

Monitoring Tools for Rural Electrification: Prospects and Challenges in Applying Energy-Poverty-Gender Linkages

In Uganda, rural electrification is one of the major energy policy strategies for increasing access to energy services. The Energy for Transformation project is the main vehicle for putting this strategy into action. The current Monitoring & Evaluation system focuses on two poverty focused elements. The challenge now is to bring in the gender focus.

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Energy policy planning is a key concern within the poverty alleviation strategies of many countries. At the same time, poverty reduction and gender equality are considered as goals as well as outputs that reflect development and change, which in turn fulfil the commitments made by these countries in the framework of international policies and conventions, such as the Beijing platform for action and the Millennium Development Goals.

One of the ways of addressing these commitments and goals within the energy sector is to formulate linkages between energy, poverty and gender. The challenge in the application of such a linkage is the monitoring of not only the achievement of energy policy objectives and the extent to which energy interventions are genderised, but also of the achievements resulting from the inputs to rural electrification projects. Energy policymakers, programme planners and implementers are therefore continuously demanding tools that can be used to apply such linkages in energy policy planning, implementation and monitoring.

This article attempts to provide some examples on how to integrate energy-poverty-gender linkages in monitoring tools for rural electrification projects. Examples are drawn from one of the subprojects of the Energy for Rural Transformation (ERT) project in Uganda, namely the Business Development Scheme/Energy for Rural Transformation (BUDS/ERT) project, which is undertaken by the Private Sector Foundation, Uganda.

The Energy-Poverty-Gender Linkage in Monitoring Rural Electrification Achievements

In Uganda, rural electrification is one of the major energy policy strategies through which the Government plans to increase access to energy services and technologies from the 1% level for rural electrification that existed in the year 2000. In the past, Uganda's rural electrification programmes were conducted through the government utility, which had a monopoly on power supply. Currently, the ERT project is the main vehicle through which Uganda aims to address issues of rural electrification. Under reforms led by the World Bank, the conventional model of government-led rural electrification has been replaced by one led by a private sector, commercially-oriented programme. In this model, subsidies are expected to take account of affordability and equity. Investment decisions are made on a commercial basis and the provision of output-based aid is balanced against the need to facilitate financial closure of private sector projects. The ERT Project Secretariat works with the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MOFPED), and has designed a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) programme. This M&E programme aims at measuring the impact of the ERT project interventions in terms of rural transformation by focusing on two poverty-focused elements: improvement in quality of life and increases in income. Gender is

another element that has to be incorporated into this M&E programme for the ERT project to conform to Uganda's energy policy as well as the national gender policy. However, gender guidelines for the M&E programme are not yet in place.

Some of the guiding questions that can be asked include the following: *what inputs were invested in the rural electrification project towards gender and poverty-related activities; what costs have been incurred in gender and poverty-related activities, who has benefited from the costs incurred in order to get to a certain result; whose needs have been catered for; who has lost out from the project; who has been able to participate; what change have women been able to achieve in decision-making; who has accessed the energy services and technologies; what choices have the rural electrification project provided for women and men, and whose choices have been catered for; what positive and negative effects have energy services and technologies had on the norms and values of society and organisations in relation to the roles and needs of women and men; and what benefits have they achieved and who has benefited?* Such questions can be incorporated in the monitoring plan for the rural electrification project and the responses analysed.

The BUDS/ERT Project

The BUDS/ERT project has been operating for one year (as of 2004) as a financing mechanism using funds from the World Bank. It provides the following services: cost sharing grants to clients; a sales-based performance grant scheme (solar grant scheme); and rural business development support to help increase energy consumption. The clients are mainly energy service users plus enterprise developers, NGOs and energy technicians in the private sector. As of now, it has supported both men and women, from small-scale private sector companies and NGOs, to obtain funding to undertake energy service delivery activities and energy-related technology transfer including solar and micro-hydro projects. The solar companies that were funded this year (2004) have so far distributed 500 solar-panel systems of (60,000 watts in total) and the funding to enterprises and NGOs involved with micro-hydro has enabled the installation of 40 MW of micro-hydro systems. Two companies have been supported in providing information technology.

Having a focus on energy-poverty-gender linkages when monitoring rural electrification projects requires an assessment to be made of the planning phase of the project and asking the question: were gender and poverty concerns a priority focus in the project? In this case, the project did not ensure that strategies to address differences in the roles, needs and access to resources of women and men were taken into consideration during the planning. Now, these are key issues that need to be incorporated. Fortunately, certain aspects, which were taken care of to ensure the effectiveness of the project, have helped it to realise the importance of gender and poverty concerns within this energy intervention.

