty. Feenstra and Clancy (2020) point out that, within European research, the concept of 'a household' is contested. Households are fluid entities with a dynamic structure, varying in income, class, ethnicity and education (Bell et al. 2015). There are also families living across multiple households or tenants unrelated by kinship. In the North, divorce and employment patterns lead to this type of fragmentation, while in certain parts of the South (e.g. Nepal and India) male migration is a contributing factor (MSSRF and CRT Nepal 2019).

There are feminist researchers who are challenging the unitary model of the household. One of the major criticisms of the unitary household is a failure to address issues of power vested in gender relations and bargaining over household resources. In their chapter, van Aelst and Holvoet (2020) describe a model which aims to address these weaknesses and takes into account the effects of personal and bargaining power. They point to the danger of pooling spouses' data and thereby missing gender issues. An innovative aspect of their model is that it takes into account the effects of men's characteristics on women's bargaining power and vice versa. Their data analysis shows that the outcomes of women's earned income contribute to improving their bargaining power and decision-making ability. The most influential drivers of women's intra-household decision-making power, at least in relation to climate adaptation strategies, are working outside the home, especially when their husbands are not working off-farm, owning physical assets in their own names, attaining higher education levels and being married to men with higher educational levels. These findings are generally in line with the literature, much of which draws on a large body of evidence from qualitative studies (Ray 2020). However, they point out that their analysis is also limited by assumptions about household composition. They assume that there are two decision-makers in a monogamous marriage, despite there being multiple adult members in many Sub-Saharan rural households as well as

polygamous marriages. These issues around household construction draw attention to the limited understanding of data based on female- and male-headed households which is typical of much of the available sex-disaggregated data for energy access. As a consequence, the issues related to differences between male- and female-headed households tend to be the ones that are captured, such as energy poverty due to the number of adult members with an income, and possible biased regulation towards males as household heads.

Ray (2020) also raises some interesting questions about when households state that a decision was taken jointly. Is this ‘joint’ decision a result of gender equality within the household or a power balance between husbands and wives around certain strategies related to the issue under investigation which does not extend into other areas? Also, to what extent do wives silently disagree but do not contest their husband’s decisions? Quantitative data do not explain these issues.

How and What We Count

Nelson (2020) raises two interesting points in relation to doing research: how we count and what gets counted. These topics do not appear to be widely discussed in the literature, yet they have consequences for researchers and for the intended beneficiaries of research and policy interventions.

How we count matters in terms of outcomes. A requirement for quantitative data, particularly where a device is involved in the counting of the data, begins to shape who is regarded as competent to collect the data. What is required to be collected is standardised in the name of efficiency which can result in missing crucial gender issues in our context of energy access and distribution of benefits (Kooijman 2020). Governing through numbers hides political decisions, including about what is to be measured. However, once the data have been collected, who owns the data and who decides what happens to the data—the subject of the data collection or the collector of the data? This question raises the issue of the connection between power and knowledge (Özerol and Harris 2020). In the water sector, knowledge about water is created by those who control

the water, that is, the planners, administrators, managers and policymakers who take on the status of ‘the experts’. These actors are also responsible for the framing of the problem, in which water shortages are often described as a natural phenomenon, and not as a mismanagement of resources, a situation which results in a de-politicisation of water knowledge and the problems of water shortages (Özerol and Harris 2020). Matinga and Clancy (2020) question, in the context of gender and health related to fuelwood use, who decides the research agenda, its priorities and to what ends. The framing of health issues related to fuelwood has centred on household air pollution from inefficient combustion systems with very little attention given to muscular-skeletal damage linked to carrying wood and the physical and sexual abuse women suffer while out collecting. Is this because the former can be measured in situ (see for example WHO 2005) while the latter is more difficult to measure because of asking questions about sensitive matters?

