



INTEGRATING GENDER EQUALITY INTO THE ENERGY SECTOR

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INTRODUCTION

This Technical Guidance Note (TGN) is part of a series of documents on integrating gender equality into the sector operations of Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). The Notes identify key issues which lead to, and reinforce gender inequality, and propose possible solutions for addressing them.

The TGNs fall within CDB's strategic objectives of supporting inclusive and sustainable growth and development and promoting good governance, both internally and among its Borrowing Member Countries (BMCs).

This specific TGN focuses on the energy sector. Access to energy services is critical to lifting persons out of poverty. However, there are still some parts of the Caribbean where energy service access is limited for both women and men, including the more remote areas of Haiti, Guyana, Belize, Suriname and Jamaica. High energy costs and prohibitive connection fees also pose a further barrier in accessing energy services. However, off-grid renewable energy technologies, e.g. solar PV with battery storage, have improved opportunities for provision of access in remote communities.

Research suggests that single-parent households, headed mainly by women, are among the groups that are disproportionately represented among the poor, and that women and girls bear the brunt of energy poverty given traditional care and household roles. Furthermore, women are often primarily responsible for using, managing and paying for energy services in households.

A gender lens is therefore critical in any future development of this sector. The gender-related benefits of access to energy services are manifold. For example, access to electricity contributes to household efficiency and improved health and safety by allowing the introduction of labour-saving appliances and reduction in combustion of wood, charcoal and crop residues. This ease of access to electricity also affects home-based businesses, which are often run by women who commercialise household activities like sewing or cooking.

The availability of electricity in public and private spaces, including street lighting, can reduce crime and gender-based violence, while leading to increased access to mass media and a greater wealth of information and opportunity through computers, television and radio.

The expectation is that the TGN will assist the relevant field officers, technical specialists and decision-makers in effectively infusing gender equality into the Region's energy sector going forward.

KEY GENDER ISSUES

1

High costs of energy services can disproportionately impact poor households, with female-headed households representing a large proportion among them.

Households in the lowest income strata are disproportionately affected by the high energy costs in the Region. These households are more likely to have a larger family size, have lower quality of housing and have female heads of household. This potentially higher energy burden may result in difficult choices when assigning priorities among housing, energy, food, education or health.

2

There is not adequate data on the differential priorities for energy use by women and men in Caribbean households to inform public education campaigns.

While public education campaigns on energy efficiency are needed to promote more effective utilisation of energy for energy services and the reduction of household energy costs, there is not enough gender-related data to ensure that campaign messages are relevant and effective. Currently, existing data on energy service needs and energy consumption reflects an entire household, but does not indicate the difference in how men and women use energy in the home.

3

Female-headed households and businesses owned by women may face financial constraints in investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy.

The transition to more energy-efficient and renewable energy technologies can be constrained by high upfront costs. As a result, this can make it very difficult for low income households (a large number of those being single parent households headed by women) to invest. In the case of businesses, small or medium-sized enterprises may be unable to give priority to investment in energy efficient and renewable energy technologies and these are disproportionately owned by women. These small businesses also have lower access to savings and credit due to low incomes and assets.

4

Women are under-represented in technical energy-related fields as well as in energy-related decision-making.

The energy sector is characterised by more male than female employees and men represent a higher proportion in the management and ownership of energy-service related businesses. This gender gap is due primarily to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. The bias is initiated from as early as the selection of subjects and careers that are encouraged within the school system. However, simply employing more women in the sector will not, of itself, ensure that gender issues are actively considered. There is also a need to increase understanding of gender equality issues more generally, how they link to human resource management and how they might impact individuals and businesses in the sector.

SOLUTIONS FOR INTEGRATING GENDER EQUALITY INTO THE ENERGY SECTOR

High costs of energy services can disproportionately impact poor households, with female-headed households representing a large proportion among them.

Governments should consider providing financial support (with incentives to save energy) based on careful targeting to protect vulnerable groups from high energy costs, particularly lower income single-parent households, mainly headed by women, and having high dependency ratios. In the case of the elderly, age-responsive systems would highlight that elderly women tend to have lower pensions than men or no pension at all. In order to improve targeting, proxy means-testing systems can be developed and employed. There is a further need to continue lifeline tariffs and improve customer service systems to address the issues of energy poverty.

There is not adequate data on the differential priorities for energy use by women and men in the household to inform public education campaigns.

It is recommended that data be collected on energy use by women and men within the household, e.g. for recreational use, household chores or home-based businesses. Utilities should also be encouraged to understand their customers better, e.g. via disaggregating their customer data base by sex. These data can be used to design more effective campaigns which take into account the differences between men and women as it relates to consumer behaviour and decision making and optimise the utilisation and benefits related to energy impacts for households.

Female-headed households and businesses owned by women may face financial constraints in investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy.

An evidence-based gender perspective should inform all financing mechanisms implemented to increase the use of energy efficient and renewable energy technologies, at both the household and business level. These gender differentials should also be taken into consideration as it relates to access to credit and financing to invest in renewable energy devices, for example, by developing financial products which address the lack of collateral.

Women are under-represented in technical energy-related fields as well as in energy-related decision-making.

On the one hand, changing gender stereotypes needs to start within the school system. Education programmes should focus on the removal of biases from teaching approaches and textbooks. Also, a collaboration with Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions and universities can encourage girls to consider further education and training in energy-related jobs. On the other hand, energy sector institutions at the utility and governance level should consider the gains of integrating gender into their policies. For example, integrating gender into human resource policies can have multiple benefits such as increased productivity, decreased staff turnover, reduced absenteeism, and enhanced capacity to attract and retain high quality employees.

CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT BANK



P.O Box 408, Wildey, St. Michael
Barbados BB11000



246-431-1600



246-426-7269



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