



Gender-sensitive sustainable energy cooperatives in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus

Establishment and promotion of energy cooperatives in rural areas of Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to achieve national climate protection goals in a democratic and gender equitable way.

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Why gender and energy ?

In particular in rural areas of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, women often experience energy poverty. This impacts negatively on all their activities and increases their burden of work since traditional gender roles stipulate that women and girls are still mostly responsible for the collection of biomass to provide for the household's energy. Another negative effect of the burning of biomass is indoor air-pollution which is particular detrimental to the health of women and children who spend a large part of their days indoors. Thus the production and the use of unsustainable energy sources have different impacts on men's and women's lives.

Taking this into account and recognising the cross-cutting nature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 7, WECF supports projects that seek to both advance sustainable energy and gender equality. WECF and partners have initiated the establishment of gender-sensitive energy cooperatives in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. These gender-sensitive cooperatives provide a clear opportunity for women's personal and economic empowerment, and are a way to engage all of society in the energy transition. Women participating in the cooperatives are engaged as members, managers, investors and also as receivers of clean energy. Women also benefit from capacity-building activities and are supported in their path towards increased economic independence.

Initial situation

The rural population of the target regions listed above mostly use firewood from unsustainably managed forests for heating and cooking, thus also having a negative climate impact. They spend up to 30% of the household's income on energy. This is

much higher than in Western Europe, and is one of the factors of poverty.

Gender-sensitive cooperatives: project objectives

The cooperative model is being expanded to achieve not only a community-based and democratically-run energy provision model, but also promote gender equality. The concrete objectives are:

- Access to affordable and renewable energy
- Access to loans, particularly for women and low- income households
- Reduction of energy costs for same level of service and promotion of energy independence
- Reduction of unpaid work load for women
- Participation of the local population in cooperatives
- Engagement of women as important stakeholders in the energy transition
- Strengthening of the local economy

Project actions

- Creation of 4 gender-sensitive sustainable energy cooperatives in different regions of Georgia
- In Georgia, establishment of one 'umbrella cooperative' for joint sourcing, marketing and distribution
- Founding workshops to train staff on technologies and management skills
- Development and testing of technologies and marketing
- Regular exchanges with international experts
- Public relations and policy advocacy to support energy transition and gender equality enabling framework

Business model

Local energy cooperatives provide a very low threshold for citizens to participate in energy entrepreneur-

ship: for 25 euros they can already become a member of the cooperative, and co-decide on its development. The establishment of an umbrella cooperative with all local cooperatives as members ensures the bundling of economic and technical know-how on energy technologies (e.g. solar collectors) and achieves economies of scale when purchasing materials. The umbrella cooperative operates a production facility for certified solar-collectors, financed by local and international investors. A solar collector pays back after 3 - 5 years.

The project is thus sustainable, and can be easily scaled-up thanks to the capacity-building efforts deployed (trainees become trainers). It also has the potential to be replicated in other settings: supporting an energy cooperative requires a relatively low investment and can be done in a very flexible way, to respond to different local needs.

Achievements

- Foundation of 4 energy cooperatives in 2016
- More than 140 members, including 40% of women as members and in the board
- Production and installation of 60 solar collectors for rural homes
- Organisation of 5 trainings sessions for 150 participants
- Promotion of gender-sensitive, inclusive financing models for members
- Outreach and advocacy with a focus on gender equality benefits for energy transition

About WECF

WECF is an international network of over 150 women's, health and environmental organisations, that advances women's rights and sustainable development including in the areas of energy, climate, health, water and sanitation in over 50 countries. We share lessons learned with policy makers at local, national, UN, and international level imparting especially the perspective of women.

Learn more on www.wecf.eu