Much of the knowledge generated on energy, health and gender is from the outsider’s perspective, while the insiders who experience this nexus daily are treated as passive subjects of studies. As Taylor (2020) posits, women are surely the experts on their energy needs and priorities. However, it is the outsider who draws the policymakers’ attention to the identified problem. Matinga and Clancy (2020) report that the knowledge generated about the nature and the framing of the problem, and how to address it, appears to remain within formal medical or energy circles and is not shared with those well placed to use the information, including the ‘subjects’ of the studies.

The composition of a research team also reflects who is regarded as an expert in the make-up of the research team, which cuts across not only gender but also specialisations (e.g. enumerators and translators). Discussing and making transparent how gender is incorporated in the research process is, according to Ray (2020), something that is “widely acknowledged but only briefly (if at all) documented as part of organisational/project strategy”. However, if gender considerations are clear prior to research commencing, then gender is a more prominent part of the research process. Whether the type of initiative Kooijman (2020) mentions, in which an accreditation standard requires gender experts to be

involved in project design and development, as well as including representation of local women in the project assessment, works as a gender mainstreaming tool remains to be seen.

Closing Remarks

The body of work presented in this book does demonstrate that we can learn from each other—no matter our geographical focus and location, our discipline, whether we are academics, activists, policymakers or practitioners, and the research methods and approaches we use. As an overall conclusion to draw from the book, it would be difficult to summarise it better than Wendy Harcourt (2020) in her reflection piece: “energy cannot be understood simply as the provision of better access to resources, more adept technology or efficient management practices”. Indeed, we need to view the energy transition through critical gender/feminist lenses to identify and unpack the gender effects of developmental and environmental/climate interventions related to energy access as currently promoted in the international development agencies.

Authors in this book have drawn attention to two issues which need further consideration. First, we need to demonstrate how power relations and discursive techniques operate in policy, practice and research. Power relations and the way they shape research are not extensively discussed as an issue in the academic context where, as Nelson notes, we are under increasing pressure to produce meaningful sustainability data.

The second issue is to situate gender and energy in its cultural and ecological context. For feminist researchers, particularly those who use feminist political ecology as a guiding framework, this might be an obvious statement. However, for many energy researchers, it is less obvious that gender is more than a binary categorisation of women and men, that there are contextual social processes and relationships that differentially affect women, men and communities. Indeed, a theme throughout this book is a call for data to be collected and analysed intersectionally: to move from the binary of gender to an analysis which reflects the complex socioeconomic identities of the women and men who are the focus of

energy access interventions. There are calls to extend the analysis to one that highlights colonial legacies (Nelson 2020; Özerol and Harris 2020).

Authors also underline the need for mixed methods in data collection. Quantitative data can provide evidence of the presence (or absence) of particular factors as the research by van Aelst and Holvoet (2020) demonstrates. Indeed, I strongly recommend that their research is extended to other aspects of intra-household decision making to help create a more comprehensive understanding of the processes and outcomes involved in gendered decision making. However, qualitative data are required to unpack the complexities of lived experiences which, if missing, fail to reveal how best to address the identified problem, as is described by Matinga and Clancy (2020) on health issues surrounding fuelwood collection and use. To unpack the complexity of lives, there are also strong arguments for ethnographic approaches to data gathering, which despite being time consuming, are revelatory (Osorio 2020). Gender and energy is an emerging field in academic research and has much to contribute, as well as much to learn from colleagues working in other fields, to ensuring that policy interventions are effective in delivering a gender-equitable energy transition. I hope that what preparing this book and the earlier associated Symposium have done is to establish a network of learners of the sort that Dianne Rocheleau had in mind when describing feminist political ecology—an approach used consciously or unconsciously by several authors in this book (Rocheleau 2015). Rocheleau conceived of a network of learners as a work in process (not progress) with a continuing circulation of theory, practice, policies and politics using various combinations of social identity which will contribute to a better understanding of how we engender the energy transition. This is the type of dialogue and form of working together that I believe we envisaged when we set out to write this book. I hope that the conversation continues.

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