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# **Understanding the gap between the gender equality and social inclusion policy and implementation in the energy sector: The case of Nepal**

**Dr. Marlène Buchy and Shristi Shakya**

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# Introduction



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- The Constitution of Nepal 2015 mandates equality, inclusivity and non-discrimination in all sectors.
- Nepal has a Gender Equality Policy 2021; its first GESI Policy was formulated in 2009.
- But there has been a slow evolution of GESI policy and implementation in the energy sector.
- Social norms are put forward to explain resistance to GESI, but there has been limited research on the role of institutional mechanisms.

The research focuses on the institutional and policy processes within the energy sector and between the three spheres of the federal system.

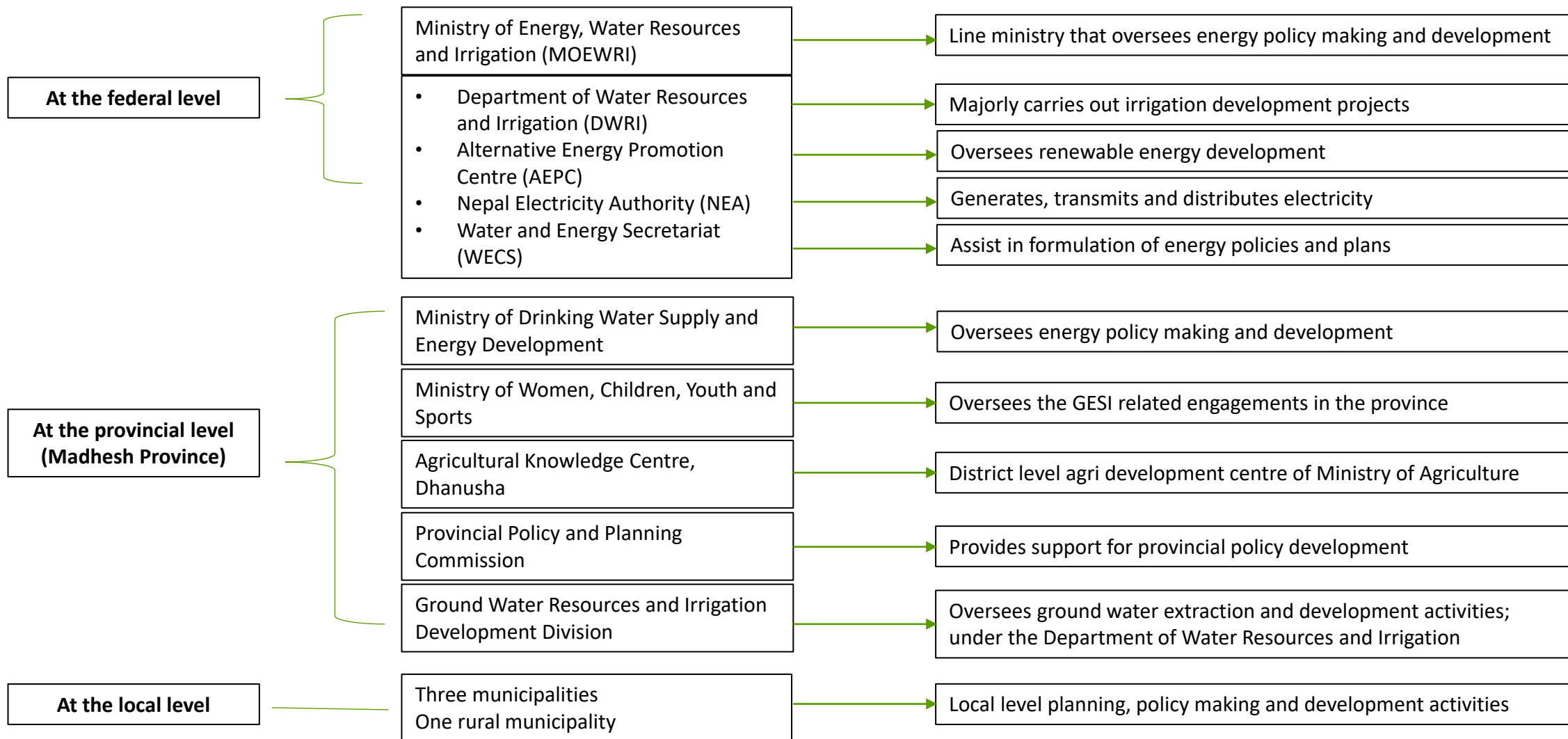
Research Question: **Why do Nepal's public energy institutions, despite a constitutional commitment to gender equality seem reluctant to mainstream GESI within its policies and practice?**

# Methodology:

Semi-structured interviews: **20 women & 33 men** working in Nepal's energy sector  
Government, civil society, private sector, donor organizations and GESI consultants



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# The analytical framework



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Paine's three interlinked barriers (2011) explain the limited progress in gender policy development:

