Gender Perspectives on Energy Poverty and Energy Democracy in The Philippines

Maria Teresa I. Diokno
The concept of “just transition” talks about how we can shift from the current energy set-up to a clean and more democratic energy system without foregoing sectors who are currently involved in the old set-up.

This means taking into account not only class and workers’ issues such as those of workers in coal power plants who could lose their jobs once the shift to renewables happen, but also gender issues, giving emphasis on the role of women in a renewable energy-powered society. How can the shift to renewable energy advance gender equality? And how can clean energy benefit men and women equally? There is a dearth of discourses in how shifting to renewable energy affects men and women differently.

Hence, it is important to talk about today as we are in the momentum of changing the energy picture in the Philippines and in the world. This means that trying to build a new system must also efficiently go hand-in-hand with building not only the technical aspect of energy but also the more ecological, social, and cultural aspects of changing what powers the globe.

Gender equality is a central element in transforming modern democracies which FES believes in. It is then right for us to put on the table how this powerful systems-change will affect different sectors. In this manner, we are not only providing solutions to help mitigate the impending climate crisis, but also in the same stroke, addressing the gender concerns with it as well—and hopefully other social concerns that will make the new system work for everyone.

In the end, a changed technical source without a change in culture, values, beliefs, is then just a transition, not a Just Transition. It is with this that we raise in high hopes future publications too that will properly dissect questions on intersectionality. We hope and we expect to see more discussions coming up from this publication on “Gendered Perspectives on Energy” as we aim to explore more concrete details for the gender dimension of Just Transition.

Johannes Kadura
Resident Representative, FES Philippines

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**About CPII**

The Center for Power Issues and Initiatives (CPII) is an initiative by a group of men and women committed to pursuing a power shift agenda in the Philippine power industry. By power shift we mean two things: Energy that is reliable, affordable and environmentally sustainable, and a system of generating and distributing energy that empowers consumers and enables the poor to have access to electricity.

The CPII conducts research and policy studies on renewable energy and energy democracy and establishes stronger relations with trade unions and associations in the power industry, electric cooperatives and the social housing sector.
Gender Perspectives in Energy Poverty and Energy Democracy in the Philippines

Introduction

Energy poverty is defined as “the absence of sufficient choice in accessing adequate, affordable, reliable, high quality, safe and environmentally benign energy services to support economic and human development.” (Reddy, 2000, as cited in Clancy, 2002). It is the inability of primarily poor people to gain access to, much less afford, electricity in their homes, places of work and communities, in order to live a decent life. When the struggle to survive is predominant, the choice of clean and renewable energy (RE) matters little if at all. What is important is to have energy and fuel to meet basic needs such as food, light, and if one can afford it in this increasingly hot climate, cooling. Very often, what is affordable as a source of energy is what one can herself/himself gather: wood, dry branches, agricultural waste. Burning kerosene, charcoal, wood, is the way to generate energy in many parts of the Philippines. Cheap fossil fuel is what we traditionally know and what we can buy or gather. Time spent on gathering fuels—and who in the family is assigned this task—adds to the problem.

Access to electricity in one’s home is still a dream for about 11 million Filipinos. In Southeast Asia, the Philippines ranks as having the third highest number of people who are energy deficit (World Energy Outlook Report, 2016). Philippine government statistics show that overall electrification was 94% per cent in 2017. That same year, electrification was only 85% per cent for the bottom 30% per cent of families, while for the top 70% per cent, it was 98% per cent (Philippine Statistical Authority, n.d.). But even for poor families who do have access to electricity, paying for electricity is a constant struggle—not surprising for a country whose electricity rates are among the highest in the world, second only to Japan in Asia.

This paper is an attempt to look into the gender dimensions of energy poverty in the Philippines, in the experience of energy poverty, different for Filipino women and girls? What is the resulting burden on a family that is energy poor, and is this shared equitably among the men and women who make up the family? Does the absence of affordable, reliable and renewable energy have an impact on the productivity of male and female household members? On the way each of them uses this human energy?

