



ENERGY DECARBONIZATION

These briefs are intended for organizations and activists engaged in advocacy on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender and sexuality in Asia and the Pacific. They aim to provide a snapshot how SRHR links to the new Agenda 2030 framework laid out by the [2019 Global Sustainable Development Report](#) and the six entry-points it identifies, provide brief evidence from the context of Asia Pacific, and illustrate how fulfillment of SRHR helps countries in the region achieve just and sustainable development using the development justice framework of Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (AP RCEM). The briefs have been developed by members of the Thematic Working Group on Gender, Sexuality and SRHR of the AP RCEM, and supported by the co-coordinator of the TWG, APA.

INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN GENDER SRHR AND ENTRYPOINT 4

Achieving energy decarbonization and universal access is key to economic development as well as the overall social well-being of the people and the planet. As over 1 billion people in the world lack access to electricity – and 2.8 billion to 3.4 billion lack access to clean cooking – women and children bear the greatest burden of energy and time poverty, expending hours of unpaid and contributory labor to gather fuel, collect water, and manually process grains and other foods for domestic and livestock consumption.

Women are the primary energy managers at the household level, and their access to clean energy services can improve their health and well-being, free up their time and catalyze their economic, political and community participation and involvement.¹ Structural barriers to women's access to energy which include a lack of access to formal financial institutions; a lack of credit history or collateral; limited engagement and consideration of their needs in the development phase of energy access projects; low engagement as entrepreneurs in the energy value chain; and limited education and discriminatory social norms and laws.²

Lack of reliable lighting both within the home and at school is leaving girls behind and without educational opportunities, while women and girls are forced to deliver babies and have SRHR examinations conducted in darkness at health facilities for lack of electrification. Lack of energy sources also deprives them of access to information and connectivity with the outside world (telephone, computers, internet, television, etc.) as they expend considerable effort and resources to gather unsustainable and damaging means of alternate energy for the household.

Household air pollution, which is intricately linked to burning fuels such as wood, animal waste and coal for heating, cooking, and lighting is responsible for about 2.8 million deaths worldwide, affecting mostly women and children³. It also causes aggravated harm to pregnant and lactating women, increases household health costs, promotes morbidity, and intergenerational precarity. Physiological changes during pregnancy, such as a 40% increase in the amount of air pregnant women breathe per minute as well as a 50% increase in how hard their hearts work, can make pregnant women particularly vulnerable to pollutants and may cause preterm birth and low birthweight.⁴ Those in low-middle-income countries who are constantly exposed to high pollution levels indoors and unable to leave home under lockdown are at a higher risk of complications. In the Pacific, access to investment funds for green technology, and the adverse impacts of climate change directly impact women's SRHR and contribute to unwanted pregnancies, maternal mortality, and reduced access to education and health services.⁵

Women and girls face violence as they venture further⁶ to find fuel for domestic consumption or use outdoor latrines that have no source of light at night. Over-pricing of electricity in some developing countries in the region despite lowering global oil prices, proliferation of unregulated independent power suppliers, poor public infrastructure and large debts for public energy projects also reduces access at the household level and enhances costs of electrification over essentials like health. The non-electrification of health facilities remains a challenge, limiting access to quality SRHR and other health services that require reliable energy sources to function.

The regional production of oil, coal and gas continues to rise to meet the growing demand for energy and infrastructure investments despite commitments to clean and renewable energy.⁷ This underinvestment comes at the expense of people's health and stifles gender equality as women continue to suffer the burdens of dirty cooking⁸ with direct consequences for their SRHR. Some indications suggest that women are more likely than men to conserve energy—using up to 22 per cent less, including through a greater willingness to alter everyday behaviors.⁹

POLICY COHERENCE

In 1994, the [International Conference on Population and Development](#) Programme of Action first linked gender



equality and SRHR with the broader development aims of water and food security, decent jobs and sustainable energy for all. The [2013 Asia Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development](#) stressed that volatile energy and food prices and increasing challenges posed climate change and the loss of biodiversity were increasing vulnerabilities and inequalities in the region. The adoption of the Agenda 2030 with a dedicated Goal (SDG 7) marked a new level of political recognition, commitment, and shifted focus on equity, renewables and clean energy.

The [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), (UNFCCC) made energy decarbonisation a global environmental and political concern, with the 2015 Paris Agreement requiring governments to undertake a transformation in energy sectors and invest in renewable energy. UNFCCC has a gender action plan (GAP) that sets targets for participation of women in policy decision-making as well as allocations of funds, and the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#) has made specific provision for the empowerment of women. The Istanbul Programme of Action for 2011–2020 charts out a path for Least Developed Countries and highlights energy access as a priority area for action, along with gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Sustainable Energy for All initiative launched by the UN Secretariat in 2012 now works towards achievement of SDG7 and has a focus on gender equality and women as leaders and change agents.

