

Gender-responsive approach to climate policy implementation - the possible role of gender equal energy cooperatives as a tool for capacity building for renewable energy (RE), energy saving and energy efficiency (EE)

Introduction:

Aiming to best highlight what gender-responsive capacity building looks like, the SBI workshop will consider forms of capacity building, from equal access of women and men to education and awareness raising, to capacity development on mitigation and technological solutions which are socially sound, decentralized and gender-responsive.

Increasing women's access to sustainable energy and opportunities for energy entrepreneurship are crucial for alleviating energy poverty and realizing gender equality worldwide¹.

The ILO views cooperatives as important in improving the living and working conditions of women and men globally as well as making essential infrastructure and services available even in areas neglected by the state and investor-driven enterprises. Cooperatives have a proven record of creating and sustaining employment – they provide over 100 million jobs today; they advance the ILO's Global Employment Agenda and contribute to promoting decent work².

Sustainable Energy cooperatives are contributing to the achievement of the sustainable energy goals of energy access, energy efficiency, and reduced emissions. Cooperatives are visible in facilitating access to sustainable energy, where they are playing a significant role in generating electricity and distributing it to consumers. They are also leading the way to the adoption of new and renewable energies like solar and wind power in many parts of the world³.

RE and EE Cooperatives

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. As member-based organizations, co-ops are designed to help their members meet their economic and social needs and aspirations, which often depend on the availability of natural resources and a healthy natural environment. As democratic and participatory organizations, they encourage equity and equality. Many cooperatives particularly focus on ensuring gender equality and promoting women's leadership. Excellent experience exist with cooperatives as a way to strengthen women's economic empowerment and to increase women's access and control over resources. As economic entities, co-ops provide their members with commercial services, which in the context of the Green Economy and RE could derive from opportunities in emerging green sectors. As locally rooted institutions, they reflect their communities concerns about social justice and the environment. As enterprises operating under values and principles that include social responsibility and caring for their communities, they strive to serve members not solely in economic terms, but

¹ UN Women (2015): WOMEN'S SUSTAINABLE ENERGY ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ACCESS <http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/fpi%20briefenergy%20globalusv3.pdf?v=1&d=20151203T172456>

² ILO (2015), Cooperatives (COOP), <http://www.ilo.org/empent/units/cooperatives/lang--en/index.htm> (accessed 01.02.2016)

³ ILO (2014): http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_240640.pdf

also in terms of the wider social, cultural and environmental benefits. Cooperatives therefore encourage women and men to take a longer-term view by creating common expectations and a basis for cooperation that goes beyond individual interests. Worldwide cooperatives bring together an estimated one billion people and employ more than 100 million people. They therefore have enormous potential to mobilize their members and the general public through advocacy, information sharing, and education and training including in the area of climate mitigation and adaptation measures, such as energy saving and sustainable renewable energy production.

Example of renewable energy cooperatives in Germany

Energy co-ops have a strong socio-economic role, through RE production, in the wider energy system transformation in Germany. Energy co-ops have turned into important supporters of renewable and decentralized energy structures, due to their strong growth since the year 2006, their participation in local renewable energy projects and their democratic awareness. The cooperative form of coordinating regional energy projects applies to a decentralized energy system that is managed by many smaller firms – a concept that is preferred by the majority of German citizens (more than 75%).

More than 140.000 German citizen's (through DGRV the umbrella organization of cooperatives⁴) have participated in energy cooperatives aiming at increasing renewable energy to reduce GHG-emissions, and to ensure a safe, non-nuclear, energy sources, providing local and affordable energy for all. So far, no gender disaggregated data exists, but co-ops information states that approximately 40% of their members are female (referring to the number of members and not to the volume of the investment).

The cooperatives invest in small-scaled and medium-sized renewable energy (RE) projects like solar heating, photovoltaic, wind, water and biomass technologies and supports projects for increasing energy efficiency and energy saving. This range of technologies have been effective in reducing GHG emissions with different projects and could be up-scaled in terms of funding and technology. Many cooperatives start to sell the produced electricity and heat and show the successful development from production to power trader.

