Date Transcribed: 2nd May 2021

Interviewer(s):

Respondent(s):

**INT:** **-dot in the corner that tells you that we’re recording.**

**My first question is can you tell us a little bit about what you currently do? Your current role in the context of energy and energy access?**

RES: Yes, well I would say my current role, I’ll come from the organisational point of view because that’s where my work is focused now and the work we do- Can you hear me?

**INT:** **Yes, I can hear you perfectly.**

RES: The work we do is engaging you know [unclear 00:00:46] basis you know, so depending on what we are working on then we can talk about those issues. But I’m currently an advice report member for XXXX, and the movement is a leading XXXX environment and renewable energy advocacy and campaign group in Ghana, which has engaged you know energy issues in the past. Currently, we are not actively engaged in any energy issues, but the work we’ve done in the past is very much- Some of it is related to this conversation. So I guess that would be the entry points, even though currently we don’t have a project or campaign on any energy issue.

**INT:** **I** **suppose in that case would you be able to, yes, to talk a little bit about what in the past have been the kind of key projects or campaigns that you’ve been involved in on energy issues as an organisation? And also, how you personally became involved in that type of work?**

RES: Well, I mean I became involved- I will start from the individual point of view and then go onto the organisation. I became much involved in energy issues from the point of view of climate change about more than a decade ago when I was leading the environmental movement. You know, we saw energy as one of the issues that we have to engage in terms of giving solutions to climate change. So that started off in 2013, I believe when we campaigned against the government of Ghana when the government decided to bring in a coal fired power plant from South Africa. And that was my first [unclear 00:02:50] to engage the Ministry of Energy, the XXXXthat was a leading, implementing organisation for that project.

Later on, from the individual point of view, I started a start-up called Solar People, and my vision was to take on energy poverty as you may call it, by mobilising solar lamps and then, you know, deploying them into communities, of great communities where school children had no electricity to use. That was one of the very important initiatives I got involved, and then later on we had an initiative through that, called XXXX, where I partnered with XXXX to provide XXXX to girls in schools.

At the organisation level, that is XXXX, we came back to energy I think in 2017 or 2018 there about, when we reviewed the Renewable Energy Act. Which was supposed to, one, promote the renewable energy industry, and also to give the government pressure of implementing some key provisions in the Act, which they hadn’t implemented even though the Act was propagated in 2011.

Then also raise up the issue of youth-led businesses in Ghana, in terms of the renewable energy industry, how the government can support some of the small start-up companies that young people were leading, in terms of granting licenses and giving opportunities for them to grow their businesses. So, I would say that these are the specific projects that I have been involved in personally and on the organisational levels.

**INT:** **Okay, and so in your current role, in the sort of advisory capacity, so you’re currently not focusing on energy, is it more advising kind of I don’t know organisational wide strategies or what’s the current role as an adviser? What’s the purpose of that?**

RES: Well, you know, it depends on what the organisation is focusing on. Currently the organisation is focusing on building an intergenerational movement of young people at the grassroots. So, I’m doing a lot of advisory on those trainee programs, you know. The organisation is also focusing on running a campaign on single-use plastics, seeking for a legislation to ban single-use plastics in Ghana, and that is also one of the, you know, of the work I’m doing in terms of being an advisor. You know, advising on the stakeholder engagement and all the other little pieces of the campaign.

**INT:** **Yes, I suppose in terms of energy it's sort of perhaps there’s a tangential link where, you know, of course plastics, sort of fossil fuel-based, and, yes- So I think this does sort of link, but I guess for the purpose of this interview we might focus more on your sort of previous experience.**

RES: Yes, yes. Right.

**INT:** **I’m kind of thinking in terms of- You’ve already touched on the Renewable Energy Act and in terms of policies, what sorts of policies and laws have been shaping your work on energy, or the organisational work on energy in the past?**

RES: Well, we have been actually [unclear 00:07:12] energy poverty. I mean we all know Ghana has a policy on energy and with that policy on energy, you know, it says that by 2020 the country has to achieve 10% renewable energy in the energy mix, which hasn’t happened. I don’t know if it’s been, you know, it’s been changed or it’s been updated, but that was something that was actually driving the kind of work we do. And of course, universal access to energy I think by 2030 was also a key agenda, and we realised that wasn’t happening, or not happening on the pace or the speed that we thought could be possible. You know, so I would say that it was the Ghana energy policy, the universal access to energy policy or framework or whatever it is, that was actually, that were actually driving the kind of work we do when given as the direction that we should engage.

**INT:** **Yes, and can I just ask so in terms of the 10% renewable energy, was that just for power or for all energy?**

RES: It was for power; you know, it was for power.

**INT:** **And so then-**

RES: But I think along- Thatwas the power. Universal access was for all kind of energy, you know, at the different levels of our society, from the household level to the industrial level, and to all aspects of our lives in Ghana whether economic or social.