What about rural and urban poor communities that are now able to enjoy some renewable energy in their homes, or some combination of it? What impact has RE had particularly on the women and girls of the family?

A gendered understanding of energy poverty may also help us sharpen our programme to build energy democracy and to advocate for policies that would be more gender-responsive to the problems of energy poverty. At the very least, we understand better the role that energy can play in empowering Filipino women and men.

Review of Literature

The Gender-Energy-Poverty Nexus

Joy Clancy, Margaret Skothich and Simon Batchelor (2002) wrote a paper commissioned by the UK government’s Department for International Development (DFID) to tackle a crucial element in the discourse on women and poverty, energy. To quote: “[The paper] explores energy as a strategic issue in poverty, and discusses the difficulties in the provision of energy services for the poor. The paper then moves on to consider gender aspects of the poverty-energy link, and how energy provision can contribute to moving women and their families out of poverty. The focus then turns to the issue of sustainable livelihoods, and the part energy plays in these, first in general terms and then specifically in gender terms. The paper concludes by listing some of the major areas in which research is still needed to improve our understanding of the role of energy in poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods, and the role it can play in meeting women’s strategic needs.” (Clancy et al., 2000, p. 6).

The authors suggest, based on their extensive work particularly with rural communities, that the energy dimension has long been missing in the discussions and debates on poverty. Furthermore, the failure to recognize energy poverty has meant that this area has been left out of the discussions on poverty. A stark example is biomass. The authors write: “[Despite the fact that around two billion people still use biomass fuels (World Bank, 1996), and the fact that these are also the two million poorest people on earth, there has been little attempt to analyse the energy-poverty nexus in depth. This can partly be explained by the fact that the biomass in rural areas is collected at zero monetary cost, mainly by women and children, and so it falls outside national energy accounts, the result of which is that the issue renders itself invisible: “No data - no visibility, no visibility – no interest” (Hyver and Westholm 2001).” (Clancy, 2000, p. 6).

Making visible energy poverty and its links to women is thus an important prerequisite in shaping pro-poverty energy policy, especially in countries like the Philippines where poverty is persistent and where access to electricity is still not enjoyed by all. “The invisibility of energy-poverty issues leads to decision-makers not being fully aware of their significance, and so policies and strategies fall to address the issues fully.” (Clancy, 2002, p. 6).

The authors also explain succinctly the inherent inequalities in energy, again using biomass as an example. Poor people throughout the world use biomass because they cannot pay for other fuels or sources of energy. But biomass has low fuel quality. Its emissions may pose health risks to the family that relies on it, and there is the responsibility, effort and time—usually borne by women and children—to collect it.

Because of energy poverty, “poor households use less energy than wealthier ones in absolute terms. Less water is boiled for drinking and other hygiene purposes, increasing the likelihood of water-borne diseases. Illness reduces the ability of poor people to improve their livelihoods and increas- es their vulnerability, not only in preventing adults from working effectively but also negatively affecting children’s learning.” (Clancy, 2002, p.7).

The authors pose the highly relevant question: “Can we find the energy to address gender concerns in development?” (Clancy, 2002, p. 5).

The gender component of energy poverty: four important questions.

Clancy et al (2002) look further into the gender component of energy poverty. They believe four important questions must be looked further to fully understand more the Gender-Energy-Poverty nexus. These are as follows:

• Who decides what energy to use, and who benefits? The authors find that when energy needs to be purchased it is the men in the household who decide what is purchased and for what use. On the other hand, when the energy is generally free, such as biomass, oftentimes it is the women and children who are tasked to gather it. One tendency found in various developing country studies is that when men decide what is to be purchased, domestic labour-saving devices (that would generally benefit women) fall behind recreational appliances such as TVs. In India, it was found that the introduction of electricity benefited the men more than the women because the electricity was used to power irrigation pumps, saving time used by the men to care for the oven previously used to draw water. Time saved was used for recreation, which the women still had little if no time for. By not raising this question, the strategic and practical needs of women are often not addressed.

