

Can county-level energy planning give a stronger voice to end-users? Insights from Migori County in Kenya

In 2010, Kenya established a devolved government system that provides for citizens' participation in matters that affect them. In the energy sector, responsibility for planning has been devolved to the county level, which could offer an opportunity to redress imbalances created by centralized approaches.

For example, centralized energy planning has tended to prioritize large-scale centralized energy systems, often with little emphasis on households, even though they account for most of the country's energy demand. Limited access to modern energy services also means most households need to rely on traditional biomass fuels, which are associated with serious indoor air pollution, environmental degradation and negative social impacts.

Yet devolution is not guaranteed to lead to more locally appropriate energy planning. In theory, bringing government closer to the governed allows officials to better understand and respond to the needs of the people. Yet if, in practice, planning is tightly controlled by the government officials, with little participation of citizens, understanding of local needs may not improve much, and actions may continue to favour the elites. Indeed, evidence shows that citizen participation in most developing countries is limited, despite many publicly stated policy commitments.

Kenya's new effort to devolve responsibility for energy planning to the county level, which is still taking shape, provides a timely opportunity to support county governments in developing a framework for ensuring meaningful citizen participation in energy planning. This policy brief, based on the SEI Working Paper *County energy planning in Kenya: Local participation and local solutions in Migori County*, explores avenues for citizen participation, and places them in the context of household energy consumption patterns and stated needs.



A small business in Kuria East sub-county uses solar power to provide customers with hair cutting, phone charging and torch charging services.

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Key findings

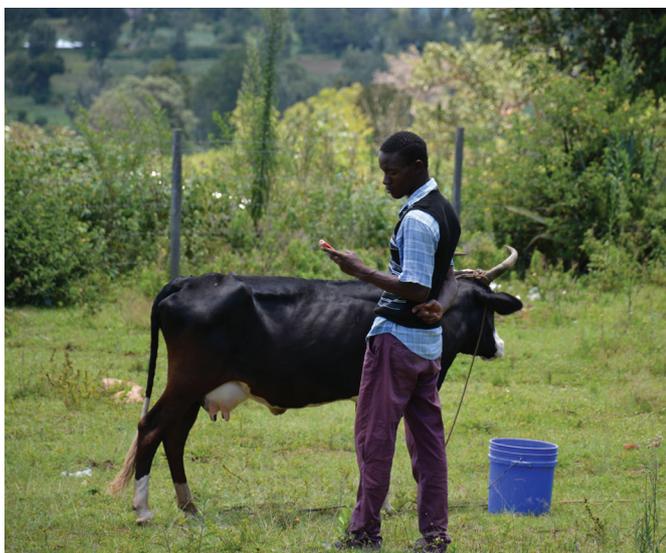
- The devolution of energy planning to the county level in Kenya provides an opportunity for end-users to have a voice in decisions that affect them. This can only be achieved, however, if concerted efforts are made to ensure wide, deep and meaningful participation.
- Before county governments can start to plan, energy consumption patterns in the county must be understood. This will inform the planning process and ensure that the most pertinent issues are being addressed. In Migori County, survey data show that kerosene for lighting and fuelwood for cooking are the most pressing issues for households.
- Citizens are willing and eager to engage in energy planning, and there are many existing avenues for engaging with them, which could reduce the cost and effort required. For example, existing women's and youth groups have experience educating their peers, building capacity and organizing activities/ events to effect change.

The institutional context

A new Energy Bill under consideration by the Parliament specifies what local-level governance would mean within the new counties. Each county government is expected to develop a county energy master plan that will be used by the Cabinet Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Petroleum to formulate an integrated national energy master plan. County governments are given the power to enforce certain energy efficiency and conservation provisions, undertake inspections, and issue directions, all in relation to national energy laws and provisions. They are also expected to establish a fund to promote efficient use of energy and energy conservation, which would hold all grants and loans made by the county or national government or by any other organization or individual.