Experiences at the project level with BUDS/ERT, in terms of applying

the energy-poverty-gender linkages in developing a monitoring tool, are discussed below. Some guidance is also given on extending the monitoring component to the household level (where the project has yet to make an assessment).

At the programme level, **participation** is a key monitoring indicator that can be dealt with by identifying the categories of women and men who participate in energy service provision. At the household level, this could be the extent to which women and men have been involved as beneficiaries. Here, the energy service is provided by the project staff, and the beneficiaries are BUDS/ERT's clients. Fifteen clients obtained funding in 2004, but it is not clear how many of these were women or men. However, the programme staff have noted that more men than women come forward for the services, but the actual numbers are not known. Some of these funded enterprises are certainly owned or managed by women. However, it is difficult for the programme to get such details having failed to plan for obtaining such gender-disaggregated data on clients who seek the services of this programme.

The differences in the needs and the involvement in decision-making between the genders also require monitoring in such a project. The programme officers were not sure how they could give attention to the needs of female and male clients when the service provision is consumer-driven. Each applicant is assessed according to given criteria and if she/he qualifies, then funds are provided. What is lacking is consideration of the different needs of women and men as they seek to access these services. These needs may be related to their different tasks, who makes decisions, and who has the authority to ensure that funds are appropriately utilised. The programme staff felt that taking this additional step, and including the differences in needs and decision-making issues between female and male clients, would mean more work for them, more training in gender planning/analysis and therefore more operational costs. With appropriate planning, however, such gender and poverty specific components could be taken into consideration within the guidance given to clients during the funding assessment and the implementation of those energy projects that are funded.

Access to resources can be monitored by assessing the number of women and men who have so far qualified for funding and, as such, have been able to access the services provided by BUD/ERT. This should be for the various components of the programme: cost sharing grants to clients; the sales-based performance grant scheme (solar grant scheme), and rural business development support to help increase energy consumption. It would be useful to find out which of these have been accessed by female more than male clients and vice-versa, and why. In this project, the programme staff have considered access to resources through beneficiary assessment: who has access to the resources that are obtained from the funding of the transfer of energy technology and provision of energy services? They realised that although more men than women get to the programme office and therefore have access to the funding (as project leaders or company owners), at the beneficiary level it is women and children who usually benefit from projects for which grants are reimbursed rather than men. Good examples are the provision of better services in hospitals as a result of improved lighting from the installation of a solar panel, and a reduced distance to water sources due to the introduction of energy technologies for pumping water. To consider women not just as beneficiaries but also as active decision-makers who can control resources will require adjustments in the BUD/ERT planning process, as well as in the clients' projects. There is also a need to address the reasons that stop women seeking access to funding. Furthermore, it is important to identify societal norms and values concerning the position of women, and to change the thinking that women's access to energy technologies and services should be as users and not in any other role.

Project costs incurred in BUDS / ERT should be monitored for the extent to which women and men have opportunities to access the funding available. One would think that the process of assessing an

application for funding would be a key to promoting or hindering women's or men's access to the funds. This, however, is not the case in this programme. The programme staff indicated that any applicant who fulfils all the requirements will go through the process faster than those who leave gaps in the application information. No applications are rejected; and sometimes applicants are given technical support by the staff to improve their applications. Before the commitment of funds, the project plans and implementation procedures are assessed to ensure the effective implementation of any projects funded. Accessibility to funding is facilitated through the guidance given to all clients irrespective of gender.

Another concern is to examine the strategies in rural electrification programmes that **contribute to poverty reduction and the empowerment of women**. The rural electrification strategy in Uganda is basically aimed at improving rural livelihoods through improved energy options/technology, and thereby reducing poverty. As such, the BUDS/ERT programme has tried to ensure that funding grants mostly target energy projects in those rural areas that have high levels of poverty, as indicated by the participatory poverty assessment reports, and that the project proposals include strategies to address poverty. However, little effort has been made to include strategies for the empowerment of women.

Conclusion

The integration of poverty and gender in the monitoring of energy policies and projects requires one to compare and assess the baseline situation with that expected as a result of the introduction of the proposed policy or project. This article has provided some suggestions for additions to the existing monitoring indicators that would reflect the energy, poverty and gender linkages, taking as an example the BUDS/ERT project. In focusing on poverty and gender there is a need to assess the differences that exist in the roles, needs and rights of women and men, as well as the ways these differences can aggravate poverty in a specific household or community.

According to the BUDS/ERT staff, future energy for rural transformation projects need to include more local mobilisation in order to improve private investment, take demand-driven financing more seriously and come up with more innovative commercial investment mechanisms.

If these issues are dealt with in the early stages of project implementation, they can help further planning and monitoring to promote poverty reduction and gender equality. ■



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