• What are the implications of biomass fuel use to women? There has been time use studies on the task of fuel collection which generally falls on the shoulders of women. The full effects of such burden, how- ever, need further study, e.g. long-term health impacts of carrying heavy loads over long distances. The physical demands of these tasks and their time-consuming nature remain, by and large, unaddressed. “The whole issue of women’s time and effort saving (reduction of drudgery) seems not to receive the attention it deserves. This might be attributed to the fact that decision-makers and planners are not fully aware of the situa- tion regarding women’s physical labour. Women’s survival tasks, based on their own metabolic energy inputs are, like biomass, invisible in energy statistics (Carcalla, 1999). As a consequence, the development of labour-saving devices, which could contribute significantly to women’s
When women are constrained by time, effort and money, how do they manage their meagre resources? The authors found some coping strategies in response to food insecurity and cooking times, the use of less fuel-intensive cooking and food processing methods, lessening meals that are cooked, serving cold leftovers, changing the types of food purchased, and purchasing other fuels. Observing these coping strategies and learning from them would help create a more gender-responsive energy policy.

What are the implications of current energy policies to women? What impact do government policies on privatization, on fossil fuel use, on deregulation of the generation and supply sub-sectors, on the commercialization of biomass fuels, even women’s practical needs have hardly been addressed.” (Clancy, 2002, p. 14).

The importance of time-use data and analysis

David Lawson (2007) of the Global Poverty Research Group, a unit of the Economic and Social Research Council based in the United Kingdom, wrote about the importance of using gender and a gender lens to analyze it. Building on the extensive time use data (TUD) of Lesotho, he developed notions and unique insights of time poverty and how these differ according to gender. Time poverty adds the dimension of time to the money and income-based concepts of deprivation. Basically, he looks at poverty from the lens of time, and explores how this differs between men and women. Lawson comments on how female-headed households and found that when the latter have young children or senior relatives to care for, they are more time poor than their male counterparts. Lawson also examined the necessity of a gendered approach in terms of how women access public transport, public schools, public health facilities. Particularly in relation to energy poverty, Lawson links the availability of an electricity connection to the time spent preparing meals and other reproductive housework. He concluded that the absence of an electricity connection—usually in financially poorer families—results in the household being more time poor.

Maria Sargiao Floro and Elizabeth King (2016) discussed the current and future importance of TUD in the Asia-Pacific development context. The July 2016 issue of the Asia-Pacific Population Journal is devoted entirely to a discussion on time use data and analysis. To quote: “TUD [time use data] can help reveal the full extent of economic activities and child-rearing activities that produce (e.g. collecting, collecting and preserving, e.g. transportation and care) and use energy (e.g. cooking) (p. 8).”

Going beyond the meter

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) published a Gender Toolkit focusing on energy. Among the stylized facts cited in this toolkit are the following: 

- Women are more time poor than men.
- Only 50 per cent of the children 60 years and over have reached the 65 per cent to have their school
- The proportion was significantly lower.

Most government statistics will show that more women and girls complete their education than their male counterparts. The reason for this is that boys in poor households are compelled to help the family by working or earning. According to the ADB’s 2017, 20 per cent of young males (6-24 years old) who are not attending school answered “looking for work” as a reason for quitting school. Another 21.3 per cent of the cost of education is the cost of transportation, which is the main obstacle to school access. This lack of access to education and the time it takes for school girls who are heads of households to go to school is the primary reason for dropping out. Among girls and young women aged 24-39 in the poorer 30 per cent who stopped attending school, the primary reason was “marriage/financial matters.” A proportionately smaller number of young females stopped going to school for the same reasons given by boys and young men. In other words, “even with marriage and caregiving in the family, young Filipinos go to school.”