- **Pragmatic barrier:** 'we have limited resources' thus minimum efforts to collect evidence, have disaggregated data, appoint gender experts etc.
- **Conceptual barriers:** Gap in data leads to conceptual limited or mis-understanding : what do we understand by gender? Focus mostly on women and ignores intersectional identities and power relationships.
- **Political barriers:** The two lead to specific policy outcomes: GESI blind policies as GESI is not a political priority

# Key results: Pragmatic Barriers



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At the federal level

Institution	GESI policy	GESI unit	Reasons
MOEWRI	X	X	The Constitution has provisions for gender equality
AEPC	GESI Policy 2018	√	Supported over the years by development organisations; to get accreditation from GCF
NEA	GESI Strategy and Operational Guideline 2022	√	Strategy formulation supported by ADB
WECS	X	X	It doesn't implement projects

## 1. Who is involved in the definition of the problem?

- Developed in a consultative way - say GoN respondents
- Single-handedly written by an external Nepali or international consultants say non-GoN respondents
- Men from elite groups the data the data : no women in senior positions and elite caste groups proportionately over-represented in bureaucracy

## 2. What evidence is used to develop the policies?

- **There is a lack of data on the GESI status within the energy sector.** *What is the status of implementation of the 33% quota for female representation in water user associations?*
- **The GON energy institutions do not collect social development data.** *The annual outputs monitored by the MoEWRI report only on infrastructure development.*

This absence of data makes it difficult to measure change or outcomes of implementing GESI policies across the sector.

## Resource issues faced by the Madhesh Province:

Lack of human resources:

- At province: Need ~22,000 employees to administer the newly formed provinces, but 11,000 positions across the country remain vacant ([Devkota, 2023](#)).
- Lack of staff and constant staff turnover resulting in delay in institutionalization of the functions of the Province
- It also partly explains lack of data available to inform policy development.
- **The lack of GESI data is only one issue amid a wider challenge of data paucity.**



# Key results: Pragmatic Barriers



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At the local government level

- Acute staff shortage—Development of both the energy and GESI policy has been slowed down
- Frequent staff turnover– Staffs unable to provide an overview about energy-related development in the palika level
- Where there is a GESI policy, it was mostly developed by external consultants through projects like the Provincial and Local Governance Support Program (PLGSP)

# Key results: Pragmatic Barriers



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Limited resources dedicated to integrating GESI

- GESI responsive budget is one monitoring criteria for The Local Government Institutional Self-Assessment (LISA), BUT there is a lack of institutional and organizational system to ensure necessary targeting of and attention given to GESI issues ([Purnima, 2020](#)).
- Formulation of GESI Policy is conditional, and related to specific development programs

# Key results: The Conceptual barrier



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## What is understood by GESI and Policy?

- **GESI:** the need to focus on women, their needs and their participation in decision-making positions
- Therefore, the social inclusion dimension in GESI is overlooked in definitions and activities
- The head of Women's Development Section is appointed as the GESI focal point of the palika. Budget and programs of this section is limited to conducting activities for women.
- And GESI-focused components of palikas tend to be conducted without any collaboration with or knowledge of the Women's Development Section or the GESI lead.
- Donor organizations influence in GESI integration

- **Policy** (or the absence thereof) is constantly put forward as an explanation for action (or non-action).
- Policy is understood more as a set of rigid guidelines or procedures rather than as an overarching document providing broad directions for the country.

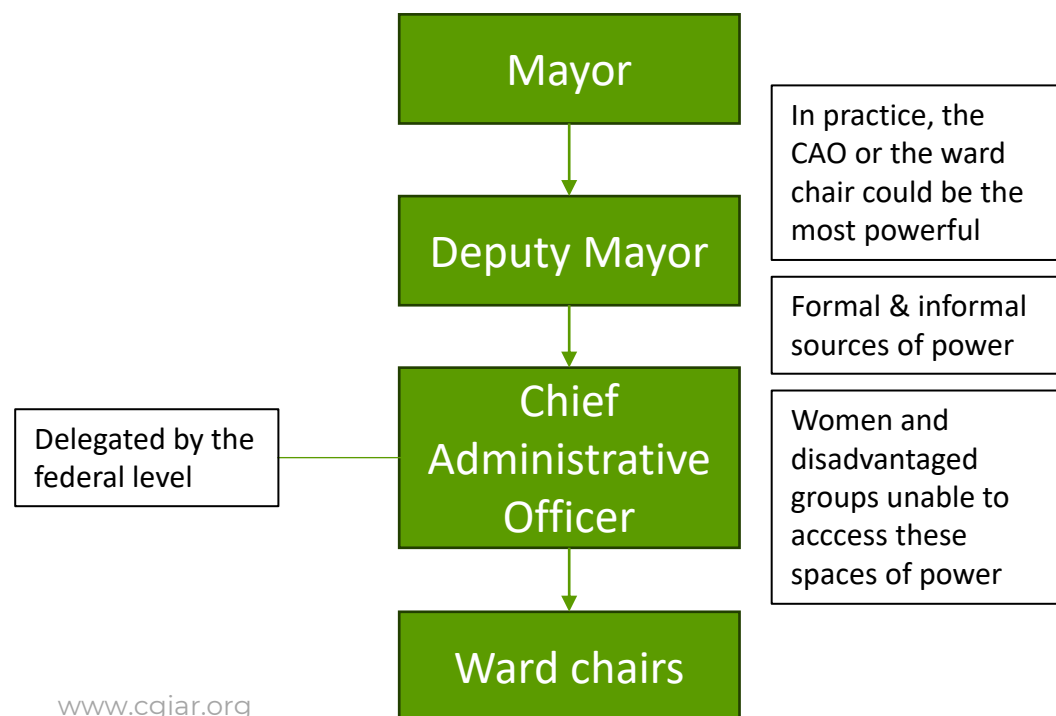
**“Until there is a policy, you cannot work in Nepal”**

