



RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 02/2022

Gender perspectives on just transitions

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Purpose of the study

This project has developed a theoretical framework for understanding why women and men often have different prerequisites for participating in, and benefiting from, energy transition processes. The project is based on data from Standal's PhD research, with the implementation of solar-based microgrids for electricity in rural North India as a case study.

Research questions

We ask:

1. What role do gender relations play in women's and men's participation, decision-making power and advantages in the energy transition to a renewable local energy community?
2. How can a theoretical framework emphasizing social justice and different kinds of capital provide useful information for the development of policies and initiatives for just energy transitions?

Who participated in the research group?

Karina Standal (CICERO) and Marielle Feenstra (University of Twente, the Netherlands)

What have we found out?

Based on the research conducted on the energy project in rural India, the project has developed a theoretical framework that combines the concepts of "justice" and "capital". Justice in this context refers to three principles commonly used in justice theory: just distribution (of burdens and benefits), just recognition (of the diversity of people and actors with "interests" related to a project), and just processes (to achieve equitable distribution and recognition). With the use of the the "capital", we seek to highlight how women in many contexts lack different types of social, knowledge-related and economic capital, as well as symbolic capital (more hidden power and related to status).

The study of the energy project shows how such a theoretical framework can reveal gender differences that lead to women in many contexts having fewer opportunities for participation, less decision-making power and being able to achieve fewer advantages in energy transitions.



In the villages it was difficult for women to participate on an equal footing with men. Cultural norms meant that they could not speak at village meetings, could not make the decision to connect to the microgrid or decide what electricity could be used for at home. It was not only within the family and the community that such attitudes made themselves felt. Policies to enable more private sector-led development also informed the Indian energy project in ways that highlighted a focus on testing technical solutions and business concepts.

The energy project was initiated by a Norwegian solar energy company and carried out in collaboration between private and public sector actors. The private company was solely responsible for the implementation (the public sector contributed as donors and with responsibility for follow-up and evaluation). They did not have a desire to challenge local gender roles since this was quite far beyond their competence and core activities. The women locally were therefore not regarded as legitimate stakeholders who were affected and had the right to participate in the process.

Implications

The study provides important theoretical and empirical knowledge about how inequality in local communities is "transferred" to new energy systems in the transition to a low-emission society, unless measures are actively taken to ensure that all the people involved are recognised as legitimate stakeholders. This is mainly relevant for researchers and public administration, but also for business and civil society organisations that want to engage in local energy transitions, such as renewable local energy communities. Although the project uses a case from India, the theoretical framework is transferrable to Norwegian and other Western contexts.

The Indian case study and the theoretical framework illustrate well how women in many contexts lack different types of social, knowledge-related and economic capital. This insight can be used to identify policy areas that are important for supporting an inclusive and just transition. For example, measures in the education sector could strengthen the status of women (particularly relevant in the Global South), while measures to increase the proportion of women in technical and natural sciences will be important for a more inclusive and diverse energy transition locally and globally.

Standal, Talevi and Westskog's [study of Norwegian and British families investing in rooftop solar cells](#) also showed that women were seen as having less interest and expertise in solar energy than men. This affected their motivation to take part in the project.

- The results of the project were published on the 15th of December 2021 in a book chapter of the [Research Handbook on Energy and Society](#). The book is edited by Janette Webb, Faye Wade and Margaret Tingey and addresses current developments in social science energy research.