Based on the 2009 Official Survey of Family Income and Expenditure, the Philippine Statistical Authority concluded that, “on the average, female-headed families had an income...which is higher than the income of male-headed families.” But this situation is changing. While 64.6 per cent of male-headed households’ heads of households belong to the richest 70 per cent of the population, the income earning capacities of women in the bottom 30 per cent are lower than that of male heads of households in the same income category.

Again, based on the same 2009 survey, the average annual income of women-headed households in the bottom 30 per cent was 56,500 Philippine pesos, compared to 63,000 Philippine pesos headed by men.

Going back to the 2017 APIIS, we found out that the homes of the bottom 30 per cent are smaller. Nearly half (46.3 per cent) have a floor area of ten square metres or less. The building area of another 30 per cent of the bottom 30 range from 30 to 70 square meters. Less than one per cent of the same group live in homes of 200 square meters and larger. In short, homes in the bottom 30 per cent have smaller families but smaller rooms. Furthermore, less than two-fifths of the walls of their houses (38.9 per cent) are built from strong materials. Most of the walls of their houses (61 per cent) are made of light materials, predominantly light materials, or a mix of light and salvaged materials. They live in smaller homes and in more vulnerable shelter conditions. The 2017 AIPS says that among the bottom 30 per cent, 84.7 per cent of women, if not burdened with marriage or caregiving in the family, would have a job, but compared with the male heads of the families who had work (92 per cent), the proportion was significantly lower.

Based on the same AIPS 2017, only 6.2 per cent of the bottom 30 per cent pay for freight and the poor and are unaffected by the increased cost of electricity prices. In the Philippines, only 75 per cent of the bottom 30 per cent live in poverty. APO says that these three decisions were felt: two with residents of island communities in Romblon and Iloilo, and one with urban poor residents in San Jose del Monte City, Bulacan.

A on Energy Poverty

1. Do you have electricity at home?
   2. If yes, how many times have you had to get connected to the wires? What do you need to do to get a connection?
   3. For those who answered yes. Since when have you had electricity at home? Did you get it connected? Did you get help from a group or organization to get connected? If so, who, how much?
   4. How much are you paying for electricity? In your household, who is responsible for paying the bill?

Who in your household decides the monthly budget for electricity? Do you have to choose what you use electricity for? What are your top priorities in terms of electricity use?

What sources of energy other than electricity does your family/household have other than electricity? Which of these do you use with greatest frequency?

Energy poverty: what the data tells us

Drawing on the final report of the government’s Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIIS) of 2017, a “food poor” is one who has experienced hunger at least once a week. Those who experienced hunger at least once a month were 36.4 per cent of the bottom 30 per cent.

When one considers the high cost of electricity in the Philippines, the picture of energy poverty becomes sharper.

Questions for focus group discussions

The following questions were drawn up as a guide for focus group discussions conducted in the Philippines. These three discussions were held: two with residents of island communities in Romblon and Iloilo, and one with urban poor residents in San Jose del Monte City, Bulacan.

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5. What is your family/household’s monthly budget for electricity? Do you have to choose what you use electricity for? What are your top priorities in terms of electricity use?
6. What sources of energy other than electricity does your family/household have other than electricity? Which of these do you use with greatest frequency?

B on Energy Democracy

1. Do you know who is supposed to provide electricity in your area? Do you know what the name of the utility that has the franchise to provide electricity in your area?
2. Do you know who in your household has the right to make decisions on energy poverty and democracy?
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are a member of? Did you vote for them? In your view, how free are the elections in your community? Have you witnessed any problems in the elections? Have you ever filed a complaint about elections?

10. How often do you experience outages? Do you get sufficient warning about when outages are about to occur? Do you receive any information from the utility when such problems occur?

12. Do you know whom you should contact in case there is a problem? Do you know when and how to contact the office of the utility official or staff?

Focus group discussion in Polopina Island

Background

Polopina Island is part of the town of Concepcion in Iloilo province (see latitude and longitude). The five women from the community took part in a discussion on their energy situation. They are all active community leaders; they are all mothers. Three of the five women have regular income from five different activities such as food vending and catering, sari-sari store, and informal lending.