**INT:** **Yes, yes. Yes, and was there a sense of like, it being basic energy? So universal access could be basic level or could be, you know, a sort of level that would guarantee a certain level of living standard.**

RES: Yes, we as an organisation wanted from the household level, you know, and that was personally what I’ve [s/l even took on 00:09:33] with Solar People. Because I thought that when the energy discourse takes place, it’s all about power in the national grade, it’s all about ECG and, you know, agreement and- But what is normally overlooked is energy access at the household or community level, both off-grid or among the urban poor.

**[00:10:00]**

You know, and how people are struggling to break free from energy poverty, and how energy poverty also becomes a risk that erodes the capacity of people to respond to other livelihood pressures. So even health issues because of air pollution due to poor access of energy and how young people or children in these areas are not even able to perform well in schools because they don’t have access to light or even, you know, lamps to study at night.

So, we were more, very much interested in what people probably would think is the mundane, energy poverty in communities and at the household level, whether people are off-grid or whether they are in urban poor communities that do not have access to even simple methods of cooking, that are healthy enough and are relying on traditional methods that are not necessarily bad, but have impact, certain impacts on their health. So we were looking more to the household level and energy access that ties into the livelihood of people.

**INT: Yes, okay. And I think that actually very nicely leads to my next question, which is, what does equitable energy access mean to you?**

RES: I guess, I would probably use the environmental justice lens. So that would be in terms of, one, recognising that people do not have access to energy or have difficulty accessing energy. So the recognition of that is very much important. And of course, the participation in the process of providing energy is also key to answering that question, because normally, you know, people make policies without really understanding what people feel about it. And equitable energy access from all levels of society, when people are discussing those issues, you have input from people, the people whose needs are supposed to be addressed. You need to have their voice heard and they have to participate in those kinds of decision‑making in terms of what is best for them in deploying energy, energy technologies or energy interventions.

So, participation is key. And then I would also say distribution and redistribution because, yes, we know that people should have access to energy regardless of, you know, gender, regardless of economic status, regardless of geography, regardless of locality, regardless of cultural or social belief systems. But that kind of distribution is not even, you know- So there are communities that are off-grid, and we don’t even remember they exist. And there are also urban poor people living in cities who are still grappling with the same issues that great communities grapple with. You know, so in terms of equitable, I believe it’s about recognising that one, that such a problem exists and that- And also recognise the magnitude of the problem in terms of energy poverty.

**INT: Yes, okay, yes.**

RES: Making sure that people participate in giving solutions to them. And, three, looking at how we can distribute energy to everyone, regardless of where they are found, you know, regardless of their geography. And also redistributing energy, I would say energy opportunities that are currently being ruled out, so that people in places in marginalised or disadvantaged places can also have access.

**INT: Yes, yes, that’s very good and again leads to my sort of next question which is, what does gender equity in energy access mean to you?**

RES: Well, I guess the same variables. You know, like recognising that, one, women now also- I will always use the household as my basic unit of analysis before even engaging other sectors. I would say that, one, we have to recognise that women suffer the most in terms of organising the house or organising energy for the house. First and foremost, women do in my context I mean, women do a lot of work in the household. So they walk for miles to fetch firewood, you know, to camp and make fire and they don’t have the sustainable or healthy means to even cook food which means that they are exposed to pollution, you know, which impacts their health. Even with things like pregnancy and giving birth, when you go to hospitals there are certain hospitals that I’ve seen that do not have electricity access, you know, to even sterilize equipment for health provision for women.

So we need to recognise that women face a lot of problems in, one, accessing energy or, two, affording energy. We also need to realise that women are also in most cases, are not participating in decision-making to address those problems. You know, even when you move from the household level to the national level, in terms of national decision-making process this is something that is evident. Because all energy interventions talk about mainstreaming gender, mainstreaming gender, so that is a recognition that there is a missing link there or there’s a gap there.

Then as I said in terms of energy deployment and redistribution and energy decentralisation, we also realise that, you know, women are still not able to be reached in terms of solving the problems that they face at the household level, or at the national level decision-making process so that for me is how I view the gender angle, you know?

**INT: Yes. Yes, that’s actually very much in line with also what a few other people have said, and yes, I think the participation in decision making I think that’s really key.**

**Do you think that different groups of women, so in the Ghanaian context, that different groups of women benefit from access to energy differently? So I’m thinking maybe rural versus urban, or different ethnic groups, or women that are part of different sort of income groups or something like that.**

RES: Yes, first of all, I will, I would place a very key role- I mean if you are in Accra regardless, you know, you are living in an affluent community regardless of whether you are a man or women you have access, and that cannot be compared to people living in urban communities. So that’s probably the first level, is geography. I think probably the second level would be socioeconomic status, in terms of income earning. So certain people who have, certain women who have certain professions and earn a certain amount of income would rent a house where there is electricity or have access to electricity for basic household chores. You know, I mean I don’t think that if I move into one of my friends who are middle class, if I go into their house, I would see a traditional stove being used for cooking, you know, that that that is not likely. So, I think socioeconomic status would probably be the next level.

