

The Gender Face of Energy

The first section of the course was presented by Dr. May Sengendo from the East African Energy Technology Network and by Ms. Govind Kelkar, IFAD-UNIFEM Gender, Mainstreaming Programme in Asia based in India.

The presentation of Dr. Sengendo focused on the relevance of gender in energy planning, decision-making, and financing; the importance of promoting different types of energy technologies to the work and lives of females and males in different situations; and why gender roles, needs, and relationships are key elements in energy planning and services. Dr. Sengendo highlighted main challenges for mainstreaming gender concerns into energy planning, including: a) lack of statistics that link energy and gender – those involved in data collection should target the right people to obtain gender-sensitive energy information; b) ensuring higher percentage of women in energy decision-making; c) ensuring minimal annual budgetary allocation for gender related energy activities; and d) having women recognized not only as users but also as planners, entrepreneurs, and managers of energy services. Reference was made to the gender mainstreaming tools developed by ENERGIA to facilitate mainstreaming gender in different components of national energy policies. Dr. Sengendo explained that gender planning for energy projects means increasing energy accessibility for women while reducing costs. The discussion that followed her presentation stressed the importance of promoting multisectoral approach, raising awareness of the decision-makers as to the energy needs of women, and education and capacity building of women.

Ms. Kelkar focused her presentation on linking gender, energy, poverty, and economic development and highlighted the importance of institutional transformation or restructuring for gender mainstreaming. She highlighted that “women” or “men” is an independent category of analysis, not a subset of poverty. Ms. Kelkar also underscored the need to remember that gender is not a homogenous group but differs according to such factors as class, age, status, ethnicity, and location. She also discussed some critical concepts, such as a) gender division of labour – who does what, and who is in control, defines the identity and role of a person; b) opportunity cost of women’s labour – higher income earned by women (compared to men) could possibly change the division of labour in a household; c) increasing women’s income earning activities – this does not automatically lead to a change either in the division of labour or the use of labour-saving devices; and d) energy, leisure, and everyday practices – leisure is to be considered not as a function of enjoyment but for self-development, and thus also a function of production and empowerment.

According to Ms. Kelkar, women’s participation in development projects is an instrument for increasing production and productivity, and poverty reduction projects can be more successful with the participation of women’s. However, she emphasized the need to go beyond this instrumentalist approach to address women’s strategic needs and the need to accelerate the pace of change in enhancing women’s voice, power, role in gender relations, and in economic activities. The discussion that followed her presentation also highlighted the importance of linking women empowerment to cultural practices.