# Key results:

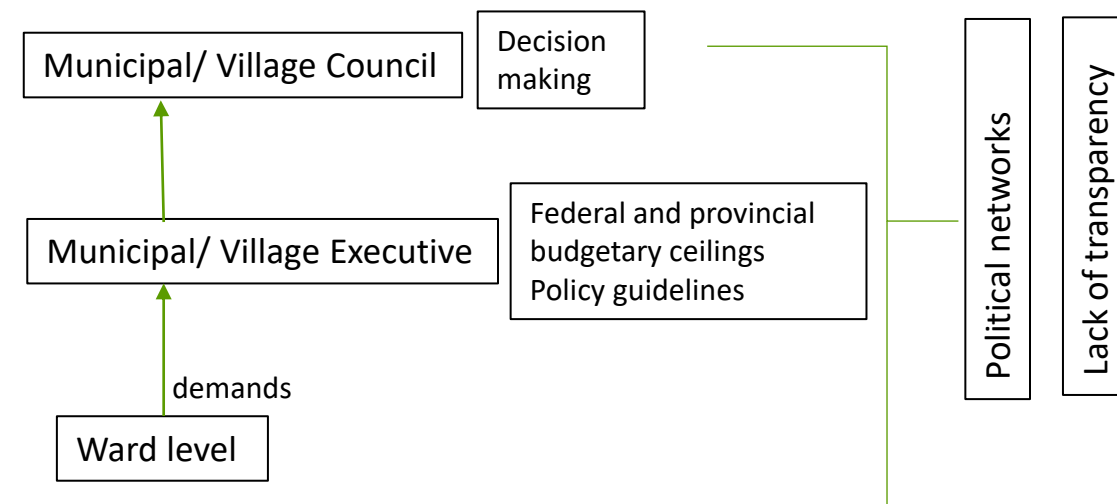
## Political outcomes: The black box of politics

Key bottlenecks to the full implementation of GESI policy in the energy sector may not be directly related to the sector per se, but more generally to the governance style and priorities.

### Local politics and power dynamics:



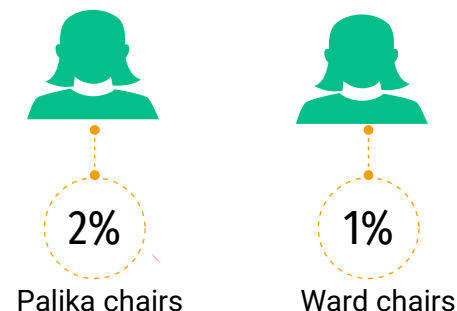
### The decision-making process:



## Is there genuine GESI interest?

- GESI is rarely a priority (especially when budgets are tight) at all levels

## Women are absent from executive functions



- The allocation of budget to the Women's Development Section as well as GESI budget of other sections is not clear (in general there are delays in budget allocation in some palikas)
- The limited interest in GESI may explain in part the slow implementation of GESI policies.
- Further compounded by political instability at the national level.

# Discussion



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1. Limits to the implementation of GESI policy need to be considered with the broader, but combined context of federalization and social norms.
2. GESI implementation can be partly attributed to process of federal transition.
3. Policymaking in Nepal at federal level suffers from a siloed approach, and lacks structural incentive to collaborate.
4. Energy engineering and bureaucracy male dominated products of patriarchal thinking
5. GESI is interpreted as targeting, and not about changing norms--limited attention has been given to what happens once quotas are fulfilled
6. GESI objectivized as a standalone project-related intervention

# Conclusion



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- GESI implementation in the energy sector suffers from limited human resources, narrow conceptual framing and delays in policy development at different spheres of the federal system.
- Bureaucratic as well as local-level ownership of the concept and its relevance for sustainable development must be developed and strengthened.
- The lack of outcome monitoring and the absence of feedback loop mechanisms, glaring systemic shortcomings



**Full paper:**

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**Thank You!**



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