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## Engendering the Energy Transition: Setting the Scene

Joy Clancy, Gül Özerol, Nthabiseng Mohlakoana,  
Mariëlle Feenstra, and Lillian Sol Cueva

### What We Set Out to Do

This book is based on the Symposium ‘Engendering the Energy Transition’ which was held in November 2016 organised by the Department of Governance and Technology for Sustainability (CSTM) of the University of Twente. The participants of the symposium represented the multidisciplinary of the gender-energy nexus and included researchers, policy-makers and practitioners, not all of whom had backgrounds in either

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J. Clancy (✉) • G. Özerol • N. Mohlakoana • M. Feenstra  
CSTM, University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands  
e-mail: [j.s.clancy@utwente.nl](mailto:j.s.clancy@utwente.nl); [g.ozerol@utwente.nl](mailto:g.ozerol@utwente.nl); [nmkaxulu@gmail.com](mailto:nmkaxulu@gmail.com);  
[m.h.feenstra@utwente.nl](mailto:m.h.feenstra@utwente.nl)

L. Sol Cueva  
ISS, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Hague, The Netherlands  
e-mail: [solcueva@iss.nl](mailto:solcueva@iss.nl)

energy or gender. They came together to discuss how to engender the energy transition and what its possible outcomes might be. There was a strong emphasis on learning from each other, particularly in view of gender mainstreaming in the energy sector being late compared to other sectors, such as water. Most of the attention to engendering the energy transition has been in the South. Only in the last few years interest in the gender dimension of energy has begun to emerge in the North, where lessons from the South can help with the transitions in both the energy system and in gender roles and relations.

The symposium created a space for the participants to reflect on two themes. The first theme was about what is known both in terms of the transition towards sustainable energy use and in changes to gender roles and relations brought through engagement with and in the energy value chain. The second theme focused on the methodologies and theoretical frameworks that can bring a comprehensive understanding of the concept of gender in the energy value chain, in particular women's empowerment and whether or not it leads to transformative change.

The common starting point was an acceptance that managing the transition to a sustainable energy system requires understanding the human factor in the introduction of low-carbon energy technologies. The academic literature points to the role of social actors as critical for the successful implementation of technological innovations, such as the adoption of clean energy both on the supply and demand sides. The up-take of technical solutions is influenced by an individual's consumption behaviour, choice-making and lifestyle (Barr and Gilg 2006). Nevertheless, social groups have enabling, mediating and aggregating functions which affect other actors in meaningful ways (Fischer and Newig 2016). For example, decisions to adopt a proposed solution, such as clean energy and its associated technologies, are influenced through the interactions between social groups and individuals in processes of adjustments, modifications and negotiations. The awareness, attitudes, risk perception, consumption behaviour and investment decisions of consumers and other actors, such as policymakers, industrial strategists, regulators, experts, technology developers and investors, have a strong influence on the transition succeeding (Parag and Janda 2014).

One social characteristic which is applicable to all actors is that of gender. Gender refers to the socially constructed and accepted attitudes, values, roles and responsibilities of women and men in a given culture and location. Gender cuts across social identity, intersecting with a variety of other identities, including class, race and ethnicity, age, religion and family structures, among others. Gender analysis shows that women and men are uniquely positioned and sometimes have distinct aspirations, pursue diverse goals, take different paths, and they are unequivocally influenced by discourses (e.g. climate change, economic profitability) or socio-material changes (e.g. sustainable energy initiatives). An important finding from anthropological studies of energy is that women and men tend to legitimise decisions in different ways and thereby nurture their specific, gendered identities which are also moderated by other social characteristics, such as age, economic status and ethnicity (Winther 2008). These distinctions raise the questions as to whether gender plays a significant role in the development of a sustainable energy system, whether women and men benefit equitably by the introduction of low-carbon energy technologies, and in which ways they differentially benefit from these technologies. These are universal issues. Therefore, in respect of the energy value chain, we can ask which values women and men aspire to, what roles and responsibilities they take on within the energy value chain, as well as what motivates them to be involved and how they negotiate decisions to ensure their values are reflected and their aspirations are reached. However, women and men need more than motivation, they also need the ability to make effective choices and to transform those choices into desired outcomes, that is, they exercise ‘agency’. In any society women and men have different levels of individual agency, with men tending to have a greater capacity to act than women. These findings point to differences in capacity to influence the energy transition and its expected outcomes.

## Why Do We Think This Book Is Needed?

There are three main reasons that motivated us to bring the contributions on the topic of gender and energy transitions together in this edited book. Firstly, the body of independent and peer-reviewed empirical

evidence about the impacts of this energy transition on socio-economic outcomes is relatively small and even more so in terms of gender-differentiated choices of energy forms and outcomes. In part, this reflects the situation that the energy sector has been much later than other sectors to mainstream gender.

Secondly, most of the attention to engendering the energy transition has been in the Global South<sup>1</sup>. The Global North has been much later than the South at recognising that there is a gender dimension to energy supply and use. The book provides some of the early evidence from both South and North perspectives and in doing so it contributes to bridging the gap in our knowledge.