The island is supposed to be covered by the Roblo Electric Cooperative (ILECO-3), but this is mere formality as there are no wires or lines in Polopina Island to connect the island to the mainland grid. Short, the island has no electricity from the utility. There were attempts in the past to install generating sets to supply homes for a fixed monthly fee and for certain hours of the day, but these were not sustained. Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) also landed on Polopina Island, and whatever generating facilities were there at the time were destroyed. Post Yolanda, there were feeble attempts by the community to install a solar electric system, but this did not result in anything positive for the island residents. An NGO provided powered kites for the residents but the lack of training on technical care and maintenance has resulted in many of these units no longer operable.

On Energy Poverty

Five of the five women participating in the FGD have generator sets (gensets) at home, which they bought. Two of the four also possess a small solar panel which they use for lighting inside the house and for charging batteries for various electrical appliances. The other two have no means for electricity use other than a solar panel given by an NGO after Typhoon Yolanda, but this got damaged and they do not know how to repair it. The FGD participants estimated that about 80 per cent of the homes in the island own a genset. In fact, it is a common desire among residents to have electricity at home.

Once acquired, the burden of providing for the means to purchase the fuel for the genset generally falls on the husband—whose primary income is from fishing. They have to work extra hard to pay the debt, the women also contribute to the fuel purchase budget.

The monthly budget for self-generation is managed by the women, who are also responsible for setting aside the funds to purchase the supplies for the genset; setting aside the money to buy the fuel. They likewise possess portable rechargeable devices for lighting. Not all of the electrical devices are used when the budget is low (400 Philippine pesos), while all devices are fully used when the budget is adequate (1,500 Philippine pesos).

All respondents adopt a use of a “household regulatory method” in order to ensure that there is electricity available when needed, especially during night time and when there are emergency situations.

One point that surfaced in the course of the discussion was that it is usually the women who manage electricity use at the household, especially when children are left at home and the husband is away fishing. They have to manage the use of electricity at home, which is a problem as they have to meet other household chores.

During night time considering that their husbands are out at sea to fish.

How often do you experience outages? Do you get sufficient warning about when outages are about to occur? Do you receive any information from the utility when such problems occur?

12. Do you know whom you should contact in case there is a problem? Do you know when and how to contact the office of the utility official or staff?
Some apprehensions because it is dark; 
- Boredom because one cannot watch television, especially their favorite shows; 
- Difficulty to do household chores in the dark; 
- Difficulty for children to study in the dark; 
- Having been used to electricity, the change disrupts their evening activities including recreational/watching their favorite shows; and 
- For the senior citizens, difficulty to move around in the dark.

On Energy Democracy

All respondents recognize ROMELCO as their utility. Five said the government is responsible for providing electricity through its electrification program facilitated by ROMELCO. One believed it should be their district’s congressman responsible for electrification, with ROMELCO implementing the project. Another respondent said those who have access to electricity are members of ROMELCO.

Most of the respondents represent their household in ROMELCO. They are aware that part of their obligations as members is to attend meetings. One added that it is a member’s responsibility to follow ROMELCO’s policies. Another agreed that the general elections for the Board of Directors was cited as another duty. One respondent described her/his responsibility as knowing the financial situation of the cooperative. The diverse range of responses is quite impressive.

Meetings have been held in the island, and they have attended these meetings. A third of the respondents said they have spoken out during these meetings, particularly on the issue of brownouts. Most agreed that their meeting attendance, adding they are too shy to speak. They receive reports from ROMELCO during these meetings, thus they are aware of the cooperative’s progress. Fifteen of 18 members know ROMELCO’s director, Adonis Silverio, while only three of them know the General Manager. All say they have voted freely for the Board of Directors.

All respondents said ROMELCO is able to provide advance information through its information officer and/or plant operator on duty. Text messaging is being used by ROMELCO to reach its members. All respondents knew whom to contact (plant operator on duty) when there are electricity problems. Some added that texting the ROMELCO hotline is another option.