In terms of ethnicity, I’m not sure about that, I think that ties much into the geography because we can see that for northern Ghana, for instance, it’s very marginalised, in other parts of the south and, you know- So depending on where those communities are also located it makes it very difficult for energy access. But I think what has been ignored for me in terms of this discourse, and it’s not just related to the gender access, it’s across the board, it’s urbanisation. You know, especially what I would call in-situ urbanisation, that this urbanisation that is happening right in the urban centre.

**[00:20:02]**

Sometimes people feel most of the urbanisation is driven by rural-urban migration, but there are a lot of sprawling settlements at the outskirts of the cities you know, that are emerging rapidly and because of how they are emerging and because of, you know, in terms of the cost analysis of extending infrastructure they are being ignored. So they end up living as if, you know, they are not within the city and that is also one of the reasons that is actually pushing people more into energy poverty because of where they- They’ve been displaced because of urbanisation.

**INT: Yes, I think that’s really fascinating, you know, in the context of actually how urbanisation takes place and what the sacrifices are that shaped that. And in this interview, you know, the role of women within that, or, yes-**

**Do you think that- So we’ve talked a little bit about decision making and the sort of difference between rural-urban context and I think it’s really interesting to hear there isn’t, there is obviously a difference but actually that is also within the urban, you know, and how the urban is growing or- Yes, well you said how places are urbanising and how that factors in, and I think that’s really fascinating.**

**In obviously, you know, your work now has slightly changed but previously to what extent did gender equity factor in your work on energy access previously?**

RES: Primarily, that’s why I founded initiative called XXXX because women are the most important. I mean all of us are equal as human beings, but women have, women are the most important in society because if you invest in women, you are you are doing something bigger, you are bringing a bigger change. You know, so XXXX for me was the embodiment of what I believed in, you know, that girls are at the bottom of all our interventions, most of our interventions if not all should focus on women. This shouldn’t be a debate because it’s something we see it if anyone- We want to address issues like climate change and environmental issues you know?

So that was based on my conviction, that was primarily, it has to be the primary concern for any energy intervention and what I wanted to do was to send solar lamps to girls. To send to boys and girls though, but to focus more on girls you know because there is clear evidence that girls are displaced when you talk about energy, when you talk about environmental risk when you talk about different types of, different forms and manifestations of poverty. So that for me was the goal, to reach out to the girl child first.

**INT: Yes, and in the work that you carried out, so for example the Solar People and XXXX kind of initiatives, how do you think- What do you think how effective that they have been in terms of, yes, addressing kind of gender equity issues in energy access?**

RES: Well I would say that, you know, I mean that was a very [unclear 00:24:02] by a small campaign without enough funding. And so, for me in terms of the long term we just didn’t have the logistics to monitor and evaluate, because sometimes we are travelling for two days in villages, you know, and it’s very difficult even having representatives there to kind of give you feedback about what is happening because there isn’t much funding for that. But I think one thing that I personally was very much fulfilled about was actually seeing girls using the lamps that we provided to study at night, and before this was not possible.

I think even though we never had the capacity to follow, monitor and evaluate, we had amazing photos of girls studying at night, and I can definitely believe that will improve their performance because in those villages by six o’clock everyone is going to sleep, or going to play, or going to sing or maybe even going to their boyfriends, you know? Because there isn’t much work to do academically, or even reading to do to expand your mind, and having solar lamps was saving the girls from a lot of even social vices.

So that that for me made a very indelible impact on my mind, even though I cannot give you data concerning how we monitor [unclear 00:25:40].

**INT: Yes, I think that sounds great. And, yes, sort of mirrors some of my very short experiences in rural Ghana actually.**

**Do you think that energy access policies in Ghana are gender sensitive, so I think you already talked about there sort of being a rhetoric around kind of gender mainstreaming? Do you think that is sufficient or are there any gaps in terms of the policies which exist?**

RES: Honestly, you know, I think they are all talk, okay, Ghana can give you brilliant policies but like practically our leaders don’t get it. They don’t get it and they are not committed to what they say you know what I mean? I’m not making a sweeping statement, I’m just telling you what I’ve seen. And so that answers the question, I think the policies look good, you can be you can be convinced about the policies that’s one thing, but you can also know that these policies don’t get implemented. You know, and it’s all about conferences, talking about gender mainstreaming, blah, blah, blah, but we know that on the ground nothing like that happens. Or even when it happens it’s not enough to catalyse that kind of change we are looking for. And actually, you know, it’s just a few people who really want to solve the problems but don’t have the power or the means to be able to do that. But politically we have the power, we have the means, but we don’t have the will to do it, so that is my observation.

