



Incorporating Women's Concerns Into Energy Policies

THE PROBLEM

Energy planning that is intended to be implemented in a gender-neutral way can miss important issues and be inadvertently discriminatory against women. For example, a policy to promote the use of electricity by small enterprises may neglect the fact that many of women's income-generating activities (such as food preparation and processing, beer brewing and pottery making) require process heat for which electricity may not be the best option. In that situation, policies to promote effective distribution networks for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) or other fuels would better support women's business needs.

For the most part, policy-makers do not take into account the different needs of men and women with regard to energy services. As a result, policies generally do not recognise that there is a gender bias, and women's energy needs tend to be marginalised in policy documents.

In areas without adequate energy services, women's priorities generally include lighting (in homes, for better working conditions in the evening and in the streets for public safety), cleaner fuels for cooking and heating, mechanical power and electricity for grinding grain, pumping water and supporting small business enterprises, and better transportation options. Women also benefit from policies that: promote better access to financing facilities and allow them to invest in equipment and pay for energy supplies; expand training programmes and extension services to improve commercial operations; and remove legal barriers that restrict women's property rights and limit their full participation in social and economic development.

Throughout the world, governments are moving away from publicly-controlled energy sectors in favour of greater liberalisation and competition. Although market-based energy investments provide important benefits, the private sector alone is not likely to meet the energy needs of rural areas in developing countries. Innovative approaches, designed using input from both women and men, are needed to remove regulatory barriers and provide incentives for communities to create their own energy solutions.

“Access to energy services is particularly important for women, given that energy services and technologies are not gender neutral. The lack of modern fuels and electricity reinforces gender inequalities.”

—*The Energy Challenge for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, UN-Energy, 2005



Photo credits: Right: ENERGIA Phase 3 Planning Meeting, The Netherlands, 2002. Courtesy of ETC Energy. Top inset: ENERGIA Regional Workshop, Thailand. 2003. Courtesy of ETC Energy. Middle inset: Participants at the two-day workshop “Improving Women’s Access to Energy: Policy, Projects or the Market?”. The Workshop was held in November 1999 at the University of Twente and organised by ENERGIA. ©1999 Joy Clancy/ENERGIA, Courtesy of Photoshare. Bottom inset: ENERGIA’s participation at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), South Africa. 2002. Courtesy of ETC Energy.

WAYS FOR GOVERNMENTS TO PROMOTE GENDER-SENSITIVE ENERGY POLICIES

- Focus on expanding energy services for the poorest citizens – women and men — that reach beyond urban and industrial markets and support wider development goals. This requires institutional and regulatory reforms that provide incentives for public and private energy providers.
- Ensure that the needs of both men and women are considered and policy-makers are aware of the differing energy needs of men and women, as defined by their different social and economic roles and responsibilities. Gender mainstreaming requirements and training programmes for energy policy-makers can help to raise awareness and support for attention to women's energy needs.
- Increase women's participation and representation in the energy sector to help overcome biases in male-dominated institutions and professions (understanding, however, that the presence of women, by itself, will not guarantee the adoption of gender-sensitive policy goals and that investments in capacity building for women may be required).
- Collect and use gender-disaggregated data in defining issues, examining and selecting policy alternatives, implementing policies, and evaluating results.
- Introduce gender budgeting in national and local government procedures to analyse the impacts of budgetary allocations on women and men, girls and boys, and ensure that public expenditures on social services and infrastructure are allocated on an equitable basis.

ENERGY POLICY SOLUTIONS

- Use targeted subsidies, capacity building and training courses, credit facilities and financial incentives to promote cleaner and more efficient methods of cooking and heating with traditional biomass fuels (wood, charcoal, dung, crop residues), for example through access to locally-appropriate, improved stoves. Since in many rural areas women are responsible for cooking and gathering fuel, increased access to cleaner, more efficient stoves will reduce the time and effort women have to spend collecting fuel, as well as the adverse health impacts of smoky indoor fires.
- Create new incentives to promote the distribution of modern fuels (such as liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), kerosene, and biofuels) cooking, heating, lighting, and business use, and remove existing market barriers affecting fuel suppliers.

- Establish institutional and regulatory incentives for utilities to extend the reach of the power grid to urban and peri-urban areas without electricity and make public investments to support the expansion of electrical connections in poor neighbourhoods. With access to electricity, some of women's household burdens will be reduced, potentially allowing them to become more economically productive and able to assume the ongoing fees for electricity use.
- In areas where it is not feasible to expand the power grid, promote the use of off-grid technologies through targeted subsidies, economic incentives, new credit facilities and community-wide village power programmes accessible to women as well as men. (Off-grid technology options include: wind turbines, water mills, and diesel motors for mechanical as well as electrical power; solar equipment to produce electricity, cook food and heat water; and processing of biomass products such as crops, agricultural residues, and dung to create liquid and gaseous fuels for motors, cooking, heating and lighting uses.)
- Support training programmes, credit facilities and business management courses directed towards women to help them become energy entrepreneurs in their own communities, and to encourage greater representation of women in the energy sector.

ENERGY FOR WOMEN AND WOMEN FOR ENERGY

"While non-profit — and particularly community — organisations face serious disadvantages in raising the capital for larger-scale service provision and in competing for contracts, when they succeed they have in general demonstrated a greater ability to provide lower-cost, equitable and affordable services — what we might call 'democratising' basic services rather than 'privatising' them....At the same time, there is an extraordinary increase in the number of women's collectives and self-help groups at the grassroots level...The challenge is now to link the two objectives of engendering and democratising rural energy services. If basic services such as energy are being privatised, the volume of credit going to poor women entrepreneurs is on the rise and...the time is ripe for innovative strategies that link these three forces into a completely new approach for empowering women as energy entrepreneurs....The role of the public sector, development aid and private philanthropies is to create an enabling environment and support systems that encourage this approach."

—Srilatha Batliwala and Amulya K. N. Reddy, in *Energy for Sustainable Development*, Volume VII, No. 3, September 2003



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