

Gender equity and energy access in the Global South

The project investigates what the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of "access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy" (SDG7) means to the professionals working on matters of energy access, and in particular what the implications are for gender equality (SDG5), in the Global South. While much research, policy and practice address these SDGs separately, there are major gaps in knowledge and action on how energy access and gender equality intersect. Energy access initiatives are, for instance, only starting to consider how gendered conventions determine 'necessary' energy use. Progress on one SDG can therefore lead to unintended consequences for the other. Measures promoting energy access could even adversely affect gender equality; e.g. reinforcing existing disparities within energy resource management arrangements.

Through collaboration with 11 partners across six countries, the project has undertaken 86 semi-structured interviews spanning Nigeria, Ghana, India and Pakistan. Specifically, the interviews were with professionals working on different aspects of the (developing) energy system. We were especially interested in better understanding how their (gendered) expectations are shaping the systems of provision that they are providing, through their own professional roles.

The project which is due to be completed in August 2021, will yield actionable, evidence-based recommendations for stakeholders in both energy and gender equality fields (including policy briefs), to support equitable development of new and ongoing policies and interventions on energy access. The project will also help link technical aspects of energy infrastructure with social aspects, providing an interdisciplinary socio-technical understanding of energy, built on knowledge exchange between partners. Such an approach is critical in ensuring energy policy(makers) start conceptualising gender in more inclusive ways, as part of energy access interventions; e.g. going beyond understanding women only as energy-users.