How these new structures will incorporate meaningful participation by community members has yet to be determined. Given that systems are not yet in place and capacity is limited, there is still a lot of learning that needs to take place. A first step is to properly conceptualize and frame participation, and to understand the context in which it is to occur. Our study focused on energy planning, because this is a clearly established county function in the energy sector and determines all that will come afterward. Moreover, because the county structures are still new, implementation of energy projects and programmes is currently limited.

Our findings contribute to knowledge on participatory energy planning in low-income settings, and will be useful for planners as well as for organizations working on energy and in other sectors. The research could serve as a starting point for ensuring that energy planning takes into account the energy needs of the most marginalized, informing Kenya's current Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) action agenda and investment prospectus.



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A man in Kuria East sub-county checks his mobile phone while tending to his cow. Mobile phones are ubiquitous in Migori County.

Participatory energy planning

Developing countries are increasingly adopting participatory governance mechanisms aimed at facilitating ordinary citizens' engagement in public policy processes. They involve citizens in planning, decision-making about the allocation of public funds and the design of public policies, as well as in monitoring and evaluation. This trend is in part a response to concerns that over time, technological progress appeared to have diminished citizens' control over decisions that affected their lives and increased the power of scientific and technical elites. Now slowly, but surely, citizens are reclaiming a central place in decision-making processes.

Yet the literature on participatory energy planning suggests that participation alone is not enough to ensure that end-users' energy needs will be met. First of all, participation can take many forms, and not all give citizens a chance to make a real impact. The method, depth, type and equality of participation in the process all matter greatly. Second, the different interests and framings of actors seeking to influence the process are likely to shape and constrain the outcomes – and in fact determine the method, depth, type and equality of participation.

Thus, in order to make a difference, participatory processes need to open up the decision space beyond the options preferred by those with the most power and influence, and uncover alternatives that might not otherwise be considered. They need to take a truly bottom-up approach, and include mechanisms for reflection and learning, so that planning processes can be continuously improved.

Existing participatory energy planning tools suggest six key activities that can enable effective participation and help overcome barriers to it:

- Stakeholder engagement and awareness creation;
- Needs assessment;
- Resource mapping;
- Visioning and action planning;
- Capacity-building, and
- Implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

While some of these activities represent specific steps in the planning process, others may occur throughout the process, such as stakeholder engagement and awareness creation.

An up-close look at Migori County

Our fieldwork focused on Migori County, in southwestern Kenya, which is home to more than 900,000 people. Through a survey of 500 households, a number of expert interviews and eight focus group discussions, we examined household energy consumption patterns and explored options for citizen engagement in energy planning.

The household survey showed that four energy sources predominate in Migori County: charcoal, firewood, dry cell batteries and kerosene. The disaggregation of the data for rural (85%) and urban households (15%) showed a more nuanced picture: rural households relied primarily on kerosene (97%), firewood (96%), dry cells (72%) and charcoal (67%), while urban household used a greater variety of energy sources.

Electricity (65%), candles (56%) and LPG (39%) were the important energy sources for urban households, but practically non-existent in rural households (only 12% had electricity, for example). Electricity access was limited by the lack of a power grid nearby or, when physically available, by the high cost of initial connection.

The survey data showed that households spent the most on charcoal, an average of KES 1,334 per month per household, followed by LPG (KES 869). Households with electricity paid roughly KES 600 for it; the monthly cost of kerosene and firewood was KES 351 and 531, respectively. However, comparing these costs does not tell the full story, because different energy sources provide different

