

Gender Mainstreaming: Renewables 2004

The EU adopted gender mainstreaming in 1996 as a strategy for implementing gender equity and integrating of gender issues. With its Cabinet resolution of June 1999, the Federal German Government agreed to apply the gender mainstreaming strategy in all policy areas to foster gender equity. Although the Federal Environment Ministry has played a pioneer role in implementing gender mainstreaming, there are signs that some difficulties must still be overcome in technology-dominated sectors like that of renewable energy. Initiated by the Federal German Government, the International Conference on Renewable Energies presents an opportunity to take such matters in hand.

Action taken so far

A member of ENERGIA (Network for Gender and Sustainable Energy in the South) has been appointed to the International Steering Committee (ISC) to represent issues of Gender and Energy in the South. No representation exists for issues of Gender and Energy in the North; neither on the ISC nor on the National Advisory Committee (NAC). This paper thus focuses on the situation in the North, i.e. industrialised nations. We also wish to see gender and energy in the South/in developing countries integrated as a cross-sectoral issue because consensus exists at international level that sustainable energy production and supply cannot be achieved in the South without taking gender issues into account.

The proportion of women members on the ISC is 25% and less than 18% on the NAC. Such meagre involvement of women is unacceptable, especially considering that committee members largely come from politics and industry associations and less from the technology-focused planning and production sectors in which women are under-represented. But merely increasing the proportion of women on these committees is not enough to lend a voice to gender issues: women gender experts must be involved.

To the best of our knowledge, gender issues have not been taken into account when preparing for the conference.

Requirements: Further action needed

- We regret that women and women gender experts have only been appointed to the ISC (and only one woman at that) and not to the NAC. In further preparations for the conference, the number of women gender experts at national and international level should be increased and they should be given the opportunity to influence the proceedings. Overall, we would wish to see a broader-based preparatory process.
- In preparing for the integration of gender issues and greater involvement of women at national level, a round table discussion on Gender and Renewables should be held comprising representatives from the Federal Environment Ministry (BMU), the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit GmbH (German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ)), Deutsche Energie Agentur (dena) and women gender experts.
- At international level, the involvement of women in conference preparations and at the conference itself should be supported by regional workshops and by gender-sensitive informational material on renewable energies and their economic, social and environmental benefits.
- Women's access to energy must be enhanced when it comes to the objectives of alleviating poverty, establishing basic rights to welfare and lessening the burden of providing for the family. The different ways

in which women and men are affected by energy policy must be taken into account in all recommendations and plans for the conference and must ensure that women and men benefit equitably from those plans. This also applies to the use of renewables in the North and the involvement of women in policymaking, planning and industry in the energy sector.

- During the conference, a side event on Gender and Renewable Energies should be held to allow exchange between women gender experts and women energy specialists and to foster their influence on the negotiations. Women gender experts and representatives from women's organisations must be involved in the Stakeholder Dialogue planned for the opening day of the conference.

Background: The role of gender mainstreaming in the renewables sector¹

Energy is recognised as a sector with an extremely low proportion of women in all its fields and at all levels. This applies both to renewables and to conventional energy planning and generation. This was not always the case as regards the renewables sector: women were at the forefront in the early days of the debate on the use of renewable energies – particularly in largely women-led citizens' initiatives opposing nuclear energy. But more traditional patterns have re-emerged as renewables have become more established. This was emphasised back in 1994, when a woman wind expert remarked: "Renewable energy has come of age. Were women only good enough to nurture it in its infancy?". While this trend cannot be denied, it could be guided in another direction by means of gender-sensitive planning – particularly in policymaking – and greater integration of socio-economic issues.

Regular surveys on environmental awareness among the general public have shown that women are generally more environmentally aware and behave in a more environmentally compatible manner than men, even though they possess less specialist knowledge on the environment. Recent studies show that it is usually the women of the household who push for 'green' electricity when deciding whether to switch to a new supplier. Overall, women have lesser financial capacity due to the differences in pay between women and men. This makes such decisions harder for women to influence or to make. Thus, in terms of both numbers and amounts, women are less financially active and invest less in renewables.

Gender mainstreaming must play a role in enhancing the amount of influence afforded to women in planning and decisionmaking in energy planning and production and in integrating gender expertise into planning as a whole.

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¹ For further information see Ulrike Röhr/FrauenUmweltNetz (2002): Gender & Energie im Norden. Background paper for the International Conference 'Gender Perspectives on Earthsummit 2002: Energy, Transport, Information for Decision Making', Berlin 2002 jointly held by the BMU and the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (www.frauenumweltnetz.de/veroeffentlichungen/veroeffentlichungen.html) and Joy Clancy/Ulrike Roehr (2003): Gender and Energy: Is there an Northern Perspective? In: Energy for Sustainable Development, Vol. VII No 3, Sept. 2003