The co-ops allow a **de-monopolization and democratization of expert knowledge** and the entrance of new actors into the energy sector and demonstrate an alternative to the centralized fossil energy industry. Becoming energy producers and entrepreneurs in a local context is a political process of learning and development with as broad and diverse representation as possible from all parts of society. The increased knowledge and experience about renewable energy raises the acceptance with the broader public, which is important for the transformational process to move towards a decarbonized economy and society.

The renewable energy cooperates are striving for decentralized, ecological and sustainable energy solutions combined with economic targets. The roles and responsibilities are agreed by all the members – citizens in the local communities – which have an equal say independent of the size of the investment they have made. This strengthens their ownership feeling and provides – contrary to the fossil energy industry – a structural pre-requisite for a **gender-responsive approach** for energy supply, as women make up 40% of the cooperative membership and their priorities are therefore well represented in the decision-making.

In the cooperative model, resources are decentralized and distributed in a more equitable way. The decentralized and local production of energy reduces the demand for big and central power plants.

⁴ See English website of DGRV <https://www.dgrv.de/en/home.html>

Broad public participation and low-volume investments are the business model of energy cooperatives. This structure provides a good basis for further strengthening **gender** equality in the energy sector.

Gender-responsive approach

Do energy cooperatives have the potential to build capacity for gender just climate solutions?

Some energy cooperatives are applying a gender equality strategy and have developed specific gender – equality objectives, such as for example the energy co-op “Windfang”⁵. Windfang’s gender equality objectives are:

- Encouraging and professionalizing of women in technical sectors
- Increasing the influence of women in the energy sector
- Creating greater possibilities for women to invest money in renewable energy and thus to influence the policy of the company in a democratic way
- Increasing women’s engagement in energy saving and increasing RE share (at home and at work)
- Education and trainings targeting women specifically, including on decentralized energy supply and social and ecological responsibility of energy co-ops

Energy cooperatives overall can provide a structural enabling environment for gender-responsive approaches to technology development, capacity building and technology transfer in terms of:

- Promoting women’s entrepreneurs as energy producer with role models, trainings and experience exchange
- Showing successful public participation and bottom-up processes
- Increasing women’s technological expertise and economic responsibility and their participation in decision making process
- Providing increased gender-sensitive funds and budgets within energy co-ops.

Input into the workshop

The contribution should highlight examples of good experiences in planning by energy cooperatives in conducting gender-responsive capacity-building activities with a view to provide concrete examples of results and increase in effectiveness of capacity-building at national and local level.

The capacity building examples to further develop include:

- Guidance how energy co-ops can provide an institutional framework for engaging women in renewable energy and energy efficiency.
- Guidance on job creation for both women and men; the local value chain is expanded and employment can be generated for women and men, since the energy is produced in a decentralized way on local level.
- Guidance on how to build both women’s and men’s technical know-how, through integrating them in the design and expanding existing curricula of educational and vocational education institutions.

⁵ www.windfang.net

- Guidance on how women's participation in public life can be increased through awareness raising of women and men.
- Guidance on how renewable and affordable energy can ensure saving costs and time and thus contribute to reducing unpaid care burdens of women in particular.
- Guidance on how sustainable energy cooperatives can contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda's sustainable energy goals of energy access, energy efficiency, and reduced emissions in a gender-responsive way.
- Guidance on ensuring multiple benefits through energy cooperatives, in addition to increased gender equality and climate protection, also increased social inclusion, cohesion, cooperation, public participation and transparency.
- Guidance on how to stimulate women as change agents for RE and EE by ensuring that they have
 - a clear understanding of strategies needed at local level
 - are able to mobilize communities
 - share information and apply the cooperative and self-help principles of cooperatives
- Guidance on how women's participation in design and decision-making in rural energy cooperatives can improve governance, management, cost recovery and production.
- Guidance on how cooperatives can contribute towards gender equality by expanding women's opportunities to participate in local economies and societies in many parts of the world.