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SDG 7 & Gender Gaps: Towards a Feminist Framework

High Level Political Forum 2026 Brief

7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



Context: HLPF & SDG 7

The 2026 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) marks the third and final review of Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7) on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy for all. While critical steps have been made in expanding global energy access and advancing renewable energy implementation, progress has not been just or equitable. The absence of gender-responsive indicators within SDG 7 has created a structural barrier to understanding and addressing women's energy use and needs. As a result, progress for women and girls as part of this SDG cannot be adequately tracked, measured, or achieved. With discussions underway on the future of the Sustainable Development Goals beyond 2030, there is an opportunity to reimagine SDG 7 through a feminist lens that centers energy justice, gender equality, and a human rights framework.

Gender & Energy: The Problem

Current approaches to assessing energy access typically focus on household measurements, infrastructure, and technology. These overlook opportunities to evaluate and improve gender equality, energy access, and affordability, and accelerate overall progress toward SDG 7. This conventional assessment framework ignores critical questions like: Who controls energy resources and decision-making? Who benefits from investments and energy transitions? Who bears the costs and burdens when energy access is inadequate? When energy systems fall short, for example in moments of extreme weather, who fills the gap in the care burden left behind?¹ How can people of all genders benefit from and contribute to energy access and economic and labor opportunities in the energy sector?

¹ These omissions are not merely methodological; they obscure persistent inequalities in access, affordability, and outcomes. Despite significant gains in global electrification, with access reaching 92% in 2023 and the number of people without electricity falling to 666 million, progress has not been equally shared. Women-headed households in Africa and South Asia remain less likely to access off-grid electricity, largely due to affordability constraints. The significance of energy access extends far beyond connection rates. According to UN Women, a one-hour increase in daily community electricity supply in rural India is associated with a reduction in gender-based violence. <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/fc78dc81-8167-4c41-b8a6-e3386fecf957/TrackingSDG7TheEnergyProgressReport%2C2025.pdf>
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/resources/gender-snapshot/sdg-7>

Despite the well-documented links between energy poverty and gender inequality, SDG 7 contains no gender-disaggregated indicators. As a result, the framework fails to capture the disproportionate impacts of energy poverty on women and girls, including time spent collecting fuel and water, exposure to household air pollution,² constraints on education and employment opportunities, and increased care work responsibilities. Without a systemic, rights-based and feminist perspective, SDG 7 cannot adequately address the structural inequalities that shape women's access to energy, their participation in energy governance, or their ability to lead, co-create, and benefit from the global energy transition.

A Feminist Framework for SDG 7

A feminist framework for energy justice must move beyond access alone and address systemic root causes of energy injustice. Energy access is not simply a technical issue; it is a prerequisite for health, safety, education, economic opportunity, and bodily autonomy. Drawing on feminist principles and building on existing multi-stakeholder efforts, including the policy brief on “[Gender Indicators for Sustainable Energy: A Call to Action](#)” launched at 2025 HLPF, a more transformative approach to SDG 7 would include:

- Advancing women and gender-diverse people’s **right to participate fully and equally** in energy governance, policymaking, and decision-making processes at all levels.
- Assessing and addressing, with **disaggregated data strategies**, the intersectional needs of women, girls, and gender-diverse people, in particular Indigenous, Afrodescendant, disabled, migrant, LGBTQI+, and peasant and smallholder farmer women.
- **Co-creation of just transition strategies** with women’s leadership and participation of women’s rights and gender justice organizations and advocates, ensuring that climate and energy policies do not reproduce existing inequalities but instead advance gender justice.

² For example, household air pollution was responsible for an estimated 2.9 million deaths per year in 2021, including over 309,000 deaths of children. Given the disproportionate roles of women and children in cooking and fuel collection, energy poverty remains a key driver of gendered health inequities.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/household-air-pollution-and-health>

- Recognition that energy poverty is deeply connected to the unequal distribution of unpaid and unrecognized care and domestic work. Women and girls continue to shoulder disproportionate responsibilities for fuel collection, cooking, caregiving, and household energy management. A feminist approach requires the redistribution of these unpaid energy burdens through **investments in social protections, care infrastructure, and public services**.
- **Sharing of economic co-benefits** generated by the energy transition, including access to decent work, finance, and leadership opportunities across the energy sector.
- Advancing **clean cooking technology** that centers the needs and health of women, girls, and gender-diverse people in the distribution, deployment, leadership and innovation of technologies, rather than prioritizing private corporations or investors.
- Underscores the importance of **Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)** in considerations around all energy infrastructure construction or deployment.
- Establishment of a **coordinated multi-stakeholder platform** convening SDG 7 custodian agencies, UN Women, other multilateral organizations, and civil society and feminist groups to prioritize gender-energy indicators, harmonize measurement methodologies, and ensure annual reporting and accountability on progress.

Gender Indicators for the Post-2030 Agenda

At this High-Level Political Forum, we urge governments and stakeholders to seize a critical opportunity to address the structural gaps in SDG 7. An inter-agency Working Group on Gender Indicators in Sustainable Energy is currently laying the analytical groundwork for adopting gender indicators in sustainable energy, fostering inclusive consultations, and elevating global awareness of the need for gender-responsive energy policies. As the global community advances toward a post-2030 development framework, indicators must be firmly grounded in women's rights, human rights, gender justice, lived realities, and structural inequalities.

To ensure meaningful progress, future indicators need to be developed and adopted around the following areas:

- The unequal distribution of **unpaid and unrecognized energy-related burdens**, including time spent on fuel collection, cooking, caregiving, and household energy management;
- Progress on **clean cooking access** that centers the health, agency, innovation, leadership, and dignity of women, girls, and gender-diverse people, rather than focusing solely on infrastructure delivery or corporate profits;
- Progress on **electricity access** for women and gender diverse peoples' spaces and end uses, including productive uses, that takes into account their unequal access to property, finance, assets, and documentation;
- Access to the **economic co-benefits** of the energy transition, including new clean energy jobs and retraining, decent work and health and safety, access to subsidies and finance, and entrepreneurship opportunities for women, gender-diverse people, and marginalized communities;
- Women and gender-diverse peoples' **representation, participation, and decision-making power** across energy governance, policymaking, and leadership at all levels;
- The extent to which **just energy transition strategies and policies are co-created** with gender diverse leadership and the meaningful participation of women's rights and gender justice organizations as stakeholders; and
- Within disaggregated data, the **intersectional energy needs and lived experiences** of Indigenous, Afrodescendant, disabled, migrant, LGBTQI+, and peasant and smallholder farmer women, girls and gender-diverse peoples.