

COP27 POLICY BRIEF SERIES

Energy Planning in Kenya: Understanding Perceptions of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

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Summary

Explicit consideration of marginalized groups – ethnic minorities, women and girls, persons with disabilities, refugees, youth, internally displaced persons, and the elderly – in energy planning is vital to ensure that the benefits of access to modern energy for all are fully realized. Without this, just transitions to climate compatible energy systems cannot be guaranteed. While Kenya has made progress in mainstreaming gender

equality, other marginalized groups are often not accounted for in energy planning. Drawing on 18 interviews with key decision-makers involved in energy planning at national and county levels, this research investigated perceptions towards Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI). In order to mainstream GESI in energy planning in Kenya, this policy brief points to some ways forward. We find finance and human resourcing, capacity strengthening, and greater participation crucial to achieving more inclusive energy systems in Kenya.

Key Policy Recommendations

- **Effort is required to rectify the misunderstanding that GESI equates to gender** – specifically women and girls. This is true for all levels of decision-making.
- **Knowledge on GESI must be mainstreamed across all ministries and levels of government**, but particularly at county level as, at present, expertise is embedded in a small number of individuals.
- **Marginalized groups need to be explicitly considered within energy plans** to ensure no one is left behind. This requires a better understanding about who they are and what they need.
- **Everybody must be brought on board early on in decision-making** and at different stages – from policy, planning to implementation – so that GESI is not just a tick-box exercise.

Introduction

Explicit consideration of women and other marginalized groups in energy planning is vital. Such inclusion will ensure that the benefits of access to modern energy are felt by all, guarantee just transitions to climate compatible energy systems, and support achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals [1]. While Kenya's 2010 Constitution made steps towards mainstreaming gender equality¹ [2], a broader focus on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)² is missing.

This research investigated perceptions of GESI amongst key decision-makers involved in energy planning at national and county levels in Kenya. It sought to gain an understanding of how GESI fits within current approaches to planning and to identify ways in which GESI can be built into energy planning processes.

Methodology

To map and understand perceptions towards GESI in Kenya, we first undertook a policy landscape review covering, for example, policies and legislations relating to energy and GESI at national and county-level. Subsequently, we carried out semi-structured interviews with 18 key informants working at the intersection of energy and GESI at national and county levels in Kenya (**Table 1**).

CATEGORY	# OF INTERVIEWEES	ABBREVIATION IN TEXT
National government (energy)	3	NG
County government	7	CG
National NGO	1	NGO
International NGO	4	INGO
Private sector	2	PS
Donor	1	DN

Table 1. Interviewees by category

The qualitative interview discussions were transcribed and underwent a process of inductive coding³ to elicit common themes, which are discussed below⁴.

Results and Discussion

(MIS)UNDERSTANDING GESI

We found that the concept of GESI was misunderstood by many. It was seen to mean gender equality, specifically of women and girls. Even when the social inclusion aspect was considered, it often focused on women as the following quote highlights⁵:

“My understanding of gender equality [...] comes about from a result of gender disparity that exists in this country [...]. When you bring

¹ GESI policies in Kenya's 2010 Constitution: (i) introducing requirements for greater participation of women in elective and appointive bodies; (ii) enabling access to government opportunities for special interest groups (women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and youth) at both national and county levels; 30% of government procurement opportunities must go to these marginalized groups; and (iii) increasing participation of marginalized groups in the energy value chain.

² GESI refers to equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for all, irrespective of demographic (e.g., income, age, sex) [3]. In this research we

considered the following groups: ethnic minorities, women and girls, persons with disabilities, refugees, youth, internally displaced people, and the elderly.

³ Inductive coding refers to the process whereby themes emerged from the coding process.

⁴ Qualitative research does not aim to be representative. We cannot claim that the limited number of interviewees is representative of those working in this field in Kenya, and therefore we cannot quantify responses as it would be misleading.

⁵ Anonymous interview excerpts are inserted to support assertions in the text. For abbreviations of interview categories refer to Table 1.

about social inclusion, I guess now this is in relation to decision-making having women in mind.” [CG2]

Some interviewees felt this misunderstanding existed across multiple levels of government:

“When it comes to the concept of GESI [most] ministries [do not] understand.” (NG2)

GESI AND ENERGY PLANNING

The extent to which GESI was considered in energy planning was highly varied. Some participants felt that energy was gender neutral⁶ and that it was not possible to plan for the needs of different social groups. Others, however, acknowledged that different social groups accessed and used energy in differentiated ways, and argued it was important to plan for these diverse and dynamic needs through collaboration with different stakeholders:

“Ensure public participation is done adequately and everybody is brought on board when making decisions; especially the community members [for] the rural areas which are mostly affected. So an extension of that stakeholder engagement is important to bring everybody on board, to do collaborations through partnerships.” (CG4)

It was clear from the interviews that GESI was not yet a priority for county governments irrespective of the sector. Some participants argued that it was an agenda advanced by development partners, rather than being domestically driven.