**INT: What do you think- How could that be improved?**

RES: That’s difficult, I think for me I’m investing all my time in mentoring young people and building the next generation because I think, for me, that’s my only chance to kind of you know solve some of these problems. To engage, to empower the next generation of young people to understand these issues and to organise within their communities for that solution to happen, whether engaging politicians in their own context or whether being entrepreneurial enough to start initiatives to address it on the ground, you know, without waiting for government to do so. Because I think we always talk about, we have to engage government, we have to do this with government, but for me I’m a bit disillusioned about that. About that change happening on that political level even though I believe every transformative change will be a political one.

But I feel that, you know, community-led initiatives can be a catalyst, and movement building can also be a catalyst, and supporting youth-led businesses at the community level to solve problems in the communities, you know, one community by the day. I don’t believe one day I’ll wake up and the government will solve the problems with energy in Ghana. They can do that with ECG, or they can do that with the energy, the huge energy companies, but my passion remains at the community levels.

**INT: Yes, and so do you think that perhaps policymakers, that part of the lacking is due to the fact that they’re too far removed from the communities, i.e. not visiting them, not really you know spending time in energy-poor communities, whether they’re rural or on the fringe of kind of urban centres?**

RES: Well, I think it’s [unclear 00:29:43] you know. I mean, I am not, I’m personally not inspired by their [unclear 00:29:51] currently, like I’m not just not talking about the government, but you know the generation leading because I don’t see any conviction. I don’t see the interest of people at the core of what they are doing or what they believe, or what they seem to do.

**[00:30:10]**

So, I think that is a big problem, I think it is a heart problem that, you know, people don’t care about people who are suffering. In terms of visiting communities, that could be political, if people want votes they visit communities, they see what is happening but they don’t [unclear 00:30:27] to solve the problem. We need people who have convictions and who are passionate about solving problems, and people who love people and want to create opportunities for people to live in dignity. So probably for me this is more like a philosophy of life rather than a, you know, an experiential thing your lack of [unclear 00:30:53]

**INT: So perhaps more about-**

RES: It’s about connection with people, I think it’s more of a philosophy of life.

**INT: Yes, or perhaps sort of values that somebody has.**

RES: Pardon?

**INT: Perhaps more the [unclear 00:31:05]-**

RES: Yes, yes.

**INT: -views, you know, that people bring to those powerful-**

RES: Yes.

**INT: So, I guess finally because you have to go in a couple of minutes, imagining there was no constraint in terms of policies, finance, you know, what in your view would be best practice for achieving gender equity in energy access?**

RES: Start from the communities. You know, communities are, have a lot of agency and I think sometimes we think that we have to go in and do things for them, but participatory approach is very important in doing interventions. So having shared learning dialogues, you know, engaging women groups, some of them have serious groups of- Sometimes we think, we have to go in and do things for them, but they can do things for themselves if you empower them and give them the opportunities to do, and the support to do.

So I always say we start from the community level, engage community, let them come together, let them form their own groups, see the kind of skills we can give them, you know, to be entrepreneurial in some of the solutions that they give as far as energy is concerned. It’s possible, we know where the problems are, let’s involved communities, engage them, give them the skills, empower them and support them to take to take the lead because it’s not happening. Government is not doing it and we need to re-think the way we do interventions especially post-Covid. You know, focusing more on communities and supporting them to lead change.

**INT: Yes, okay, I think that’s an excellent point to finish. So, thank you so much for your time. Yes, if you could- So if you could please sort of send us the signed consent form that would be brilliant. And actually I think there might be an opportunity, we have some events planned, some regional events one in Nigeria and one in Asia but I think because of Covid, you know, they’re not happening physically, so I think there’s great opportunity for people like yourself to actually participate. If that happens then we’ll let you know, and it’d be really great to sort of, you know, stay in touch and that was really great. Thank you very much.**

RES: Absolutely I will, I will fill the form in and send.

**INT: Okay.**

RES: And thank you for this opportunity to engage.

**INT: Yes, no, it was brilliant, and I wish we had more time to talk about the sort of urbanisation again.**

RES: Yes, we could, we could on a personal level another time if you have time.

**INT: Yes, definitely, definitely that would be great. Okay, I say thank you-**

RES: All right.

**INT: -and goodbye-**

RES: Okay.

**INT: -because I know you have to be in another meeting in a bit.**

RES: Thank you, take care.

**INT: Thank you. Bye.**

RES: Take care.

**INT: Bye.**

RES: Bye.

**[Audio ends: 00:34:00]**