Lastly, the book describes useful lessons from research and practice, not only from the energy sector, and shares mainstreaming tools for use in the Global South and the Global North. Such an approach brings novel insights and from theoretical, methodological and practical perspectives which promote cross-disciplinary learning with a global outreach.

## What Is Innovative About the Book?

### The Way We Developed the Book

The book reflects the innovative approach used in the symposium. We particularly wanted to emphasise learning from each other so contributors were selected to represent different disciplines, sectors, global regions and backgrounds (academia, policy and practice). The editorial team also reflects this diversity. We are a team of women from the Global South and North and with diverse positions as PhD students, post-doctoral researchers, assistant professors and full professors. We have experience as

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<sup>1</sup>We use the concepts of 'Global South and Global North' in preference to developing and developed countries. All countries are developing since all are subject to process of change. Nevertheless in academic discourses a universal definition of Global South and Global North is elusive, evolving and contested (for an overview see Clarke 2018). Here we use the concepts not used in a strict geographic sense but in a political economy sense of large disparities in wealth and political instability. There are pockets of the Global North in the South and *vice versa*.

activists, scientists and policymakers, combining academic experience with practitioners' skills and acting as advocates.

Another innovative aspect that reflects multidisciplinary was to have a discussant for each chapter. The discussant was chosen to reflect a different disciplinary field to the author(s) and came from either a research or a practice background with a common focus on gender. The chapter author(s) and discussant could also be from different geographical regions. The discussant was asked to provide a constructive reflection which helps the author(s) improve the chapter in terms of clarity of ideas and concepts presented. In addition, the discussant's piece can help make the chapter accessible to a wider audience.

In parallel, we kept with the academic tradition by sharing each chapter with a peer reviewer and incorporating the critical and constructive remarks of the reviewers to improve the chapters. To enhance the academic discussion, authors presented their chapters during a series of internal webinars in which authors, discussants and editors were able to provide constructive feedback. The webinars were recorded to act as a reference source. An overall reflection of all the book chapters was given by four representatives of academia, policy and practice. Their reflection pieces highlight the main conclusions of the chapters and synthesize the lessons learned relevant for the three disciplines operating jointly in the gender-energy nexus.

## **Breadth of Coverage**

Given that the transition to a low-carbon society is a complex socio-technical problem, the book draws attention to the understudied social and political aspects of the transitions in the energy system and the nexus with gender roles and relations. The chapters and reflections draw upon concepts, methods and theories of social science disciplines applied in a range of specializations such as energy access, water governance and health studies. The evidence presented differs in scale drawing on empirical data at three levels (micro, meso/institutional, macro). We present research that engages with a diversity of theory and conceptual frameworks, relevant to energy and gender studies, for example, feminist

political ecology and ecofeminism. The book highlights the importance of multidisciplinary research in the transition discourse by providing diverse and rich findings with new insights. The scholarship presented shows that it is possible to learn from each other when talking in a shared language despite our different starting points—be they sectoral or geographical.

## Contribution to Debates

The book contributes to debates around the global initiatives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly 5 (gender equality) and 7 (energy), and Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL). The SDGs are intended to be mutually reinforcing in reaching their goals which brings energy and gender into the picture as a nexus with links to other concerns such as health. In this context legitimate questions become the nature of the role gender plays in the development of an energy system: whether women and men benefit equitably by the introduction of low-carbon energy technologies and in which ways they benefit. However, the transition to a low-carbon society is a complex socio-technical problem for which no single discipline working alone can provide the answers. Instead an interdisciplinary approach is required to provide a holistic understanding of the gender issues in the energy system and identification of solutions.

We consider that the evidence presented in this book supports the underlying philosophy of the SDGs. Firstly, that they are mutually reinforcing. Secondly, that international commitment needs to be translated into local action, and vice versa—that the local situation needs to be reflected in global debates. In relation to the latter, the book provides empirical findings which further the understanding of contemporary topics and/or applications by providing new case studies, regions and contexts germane to the gender and energy transitions.

The book contributes to debates in academic research about the nature of data and how data are generated—both in terms of agenda setting and methodologies employed, which are reflected in global commitments such as the SDGs. Further, the book adds to the energy transitions

literature by focusing on the gender elements that should be considered by research, policy and practice. Gender is embedded in a complex energy systems landscape of different actors, levels, dimensions, methodologies and frames.

## The Structure of the Book

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 consists of nine chapters which examine the issues of the way gender is understood and integrated in a range of different contexts and sectors, not all of which are directly related to energy. Part 2 consists of a reflection from a discussant on each of the chapters in Part 1 together with four reflections about the content as a whole from the perspectives of practice, policy and academia which help embed the chapters and the book in political, societal and scientific debates. In addition, the reflections either identify useful, innovative, practical, methodological and theoretical insights which can contribute to gender mainstreaming or suggest from their own experience additional insights and approaches which could benefit researchers or practitioners.

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