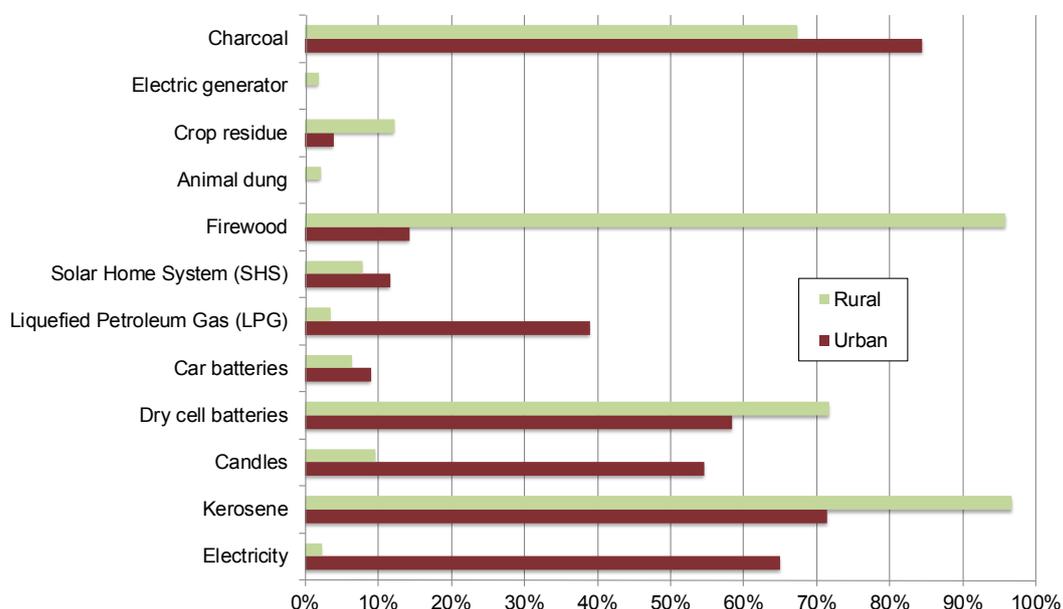


Figure 1: Energy consumption in urban and rural households

Table 1: Average monthly expenditure on different fuels

Fuel	Typical purchase volume*	Typical purchase amount*	Typical purchase frequency*	Average monthly expenditure
Electricity	–	600 KES	Monthly	597 KES
Kerosene	10 ml	10 KES	Daily	351 KES
LPG	6 kg cylinder	1,500 KES	Less than monthly	869 KES
Charcoal	2 kg container	50 KES	Daily	1,334 KES
Firewood	1 bundle	20/90 KES	Daily/weekly	531 KES

* Purchase amounts are given in Kenyan shillings (KES). These numbers are indicative only, and come from focus groups, interviews, and survey data.

energy services (i.e. lighting, cooking, powering appliances), and they tend to be bought and/or paid for over different time-scales.

For cooking in particular, the survey showed that 77.4% of the sampled households used an open three-stone fire. Many households owned improved cookstoves, such as the Kenya Ceramic Jiko, but only 17.4% used it as their main stove, while 77.3% said it was their second option. This pattern suggests that in order to increase the use of these technologies, there is a need to better understand complexities in household energy consumption, such as individual behavioural patterns, household power dynamics, and socio-cultural norms and relationships.

The focus group discussions, which involved women’s groups, community leaders, local government administrators and youth, highlighted the main challenges that communities face with their current energy sources and in trying to adopt alternative energy sources. Participants noted that electricity connections are costly, yet the supply is unreliable and the suppliers are non-responsive when called upon. Collecting firewood involves a risk of snake bites, rape, and harassment from forest wardens; burning biomass creates harmful smoke.



Firewood, collected as far as 5 km from home, is used by 96% of rural households; almost 90% cook primarily over open three-stone fires.

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Participants also noted a lack of community involvement in energy planning, policy-making and implementation. They also discussed how existing national policies hinder full exploration of available energy resources and what they regarded as the unfair distribution of electricity, for which they faulted political leaders. County energy administrators, meanwhile, cited a lack of information, lack of cooperation among stakeholders, and understaffing as key challenges, especially for the unit responsible for supporting the devolution activities.

Engaging citizens in energy planning

Our survey found only 23% of the households had previously been involved in forums to discuss energy issues; 7% reported participating all the time. Participation in such forums by other households varied: 51% participated regularly, 12% a few times and 29% only once. The households were also asked whether they would like to be involved in forums to discuss energy issues in future; 79% said yes.

Interest was notably higher in rural households: 84% compared with 58% of urban households. We might conclude that rural households – which are typically more remote and disconnected, both in political and electricity access terms – feel even more strongly about the opportunity to participate in discussions about energy.

