

Gender, Poverty, and Cooking Energy within Local and Global Contexts

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Biomass energy consumption and dependency on biomass are linked to poverty. In recent years, access to clean and efficient cooking energy has been seen as a basic development goal. It has been implicitly recognized by development organizations for several decades that gender plays an important role on how cooking energy is perceived. As noted in various sections of this compendium, men and women traditionally play different roles, which are determined by specific local (socio-cultural) and global (sustainable environmental) conditions. Gender, in this context, is discussed as a social factor in the relationships and roles of women and men, rather than in the biological context. Unless there is a clear recognition about these gender-assigned roles, it is difficult to understand how a particular society is functioning and to plan interventions accordingly.

Lack of access to appropriate energy sources is one of the roots of poverty. The amount and type of energy consumed per capita, the quality of energy services provided at certain stages of development, and the distribution of those energy services, have all become indicators of development progress. While the richer urban areas have easier access to 'modern' forms of energy (kerosene, LPG, electricity), rural areas and the urban poor still depend largely on biomass.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) State of World Population 2008, there is still a strong link between poverty and gender. Around 60 % of the poorest population are women and girls. Two-thirds of the 960 million illiterate adults worldwide are women, and 70 % of the 130 million children not attending a school are girls. Thus, there is a strong connection between poverty, gender and cooking energy. (See: <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/>)

Biomass is mainly used for cooking. Even if the household is electrified, cooking often still uses wood, charcoal or dung. Cooking is predominantly a woman's responsibility, which means women and their children are the ones facing the consequent discomforts; heavy and time-consuming workload and health risks. This contributes to the above-mentioned negative impacts: they have less time for education, for income generation and for expression of their interests.

The Millennium Development Goal 3 (MDG 3) aims to 'Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women'. This should be monitored by reporting on the following three criteria:

- Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education
- Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector
- Proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament

(See: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml>)

All three criteria are linked to the topic of cooking energy. Unless there is a major initiative working towards improvement of cooking energy access and achieving MDG 3, the situation will

become worse: with a growing population, fuel wood scarcity is dramatically increasing with destructive consequences for society (especially women and children) and the environment.

This chapter about Gender and cooking energy explains the complex relationship between gender, energy and poverty and the different gender-related roles linked within development work. Secondly, it provides recommendations for gender-sensitive project implementation.

Some concrete examples explain why it is so essential in development work to reflect and consider the complex relationships between gender, poverty and energy:

The gender – poverty nexus

- Of the approximately 1.4 billion people living in poverty (World Bank, 2008), it is estimated that 60% are women, and many of them live in female-headed households in rural areas.
- Throughout the world, women face unequal treatment under the law, and often face violence and abuse.
- Globally, women occupy only 10% of all parliamentary seats and only 6% of cabinet positions, giving them less influence on decisions to eradicate poverty.
- Energy strategies that are intended to assist people to move out of poverty must take these gender aspects into account.
- Men and women have different strategies for addressing their own poverty - men can more easily migrate to other areas or countries, while women are left behind to take care of the family and either work the land or create small, informal-sector businesses, which they can run from home.
- Women worldwide in general receive much lower average wages than men, but take more responsibility for the well being of the family
- Despite women's repayment records being much higher than men's, women have access to a disproportionately small share of credit from formal banking institutions, for example, only about 10% in Africa

In conclusion: At global and local level, men and women are affected differently by poverty and they have different strategies to overcome it. This should be reflected and addressed in development interventions.

The gender – poverty – cooking-energy nexus

- In many cases, the demand for biomass fuels far exceeds sustainable supply. The FAO¹ estimates that as gatherers of fuelwood, 60% of rural women in Africa are affected by fuel wood scarcity. In extreme situations this will lead to a considerable additional workload for women and children, and can also lead to physical and psychological violence against them.