EVIDENCE FROM ASIA PACIFIC

- 97 of the world's 100 most air polluted cities in 2018 are in the Asia Pacific.¹⁰ The energy sector remains the main contributor to greenhouse gas emissions specifically in Asia, which emits half of the world's total greenhouse gas, with emissions doubling since 2000.
- Asia Pacific's capacity to produce renewable electricity has increased almost 5 times, faster than any other region, but its share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption has dropped from 23% in 2000 to 16% in 2016, one of the lowest rates among world regions.¹¹
- At least 455 million people in the region lack access to electricity and more than 2 billion people still relying on biomass, or solid fuel, for cooking¹². Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste report that more than 80% of households rely mainly on biomass for cooking¹³ which disproportionately affects women and girls.
- While more than 95% people have access to energy due to concerted efforts toward universal electrification, only 56% access clean energy. About 130 million are effectively off-the-grid across the region. In India 46% of the health facilities, serving an estimated 580 million people, are without electricity. In Bangladesh, electrified households in the country reported a higher proportion of child deliveries assisted by medically trained persons (36%) compared to those in non-electrified villages (23%)¹⁴
- Better electricity access remains far short of the spending needed to deliver universal access by 2030, and finance for clean cooking dropped 73% in 2017 compared to the 2015-2016 period¹⁵
- In the Pacific islands, electricity access and access to clean cooking are astoundingly low in certain areas. In Papua New Guinea, electricity access is 54.4% whereas in Kiribati, access to clean cooking is a mere 13%.¹⁶
- In households that cook with solid fuels, girls spend 18 hours a week gathering fuel in parts of Central Asia. Women comprise only 20% of the workforce in industries that produce modern sources of renewable energy.¹⁷
- In 2018, the lives of at least 24 million people in the region were affected by natural disasters that triggered massive distortions in the cost, pricing, and supply of energy services.
- Women remain severely underrepresented in the energy¹⁸ sector in terms of both education and vocation. Fewer oversee national energy policies and programs or are involved in national climate change and disaster planning and management.

CONCLUSION

In order to achieve decarbonization and clean energy, it is critical to invest in and support women's engagement as entrepreneurs in energy actions across all dimensions of sustainable development. Women's entrepreneurship cannot be developed without fully addressing their SRHR, and creating an enabling environment for them to participate in and influence decisions that impact their daily lives, from transport that powers their commute to energy that gives them access to the world they live in. More and better disaggregated data is needed, especially from civil society – on the nexus of gender, health and energy in the region.

Barriers to participation in the energy sector for women, LGBTQIA+, indigenous people, minorities, people affected by disasters and conflicts, trade unions, workers and farmers, people with disabilities and young people must be removed. Free, prior, informed, and continuous consent¹⁹ and on-going community education and engagement is critical at all stages transition to renewable energy, including through human rights, environmental and gender impact assessments



-
- ¹ UNDESA (2018). [Accelerating SDG7: Achievement Policy Briefs in Support of the First SDG 7 Review at the UN High-Level Political Forum, 2018.](#)
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ See: <https://www.who.org/covid-19-pollution-and-health>.
- ⁵ Family Planning NSW, Australia, via email.
- ⁶ About 35% of Asia-Pacific countries (especially in the South-East - Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and Timor-Leste) continue to lose their forests. According to UN Women (AP), some 135,000 km of natural forest were lost in Asia and the Pacific between 2000 and 2015. This accounts for 10% of the world's total loss of natural forest. The impact of loss of forest was felt more by women, particularly those from rural, landless and land-poor households, who depend on forests to perform their roles in cooking, cattle care, supplementing household nutrition and related tasks.
- ⁷ UNDESA (2019). [The Future is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development. Global Sustainable Development Report.](#)
- ⁸ SE4ALL (2019). [Energizing Finance: Understanding the Landscape, 2019.](#)
- ⁹ UNIDO, UNWOMEN (2013), [Sustainable Energy for All: The gender dimensions.](#)
- ¹⁰ AirVisual. (2018). [World Most Polluted Cities 2018.](#)
- ¹¹ ESCAP (2020). [Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020.](#)
- ¹² IEA and World Bank (2015) cited in ESCAP (2017) [Gender, the Environment and Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific](#)
- ¹³ WHO (2016) cited in ESCAP (2017) [Gender, the Environment and Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific](#)
- ¹⁴ UN DESA). [Accelerating SDG7: Achievement Policy Briefs in Support of the First SDG 7 Review at the UN High-Level Political Forum, 2018.](#)
- ¹⁴ EY (2016). [Women in Power and Utilities Index 2016](#)
- ¹⁵ SE4ALL (2019). [Energizing Finance: Understanding the Landscape, 2019](#)
- ¹⁶ Access to electricity, 2017 values (World Bank Group: Access to electricity (% of population), and access to clean cooking, 2016 values (World Bank Group: Access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking (% of population)).
- ¹⁷ [UN Women](#) (2019).
- ¹⁸ EY (2016). [Women in Power and Utilities Index 2016.](#)
- ¹⁹ APRCEM (2020). Position Paper to the Theme of HLPF 2020.