“All these things usually come from the West [...], it did not start here, it started from the West; clearly the agenda is not [the governments].” (PS1)

Interviewees reported that counties 'pretended' to be integrating GESI just to be counted by the development partners, but they were just ticking a box:

“Personally I think [GESI] is being driven by development partners [...], most of them are supported by the development partners. And we do like to pretend that we are integrating GESI [...], but it is just ticking the box.” (NGO1).

DELIVERING ENERGY FOR ALL?

Participants were asked which groups were not currently considered in energy access and energy planning. A follow-up question enquired about which groups were most impacted by a lack of access, as shown in **Figure 1**. While all groups were considered to some extent excluded, participants thought refugees were most excluded.

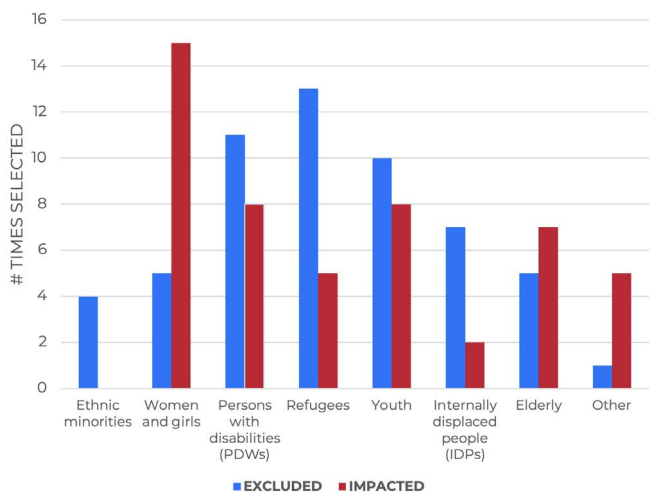


Figure 1: Interviewee perceptions of groups excluded from decision-making (blue) and most impacted by a lack of modern energy access (red) based on the number of times they were selected. The 'other' category included men (excluded) and working population, the ill, poor, single-headed households, and women and children (impacted).

⁶ Although the research focused on GESI, participants commonly focused on gender.

They argued that the situation of refugees was “viewed as temporary” (CG5) and not the responsibility of Kenyan authorities.

“At both the national and county level there were no specific programmes for refugees and internally displaced persons because the issue of refugees was not an emerging issue in Kenya, and it was the mandate of another institution.” (NG1)

Women and girls were considered to be most impacted by a lack of access to modern energy services. Here interviewees commonly made reference to the use of traditional methods of cooking.

Even if marginalized groups were considered in energy plans there were several factors that influenced their ability to access and use energy technologies and services. These included low income, geographical location, lack of policy coherence and implementation, cultural beliefs and practices, lack of awareness about the importance and benefits of energy access, and political marginalization. Of these, low income was considered one of the key factors affecting access, with participants highlighting that many low-income households placed a lower priority on energy than other needs, such as education and health. This meant that during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, people were no longer able to afford energy [4].

IMPLEMENTING GESI AND ENERGY JOINTLY

The Kenyan Constitution is explicit in its desire to enhance living conditions for all Kenyans [3]. However, the way in which this is enacted (from energy planning to end-use), and how GESI and energy are brought together in practice, is not clear, particularly at the county level. Indeed, many Kenyan counties still lack either a draft

or final energy plan and/or gender policies. The reasons for this varied, and participants raised issues regarding human and financial resource constraints, lack of knowledge and awareness of GESI and energy, and implementation challenges – including policy and planning silos. A lack of policy coherence and implementation was also an obstacle, with participants highlighting political interference in energy policies and plans as a key barrier to access for marginalized groups.

Some ways forward?

Kenya has made progress in mainstreaming gender into policies and programmes aimed at increasing access to modern energy services; this must continue – yet more remains to be done. From the interviews we identified the following three broad challenges: (i) while inclusion of the needs of women and girls is underway, the needs of other marginalized groups are rarely considered; (ii) expertise on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is embedded in a small number of individuals; and (iii) GESI is often seen as a tick-box exercise, rather than being owned by those responsible for policy, planning, and implementation.

While recognizing these challenges, participants suggested some ways forward:

- More **participatory approaches** were advocated, as they would enhance representation and inclusion of marginalized groups in national and county-level planning.
- Participants highlighted the need for **more resources, both human and financial**. These are needed by government actors, as well as for marginalized groups, to facilitate

access to technology and enhance energy service delivery.

- Finally, awareness and knowledge of **GESI must be mainstreamed** across all ministries and levels of government – especially at county level. In particular, targeted capacity strengthening was required to ensure knowledge is cascaded down to implementing officers.

While Kenya is a leader in delivering modern energy services and has made progress towards GESI, at the moment, it can be an afterthought in planning. More can be done so that GESI is fully considered and embedded from the start in energy planning processes.

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