All respondents said they experience brownouts when there are typhoons and/or when the plant encounters technical problems. Only one respondent said she was informed ahead of time if there will be scheduled brownouts. Load shedding or rolling blackout became a part of their weekly experience. In the case of the hybrid system of Cobrador, ROMELCO rotates the supply of electricity around the island and notifies the residents when electricity will be thinned in their area. According to Ms. Lina Rotoni, president of the women’s association in Cobrador island, the lives of the women of Cobrador improved in several ways: “dagdag kita” (additional livelihood) and “gumain ang trabaho” (lighter load of house and livelihood work). The necessary light bulb needed for the incubation of chicks became available, as well as cooking appliances which enabled women to sell chilled drinks and iced-based drinks that they have largely remained silent, adding they are too shy to speak. They receive reports from ROMELCO during these meetings, thus they are aware of the cooperative’s progress. Fifteen of 18 members know ROMELCO’s director, Adonis Silverio, while only three of them know the General Manager. All say they have voted freely for the Board of Directors.

The biggest agreement appears to be financial. The budget of 18 members is relatively fixed and they can only consume so much electricity. Coupled with more conscious demand management, thanks to the microgrid installation, and the loan amortization they have to pay on top of the electricity itself. The result is a consumer compressed into a very narrow consumption band. The opportunity to earn from a net metering arrangement is recognized by a larger solar-generators. This simplicity cannot materialise because of insufficient financing and very meagre pockets. Energy poverty is rendering a solar option for the poor who are yet to be reached. When asked who manages the budget and who is responsible for the electricity load, the unanswerable response was “of course, the woman of the household.” The example is given of the budgeting for maintenance or construction projects and cannot afford to go home every day. Even for the only man in the discussion group, who was employed in a private firm, the woman was the manager: the budget according to him, she is the one at home and he is the one who earns for the family. Electricity is mostly used for lighting, ventilation, mobile charging, television watching, and doing laundry.

The group was also in agreement that their biggest problem is the lack of piped water. Their housing site is covered by the water district of Bulacan, but so far, the district has not been able to supply the group with water. The problem is due to the power of the water district and the power of the people of Cobrador. Since the electricity is mostly used for lighting, ventilation, mobile charging, television watching, and doing laundry.

The group agreed that a second discussion would be needed after the solarisation has been successfully installed on the roofs of their buildings, along with the water pipes.

On Energy Democracy

The members of ALPAS are aware that they are in a joint venture with solar power system provider SunAsia Energy, Inc. through a not-for-profit Solar Microgrid and Mini-Grid Services Cooperative. The members of ALPAS are from the Popular Democracy and the Center for Power Issues and Initiatives. The ideal system would be a microgrid network combined with solar panels on top of each house so that energy can be generated and used locally. However, the current demand volume is still rendering this ideal scenario a dream. Eventually the microgrid system and the solar panels will be connected to reduce costs and increase energy generation and self-sufficiency. In the meantime, Sinag Homes Inc. manages the microgrid and supplies the load needed by the residents to access electricity from Merolco.

The agreement with the residents is that the cost of electricity they would pay would be cheaper than what Merolco charges. Of this, an agreement was reached and put into effect because of the absence of the solar panels to complete the system and because of the financial charges that need to be paid.

The prospect of some degree of electricity self-governance—an awesome development for urban poor communities—has thus far been overlooked by the residents of ALPAS. The discussions are optimistic that this will help to create.

The existence of the microgrid should provide new lifestyle opportunities for the residents. One of plans in support of the solarization project is to provide training on enterprise development for the housing associations, so that the residents can make themselves respectable, and reduce their level of make electricity affordable. As of this writing, these remain as plans and cannot be implemented until the solar panels are installed.

What is indiscutible is that the women of ALPAS will play a major role in the development and management of their solarised system and the knowledge that will help to create.

