

GENDER AND ACCESS TO ENERGY SERVICES

Presentation by Ms. Elizabeth Cecelski, Energy, Environment and Development (EED) Germany

Why does gender matter in access to energy services? This is the way we usually think of women in energy, this poor woman, carrying a heavy load of fuelwood that she works on average 40 hours a month to collect and probably she is taking it home to cook on a smoky fire that may cause her and her family to develop respiratory and lung disease. She has many other responsibilities like carrying water, grinding grain and producing food that add up to a 14 hour or longer workday. In fact, as we heard from UNDP, her life is getting more difficult, not less, in many countries such as in India and Africa. 2.4 billion people still use traditional biomass fuels – wood, agricultural residues, and dung – for cooking and heating, and nearly 1.6 billion people do not have access to electricity. With population growth these numbers are increasing, not decreasing, in absolute terms – for example in Africa by 2030 the IEA projects 996 million relying on traditional biomass for cooking and heating compared to 646 million in 2002, similarly in south Asia. This burden is on women. *This is a gender issue.* We would like to help this woman with improved energy sources like more efficient biomass stoves, grain mills and modern fuels like kerosene, LPG and electricity. But will just “adding energy” improve this woman’s life?

We need to see the complete picture! If we look at the complete picture, we see that this woman is in a subordinate position. She lives in a household, a community and a society where gender inequality is more or less pervasive. Her labour is considered less valuable than that of her husband and he makes many of the important decisions about investments in new appliances, about land use and what trees and crops are grown, about her mobility, and about how she uses her time. She has less access to education, less access to credit, less access to land, and less access to power, than her male counterparts. The man accompanying her may actually be protecting her from sexual harassment that is common during fuel collection in remote areas. The woman faces both cultural and institutional obstacles – most of the people who are in energy institutions in her country - the energy policymaking, energy planning, electricity utilities, extension agents, even improved stove designers – they look like this (man’s picture), not like this (woman’s picture). They don’t necessarily understand her problems and constraints, or pay attention to them. So more than just “add energy and stir” will be needed to transform gender relations and improve this woman’s life.

What more? ENERGIA, the International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy, has documented a number of lessons and best practices on gender and energy:

- First, equal access to energy services by women may be the principal route to achieving MDG-related benefits from energy. Empirical research shows that modern energy services are important for the empowerment of women, because they improve women’s health and make their lives easier so that women can participate more fully in development. They reduce women’s time poverty, and

sometimes their consumption poverty, and give women more options in their work and more knowledge from media, and this can help women negotiate for their strategic needs both in the household and the community. An energy policy that chooses to invest in energy infrastructure that directly meets poor women's energy demands and makes their labour more productive, such as improved cooking stoves and fuels, food processing technologies such as grinding mills, drinking water pumping and transport, and electric lighting and media, will contribute to meeting the MDGs.

- Second, we have a lot of evidence, as WHO has presented, about how current cooking energy practices in developing countries have severely negative impacts on the health of women and children, through low birth weights and infant mortality. According to the UN Millennium Project, MDG 5 on reducing child mortality CANNOT be met without improvements in the household energy system. Furthermore, we have good studies showing that substituting these fuels with more efficient biomass or even with fossil fuels such as kerosene or LPG would add little to global emissions. Per capita, developing countries consume only 5 percent of the modern energy services consumed by the industrialized countries. We should not restrict poor women in their choice of cooking fuel because of the profligacy of Northern industrialized countries.
- Third, we have best practices that show how women can benefit from energy by mainstreaming gender in energy planning and policy for example:
 - o Best practice: if we help women to increase the productivity and value of their labour, through income generation, credit, training and so on, the women's labour becomes too valuable to waste on primitive energy production;
 - o Best practice: a specific gender strategy in energy projects, with gender analysis at every stage of the project cycle, can ensure that women's needs are included;
 - o Best practice: matching up women's demands with industry objectives can promote both, as electric utilities in some countries already know, women are their best consumers.

The next steps are three:

- First, we need to set specific goals and targets for meeting basic energy needs, similar to MDG targets. As Dr Parikh has suggested, cooking energy for all by 2015 could be one. Energy for gender equality, energy for MDGs could be another. We need to recognize at the policy level, in both industrialized and developing countries, that meeting basic energy needs in developing countries does not conflict with reducing global emissions. *This is a gender issue and a poverty issue!*
- Second, gender assessment needs to be mainstreamed in the project and policy cycle – every energy project should plan for, monitor and evaluate the differential

impacts of energy on women and on men; every energy policy should include a gender assessment; every electricity utility should study how to match their goals for load, maintenance and safety with the needs of women consumers.

- Third is capacity-building. The most important need is to build individual and independent capacities of women to have voice and participation in the energy sector. We also need to build the capacity of both men and women, as well as institutional capacities to understand and transform gender relations in the energy sector. And we need to do this through partnerships and networks among grassroots women, NGOs, and energy policymakers at the national and international levels. As Dr Govind Kelkar of UNIFEM has said, we need, a “new deal” for women in the energy sector.