Supporting Women’s Leadership in Nepal's Male-Dominated Energy Sector

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Agenda

1. Key Challenges to Gender Equality in the Energy Sector
2. The Case for the Inclusion of Women in the Energy Sector
3. Urja Nepal’s Women in Leadership Development Program
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USAID Urja Nepal

USAID’s Urja Nepal is tasked with the goal of providing clean, reliable, and affordable power to all Nepalis. It partners with energy sector experts, private investors, and regulators to enhance grid stability and exponentially increase clean energy generation throughout the country and region.

1. **Utility Performance and Relevant Sector Policies Improved**
   - Assist NEA to be a financially viable utility
   - Assist ERC, the independent regulator, and NEA to work together to improve sector services
   - Assist NEA as it prepares to decentralize distribution and other services to the provinces

2. **Advanced Energy Systems Deployed**
   - Implement Integrated Resource and Resilience Planning (IRRP) and expand energy mix to include Renewables (RE)
   - Deploy an Electric Vehicle (EV) plan including an EV Charging Infrastructure for KTM Valley
   - Assist GoN to establish Energy Efficiency Services and Institutions

3. **Increased Private Sector Engagement**
   - Formalize Competitive Bidding for all electricity sector projects to increase Private Sector Participation
   - Use competition to increase the integration of RE into Nepal’ Hydro-heavy energy mix
   - Conduct project level monitoring for all electricity projects

4. **Institutionalize Cross-Border Electricity Trading**
   - At the GoN level, Assist MoEWRI to develop policies, legal, and regulatory frameworks for CBET
   - Assist the NEA trading department and other trading companies to conduct CBET
   - Assist the ERC to effectively regulate CBET

**Expand Gender and Social Diversity & Inclusion**
The Key Challenges for Women in the Energy Sector

Women are disproportionately affected at all levels by lack of access to energy and under representation as leaders, policy makers, and influencing voices across the energy sector.

Familial Responsibilities
Labor conditions, such as long working days and site visits to distant locations put a strain on personal and family relations, particularly for those—whether women or men—who are also household caregivers.

Limited Access to STEM Resources
Limited awareness of the opportunities in these fields and limited access to resources to pursue science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education and the training needed to enter and thrive in the sector are two of the major reasons behind this.

Workplace Discriminations
Many gender-based discriminatory practices (e.g., related to salary, benefits) persist in the workplace.

Representation
Women are underrepresented as policy makers, implementers, and representatives of public and private energy institutions. They are also vastly underrepresented in leadership, technical, and supervisory positions. This means that there are few female mentors, sponsors, and role models in the sector.

Misconception of Technical Capabilities
There are many misperceptions of women’s capabilities in engineering/technical fields, safety and security concerns related to technical and field work, as well as societal and cultural norms.

Gender Diversity & Metrics
Gender-disaggregated employment data is not typically tracked, which limits the types of interventions (e.g., improving gender diversity) within the sector.
Yet, Equal Access to Energy is a Driver of Economic Growth…

**Gender inclusivity not only expands energy access, but also improves the economic benefits to utilities and businesses.**

**Increased Electrification**

Women are more likely to connect to electricity than men but tend to be more economically disadvantaged. Reducing financial barriers to access is even more important for women.

**Improved Businesses & Utilities**

Businesses that have more balanced female participation are more likely to be successful. Diversified employment is more representative of the customer base, allowing for improved relationships between the utility company and customers and more tailored products and services, which can lead to decreased non-technical losses and improved revenues for the utility or electricity provider.

**Increased Economic Activity**

Access to reliable electricity increases the amount of time women have for productive activities. Women typically are the marketing forces for their communities and have access to female-to-female communication networks, enabling them to reach low-income, hard to access markets.

There is a negative correlation between electrification and poverty rates.

…and Women have a Substantial & Impactful Role to Play across the Energy Sector

Research shows there are significant benefits to integrating gender considerations into the energy value chain and throughout the power sector. In fact, when women have equal access to energy and economic opportunities, significant productivity gains are unlocked, thereby strengthening development and economic outcomes.

**ENERGY USERS**
Women use energy for both domestic and commercial purposes. In some countries, women-owned businesses are run out of the home, meaning that differential tariffs for residential and commercial uses can impact women.

**EMPLOYEES**
Women work within the formalized energy sector on regulatory commissions and utilities, both as employees and in leadership roles.