What is also clear is that the ALPAS residents, women and men, need additional subsidy to make their dream of affordable clean energy a reality, similar to the subsidy the Cobrador residents are enjoying. In April 2018 the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUD-CC) raised the price ceiling for socialised subdivisions projects from the original amount which ALPAS received of 450,000 Philippine pesos to the following amounts:

- 480,000 Philippine pesos for a 24 square meter (m2);
- 530,000 Philippine pesos for a 28 m2; and
- 580,000 Philippine pesos for a 32 m2.

It is strongly encouraged that an additional subsidy be provided to keep up with the above resolution.

Summary and recommendations

The project to be discussed is in the San Jose del Monte City, Bulacan, and Cobrador Island in Romblon, share many things in common. Most of them are responsible for the household budgeting, including paying bills. In their daily lives, their loved ones is an integral aspect of their lives. The time they use to meet the needs of their family and of their community is least likely to be recognised by the loved ones they sacrifice time for, and how much time these residents use in the use of time-saving appliances, which may enable the mother of the home to cook rice and wash clothes more conveniently, among others. In the case of the women of Cobrador, the responsibility of the women is to do household duties, and even for the men, they do not have to spend half a day to travel to the main island to recharge their phones and flashlights. Having electricity also expanded the income opportunities. Women of ALPAS, having been given the opportunity to sell a washing machine and rice cooker greatly eased the work they do at home.

In the absence of a time-use survey, we can only surmise from the anecdotal evidence collected that while the women of Cobrador and ALPAS in San Jose del Monte City, Bulacan, and Cobrador Island in Romblon, share many things in common. Most of them are responsible for the household budgeting, including paying bills. In their daily lives, their loved ones is an integral aspect of their lives. The time they use to meet the needs of their family and of their community is least likely to be recognised by the loved ones they sacrifice time for, and how much time these residents use in the use of time-saving appliances, which may enable the mother of the home to cook rice and wash clothes more conveniently, among others. In the case of the women of Cobrador, the responsibility of the women is to do household duties, and even for the men, they do not have to spend half a day to travel to the main island to recharge their phones and flashlights. Having electricity also expanded the income opportunities. Women of ALPAS, having been given the opportunity to sell a washing machine and rice cooker greatly eased the work they do at home.

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In the absence of a time-use survey, we can only surmise from the anecdotal evidence collected that while the women of Cobrador and ALPAS in San Jose del Monte City, Bulacan, and Cobrador Island in Romblon, share many things in common. Most of them are responsible for the household budgeting, including paying bills. In their daily lives, their loved ones is an integral aspect of their lives. The time they use to meet the needs of their family and of their community is least likely to be recognised by the loved ones they sacrifice time for, and how much time these residents use in the use of time-saving appliances, which may enable the mother of the home to cook rice and wash clothes more conveniently, among others. In the case of the women of Cobrador, the responsibility of the women is to do household duties, and even for the men, they do not have to spend half a day to travel to the main island to recharge their phones and flashlights. Having electricity also expanded the income opportunities. Women of ALPAS, having been given the opportunity to sell a washing machine and rice cooker greatly eased the work they do at home.
gather at night. The recreational needs of the family can also be met within the home with a television now available.

Based on the FGDs, it is apparent that access to electricity in poor households enables the women to use their time more efficiently and at the same time, expand their income-earning opportunities. Their recreational needs, the need for cooling inside the home when the weather turns hot (especially when sleeping), the need for a safe environment to move around and socialise within the community, are as important as the previously mentioned benefits. Being able to address their children’s needs (e.g. doing homework and studying at night, enjoying television shows, socialising, and sleeping soundly) as a result of the availability of electricity is valuable as well to mothers. These are very clear advantages to women of having electricity at home.

At the same time, the FGDs also pointed to the very real problem of energy poverty in poor households. Poor families have only so much money to spend on electricity on top of the 59 per cent of family income to be spent on food. They have to manage their electricity consumption strictly to keep to their budgets, and mostly because electricity costs in the Philippines are high. These are the financial burdens that women carry.

