

Background

The UN General Assembly has designated 2012 as the International Year for Sustainable Energy. Given the importance of energy in climate change mitigation, reducing poverty, meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), fuelling economic growth and bridging inequality, this designation has the potential to catalyze an increased focus on energy access issues. At present, about 1.5 billion people worldwide (one in five) lack access to electricity and about 2.7 billion people (40 percent of the global population) rely on wood and charcoal as their primary source of energy.¹ Poor women, especially rural women, continually face energy-related hurdles because they are the primary energy producers for the household and tend to be more reliant on small-scale agriculture and locally available resources like biomass and wood to meet daily household energy needs.

Improving energy access would catalyze achievement of the MDGs

Energy is essential for everyday household chores such as lighting, cooking and heating. Because rural women and girls are primarily responsible for the bulk of household work, access to energy will make a significant difference to their quality of life including their health. "Although access to more modern energy alternatives will not necessarily lead to greater equality in gender roles, it can at least relieve some of the most burdensome and unhealthy aspects of their daily lives and expand the development options available to women, their families and their communities."² On a larger scale, energy policies can catalyze national development and play a vital role in poverty alleviation and mitigation of the ill-effects of climate change.³

Gender and Climate Change Africa

Policy Brief 3 – Energy

Working Draft



Women play a pivotal role in energy production

Studies confirm that women's empowerment is crucial for all-round social development,⁴ environmental sustainability⁵ and ensuring efficiency and sustainability of climate change responses.⁶ Specifically, incorporating the contributions and concerns of both women and men can help inform programmes and increase access to grid and off-grid electricity access.⁷ Failure to consider gendered interests and the different needs of men and women can limit the effectiveness of energy programmes and policies, as well as other development activities that involve energy use.

Energy has gender differentiated aspects

Energy has significant links to gender equality. First, women and girls are often primarily responsible for collecting fuel and water at the community level. They carry greater loads compared to men but have a lower intake of calories because custom usually dictates that men receive more food and water.⁸ Women's poor nutrition vis-à-vis their work load also increases their susceptibility to health risks, including anemia and perinatal mortality.⁹ Indoor pollution from the use of cooking stoves is also a serious health problem for women and girls.¹⁰

Second, women spend considerable time in gathering biomass for energy. Because women undertake these activities largely on foot, climate-induced scarcity of natural resources can exacerbate the time poverty of women,¹¹ as women and girls will be forced to spend more time collecting these resources, thus losing out on other activities such as education and employment.¹²

Third, women generally have lower access to finance and energy-related services than men.

Energy and Gender Challenges

- Only 1 in 5 people in the world have access to electricity.
- Only 24% of the people have access to electricity in sub-Saharan Africa and 25 countries are in a state of power crisis.
- 3 billion people, largely in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, rely on traditional fuels such as wood, dung, and agricultural residue for cooking, agro-processing and heating.
- In Ethiopia, DR Congo, Tanzania and Uganda biomass accounts for up to 93-95% of the total energy consumed - a similar pattern holds true in many countries in the region.
- 2 million people (mainly women and children) die because of the burning of biomass indoors.
- About 10 million people, mostly rural poor, have gained access to modern energy services through UNDP-supported projects over the past decade.

Sources: (UNDP 2011, IEA 2011, WHO 2011)

The World Energy Outlook 2011 has noted that lack of access to modern energy services must be overcome if the MDGs are to be achieved. MDG 1, the goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by 2015, may not be achieved absent progress on access to modern energy services.

Studies from Africa, for example, show that women-headed businesses generally face more impediments in accessing grid electricity, compared to men. Experiences in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia suggest that women entrepreneurs also face greater discrimination than men in the form of delays in obtaining electrical connections and the expectation that they will pay bribes for these services.¹³

Finally, gender stereotypes mean that women are often excluded from discussions about energy plans and policies, resulting in the gender-blind planning of energy policies, financing and execution.¹⁴ As noted above, women play a pivotal role in energy production, distribution and utilization, especially in poor communities. Thus, the lack of recognition of their role in the energy sector could undermine the effectiveness and sustainability of much-needed energy projects and policies.

Recommendations for action

- **Basic technologies such as electricity for lighting and cooking are still a luxury for many rural women and men and access to modern energy services needs to be improved.** Access to modern energy services would go a long way towards alleviating the daily household burdens of women, giving them more time, improving their health, and enhancing their livelihoods.
- **Gender-based constraints related to access to energy, finance, training, employment and entrepreneurship need to be better studied and addressed.** Policies that include both women and men in the development stage may help support more equitable access to electricity (grid and off-grid). Therefore, more efforts are needed to involve women in the

Gender Audit of Energy Policy in Botswana

The Botswana Technology Centre in consultation with the Energy Affairs Division of the Ministry of Minerals, Energy, Water Resources and other stakeholders, executed a gender audit of Botswana's national energy policies. Botswana is the first country where such an audit was held. The audit showed that although there is a common understanding of the different roles of women and men in Botswana, the knowledge of the relationship between gender, energy and poverty was still limited. This has resulted in gender blindness of existing energy policies and programmes, and a lack of consultation with household residents, and women in particular, in developing the energy policy. The audit also showed a lack of sex-disaggregated data and a general absence of association between energy services and the MDGs. Based on this audit and follow-up trainings, the awareness in the government and of the Botswana Power Corporation staff has increased. The corporation recently started a groundbreaking gender mainstreaming programme for rural electrification. The audit also led to a pilot project for collecting sex-disaggregated data and strengthening gender expertise in the country's energy sector.

Source: Wright and Gueye (2009) in Dankelman (2010).

design and production of locally appropriate energy technologies.¹⁵ Infrastructure projects designed to promote cleaner, more efficient forms of fossil fuels and renewable energy can offer new skills training, increased employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women, as well as more equitable benefit sharing at the community level.

- **Investing in low-emission technologies that benefit poor communities, including women, are needed.** Properly developed and deployed sustainable energy technologies can provide the twin benefits of effective climate change responses (both mitigation and adaptation) and improved livelihoods of the poor in general and rural women in particular.
- **Climate change financing focusing on the energy sector should complement broader developmental goals including gender equality, poverty eradication and sustainable development.**¹⁶ Existing public and private sector mitigation financing schemes need to focus on projects that benefit poor and marginalized communities, which include women. At the very least, gender and social impact assessments need to be undertaken during programme and project design. Where feasible, carbon financing options should ensure more equitable benefits for men and women by helping expand women's access to energy. This includes efforts to qualify small-scale projects (such as improved stoves) for financing and streamlining the application process.
- **Mainstreaming gender in energy programming and policy is good social policy and would enhance the efficiency of energy policies.** Incorporating gender perspectives in energy projects, policy and planning is critical to ensure the effectiveness of not just energy programmes and policies, but all development activities that involve energy use.

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- ¹¹ Time poverty is understood as the fact that some individuals do not have enough time for rest and leisure after taking into account the time spent working, whether in the labour market or at home.
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