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

- Where fuel is commercialised, the socio-cultural situation will determine whether it is man's income or the woman's income that pays for purchasing fuel, or whether both are responsible.
- There are only a few women who have access to higher education and support systems necessary to achieve careers in the energy sector. This is hindering the development of equitable energy policies and appropriate technologies.

In conclusion: Men and women have different roles in the traditional cooking sector. For this sector to improve, different approaches may be needed to address the needs of both men and women when development interventions are being introduced.

Gender-based approaches and questions for local implementation

- Projects should record their results differentiated by gender. Which baseline gender-disaggregated data is available to support project planning and steering?
 - Has the gender concept been understood among those implementing the project, or is it necessary to provide extra training?
 - Does the innovation process affect both men and women equally, when considering their roles and functions?
 - Are men and women differently or equally participating in terms of strategy planning, implementation and impact monitoring?
 - How are the direct and indirect benefits contributing to gender equality?
 - In the traditional division of labour, the search for firewood and water is primarily the domain of women; does every project-based technology innovation suit their needs?
 - Working with women groups makes project work more efficient; is this recognized during implementation?

Gender-related impacts of cooking energy interventions

Below are some examples of beneficial impacts that accrue through engaging with the gender aspects of cooking energy interventions. These impacts may benefit all, or be gender-specific:

- Capacity development is a key strategy of cooking energy projects. In practice men as well as women are capacitated in terms of environmental awareness, business management, improved livelihood and health.
- Production and commercialization of improved stove technologies can generate jobs and small businesses for both men and women. In the past, women were neglected within the productive sector. Stove production has the potential to elevate women's income and their position within the productive sector.
- Women's roles and responsibilities within the community and the family can change: by becoming entrepreneurs and generating income, women gain more self-confidence and improve their status within the community and family.
- There is increased recognition of women as producers and users of innovative technologies; especially for women and girls, using better technologies means more opportunities for formal and informal education, food production, savings in the household budget, and more money for other household purposes. This increases women's status and security, and reduces their vulnerability.

- Health benefits from clean-burning stoves contribute to better working and living conditions – especially for women and children. This includes a reduction in the number of cases of burns from open fires.
- Men’s role also changes: where innovative, sophisticated and clean-burning technologies are involved, men are more interested in spending time in a clean and smoke-free kitchen, and may even get involved in cooking.
- Due to public awareness and the economic and social benefits of innovative stove technologies, cooking is changing from a private activity towards a public topic with a higher profile.
- On a global level, energy-efficient stoves reduce emissions of CO₂ and particulate matter significantly, contributing to a better indoor and outdoor environment, which concerns men and women equally.

Conclusions:

These few examples illustrate that much can be gained by using gender-differentiated approaches in planning and implementing cooking energy interventions. It contributes to the development of more equitable and just societies, where social and cultural restraints are eliminated and human and material resources are used efficiently.

Yet much remains to be done to ensure that this happens. A few of the most important steps include:

- Identification of training needs of partners, development workers and implementers for increasing gender awareness of – and concern for – gender-differentiated issues, and gender-related energy use patterns and requirements.
- Integration of gender into energy policy and planning at different levels, working with national and local authorities.
- Identification of gender-differentiated energy uses: Who needs energy? For what purposes? These questions should be examined within both urban and industrial contexts, and within rural areas.
- Identification of gender-differentiated energy production systems, and energy access.
- Identification of gender inequalities in baseline studies (decision-making, resource ownership, access to knowledge and skill development, community participation, access to credit etc.). These aspects need to be focused and improved within the development intervention.
- Gender-adequate implementation, with participation of all relevant groups in the planning and realization of development measures.
- Budgeting for continuous gender analysis, training and sensitization during implementation.
- Systematic monitoring along impact chains and evaluation of the results in relation to men and women.
- Identification of behavioural changes at political, national and local level, within the business environment, and at community and household level.
- Raising public awareness (including communication with partners at all levels) of improvements made possible through gender equality.