In the case of the Polopina Island residents, the solar lights and charging stations were given as a grant in response to the Typhoon Yolanda. However, the residents did not know how to maintain these gadgets. Perhaps a training programme for the women of Polopina on how to maintain these units would help to sustain its operationalisation for the residents.

In the case of the Cobrador island residents, the introduction of a hybrid power system was partly made possible by grants that ROMELCO actively sought for its consumer-member-owners. Furthermore, because it is operating in several islands of Romblon province, which are not connected to the Luzon grid, the cooperative can access the missionary electricity fund when its generating and distribution costs are higher than what the cooperative is allowed to charge its households. This means that the Cobrador residents are protected from having to bear the true cost of the hybrid system that ROMELCO set up for them. Nevertheless, the cost of electricity is still a problem for the women due to their tight budgets.

In the case of the members of ALPAS who were given units in buildings so they could live within working distance from Metro Manila, the acquisition of a microgrid and solar panels was supposed to lower their electricity costs. But the financing cost of this system added to their cost of acquisition of a microgrid and solar panels was supposed to lower their electricity costs. But the financing cost of this system added to their cost of electricity, frustrating many of them. The available financing from various institutions for poor communities is generally for off-grid connections and for a much lower scale of consumption than the members of ALPAS are used to. Because ALPAS residents live in an area that can be reached by Merlaco, the financing support to bring down their electricity cost by embarking on a solar option is limited and not cheap. When financing support was found, the financing cost is too heavy to bear. This resulted in the scaling down of the solar power generating capacity, which in effect also lowers the potential income-generating possibilities for ALPAS because their excess solar power could have been sold to Merlaco. The situation of energy poverty is indeed difficult to overcome without the needed subsidies.

The proportion of a poor Filipino family’s income that is spent on water and electricity, according to government data, is about 15 per cent. Compare this with the average 2.5 per cent of family income spent on electricity in the United States of America (USA), and an even lower one per cent in Japan. Poor Filipino families are nowhere near the earning capacity of families in the USA and Japan, but they have to shell out a disproportionately high share of their income for electricity. Policy makers in the Philippines should seriously consider placing a cap on the proportion of a poor family’s budget that is spent on electricity. The lifetime discount enjoyed by poor households, and paid for by the less poor households, is not sufficient. Considering that 2021 would be the twentieth year since the passage of the Electric Power Industry Reform Act, a review of the lifetime discount may be timely in light of SDG 7 on sustainable energy for all. A cap on how much a poor family pays for electricity must be pushed, along with the use of renewable energy for this to happen. Such a cap would be crucial for women who head poor households, considering that they earn less than their male counterparts.

Decentralising electricity to the level of the community must be pursued. It is also important to stress that enabling women in the community to participate more actively in community power is crucial for the empowerment of women and the development of the community, even the success of decentralised power. Since Filipino women are the recognised as home managers, it is only right that they have a greater say in how power is produced, how power is accessed and paid for, and how power can benefit everyone in the community. Hopefully, the greater say will also shape the course and direction of community power in the years to come.

Submitted by Maria Teresa Diokno, CPIII

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Maitet Diokno is the executive director of the Center for Power Issues and Initiatives (CPII). She has written extensively on Philippine power sector issues. This is her first attempt to develop a gendered perspective on energy poverty and energy democracy. Maitet obtained her undergraduate degree in economics from the University of The Philippines. She has a master’s degree in economics from the London School of Economics, University of London, and a master’s degree on social entrepreneurship from the Ateneo Graduate School of Business, Ateneo de Manila University. She also served as the president and CEO of the Pilipinas Ecofiber Corporation, a social enterprise for coconut farming communities. In addition to her work in CPII, she assists a few non-governmental organisations for coconut farmers, development practitioners and students through social entrepreneurship trainings.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany. The foundation is named after Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected president of Germany.