Asked how they would like to be involved –through what channels or forums – the majority of both urban and rural households showed a preference for individual direct communication, such as through a survey. However, surveys are costly, time-consuming and difficult to administer, so that is a limited option for financially constrained counties.

We would still encourage annual or biannual energy surveys to uncover trends, and to get data from individual households. Furthermore, the use of mobile phones might be one way to get smaller pieces of data on a more regular basis. Another option – the second preference among both urban and rural respondents – is to consult with influential community members.

The focus groups identified different roles they could play in county energy planning, drawing on past experiences with collaboration and activism. Women saw themselves educating other women and children, raising awareness, mobilizing resources to promote energy technologies, and engaging in conservation. Youths said they could work on the implementation of various projects (by providing manpower), do research and write proposals for development projects, and participate in afforestation and reforestation initiatives.

Community leaders said they could work on identifying community needs; education and mobilization of the community (for planning, implementation and information-sharing); monitoring energy activities to ensure implementation, or participating in the implementation; influencing decisions through the involvement of various groups such as youths, churches, women, and opinion leaders, and advocacy or activism, to catalyse action or incite communities to end projects if needed.

The administrators identified their key roles to include providing civic education on alternatives sources of energy; being agents of regulation; enforcement and advocacy; data generation on energy sources, uses and demand; mobilization (to provide information for planning and

implementation); monitoring the implementation, and participating in the implementation activities.

All groups cited past successes that demonstrate the diverse knowledge and skills that already exist among stakeholders in Migori County and can be tapped when all are involved in the planning processes. However, in the group discussions, communities and their leaders indicated that they are not currently involved in the management of energy resources in the county. Their opinions were not sought during planning; they were not aware of policies and regulations governing the sector, or of budget allocations or their purpose, and they were not very sure of the presence and role of the Energy Ministry in the county.

The participants suggested that they should be involved in the management of energy resources through the existing county structures. They indicated that they could be involved by mobilizing through community leaders and implementing civic education on energy issues, and by ensuring that devolution structures are working at the ward level and that community members are participating.

To achieve widespread success, county energy planning needs to be a flexible process, able to adapt to the conditions and desires of local people. County governments need to recognize that planning should be truly participatory, so as to understand the local rural energy context and capture the needs, desires and aspirations of citizens within the local community.

Recommendations for more participatory county-level energy planning

There are several areas in which county governments and the national government – in particular the entities responsible for energy – could act to improve participation in energy planning at the county level. We recommend the following for consideration:

- **Take advantage of increasing interest within communities to engage on energy issues.** The capacity of ward administrators to convene discussions on energy issues should be utilized through regular structured engagements.
- **Utilize existing mechanisms for communities to have their voice heard,** so as not to duplicate processes. Women's groups, youth groups and others already have established channels of communication and support networks, which can and should be further empowered.



This policy brief was written by Oliver Johnson and Anne Nyambane, based on SEI Working Paper 2016-01, *County energy planning in Kenya: Local participation and local solutions in Migori County*, by Oliver Johnson, Anne Nyambane, Emmanuel Cyoy and Lloyd George Oito, available at: <http://www.sei-international.org/publications?pid=2903>.



A focus group discussion with a women's group in Migori County.

- **Seek to further develop their capacity to deal with energy issues.** This includes hiring new staff, training new and existing staff, and training key community members.
- **Directors of Energy in all counties should set up a forum to discuss and share experiences.** Since they are all working in a relatively new system, this knowledge exchange can help them to learn and support each other.
- **Improve coordination between county governments and the national government's Energy Centres.** Awareness-raising activities would be a suitable starting point for building a strong partnership, since Energy Centres have the capacity to demonstrate different energy technologies and county governments have strong links with community groups who can benefit from such demonstrations and act as knowledge bridges to the wider community.
- **National government must allocate adequate resources for a participatory planning process,** so that communities can legitimize these counties' master plans that are feeding into the national energy plan.

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