**ENERGY VALUE CHAIN PARTICIPANTS**
Women are involved in the energy value chain as entrepreneurs, generators, developers, installers, vendors, and via the informal economy.

**DECISION MAKERS & STAKEHOLDERS**
Women have decision-making agency in policy development and implementation on commissions and in other government agencies, as well as stakeholders who interact with and provide input into regulator, infrastructure, and other energy decisions.
What does Nepal’s Case for Gender Equality in the Energy Sector look like?

Despite government interventions and policies to support gender equality, women face numerous structural barriers to entry in Nepal.

Nepal’s Structural Barriers

**Lack of Representation** – Despite 15% quotas for the representation of women mandated by the GoN. In an IFC study of 20 hydropower companies, only 10% of employees are women with very few in leadership positions.

**Gender Pay Gap** – Studies in Nepal have shown that there is a remarkable gender pay gap in Nepal with **women earning roughly one-third less than men** across all sectors irrespective of education levels.

**Lack of Institutional Support** – To enable true gender equality in the workplace, quotas, policies, training, and representation are critical steps, but fostering an inclusive environment and culture is equally crucial.

Strategies for Urja Nepal Gender Inclusion Work

- Technical Training
- Leadership & Soft Skills Development
- Networking Platforms & Mentorship
- Inclusive Policies and Organizational Support
- Knowledge & Data on Best Practices to support Gender Inclusive Project Design & Development
Urja’s Response: Women in Leadership Development Program

To address these challenges in the energy sector in Nepal, Urja Nepal worked directly with women leaders in the energy sector to co-create a Women in Leadership Development Program.

The Women in Leadership Development Program is composed of a three-pronged approach:

- **Technical Training**: To build technical expertise on new and developing sectoral issues, such as modern energy transition, cross border electricity trade, and project finance, to support women’s ability to engage with new discussions in the workplace.

- **Leadership Skills Development**: To create a safe space for women leaders to build their leadership skills which can be used to navigate the male-dominated energy sector. Topics included:
  - Public Speaking & Communications Skills
  - Negotiation Skills
  - Management of All-Male Teams

- **Women in Energy Network**: To provide a networking platform for women to share and learn for each other’s experiences, including:
  - Raising awareness about the challenges faced by women
  - Enlisting allies and champions from both men and women in the sector to ensure more inclusive development
Insights from the Program

The Program focused on interactive group sessions that supported personal reflections and shared challenges and insights to ignite and empower a group of women committed to advancing their respective careers and making a difference in the energy sector.

Participants shared their life and work experiences as women and leaders, both positive and negative, to listen and learn from each other and collectively problem-solve and find solutions.

Participants felt more empowered to take on leadership roles – and to demand work they were interested in – that was typically given away to their male colleagues. They aspire to become champions themselves one day.

Participants exhibited growing confidence and expressiveness – a newfound willingness to speak up and engage with their classmates, but also their colleagues. This was the first time they had a safe space to express themselves.

Participants were motivated to step outside their comfort zones and explore their potential for professional and personal growth.
In a self-evaluation by the participants of our cohort, the women felt a 75% increase in their leadership capabilities and a 63% increase in their ability for public speaking and communication skills.

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Nominated candidates who either are already in senior positions or who have demonstrated strong leadership potential.

“I learned about new dimensions of leadership from the experiences of my colleagues in the sector, in sessions full of energy and interaction.”
Shubha Laxmi Shrestha, Assistant Director, AEPC

“This training has created a platform that allowed me to venture out of my comfort zone, explore my potential, and develop professionally and personally.”
Laxmi Jha, Senior Divisional Engineer, MoEWRI

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Total Sessions to include 6 technical topics & 6 leadership topics across a 6-month period.
Next Steps for Sustainability of Women in Energy Network

Urja Nepal is planning to continue the momentum from this Women in Leadership Development cohort into next year’s work plan.

This year, Urja Nepal will continue to work with male allies and counterpart leadership to encourage the discussion and support to women in energy.

Male Allyship
Engaging Men in the Energy Sector as Allies and Champions of Gender Equality

Leadership Engagement
Working across counterparts to advocate and incorporate support for inclusive policies, plans, and engagement at the leadership level

Cohort #2
Designing a second training to expand access to leadership best practices and support the next generation of women leaders in the sector

Building Sustainable Networks
Encouraging the expansion of the Women in Energy Network to continue to grow and share stories and learnings outside the two training programs
Thank you!

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