

# ESCWA Centre for Women Newsletter

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

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## **Gender and Renewable Energy**

Centre for Women UN- ESCWA

A monthly ECW issuance aiming at raising the gender awareness and responsiveness through highlighting the gender dimensions in various fields.

#### Why is Energy Important?

Energy is considered an enabling medium for economic development. Energy helps people in cooking, heating or cooling their homes, pumping water, lighting houses and workplaces, receiving information and getting entertainment. Energy is also closely linked to health care, educational attainment, jobcreation and climate change.



#### What about Renewable Energy?

Energy at large is certainly essential for human beings. Renewable energy research and utilization are now, being given more focus and attention internationally. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia - UN-ESCWA, has, for sometime now, been advocating the use of renewable energy since it is more environment-friendly and more affordable and available especially for the poor since this energy is mainly derived from the wind, water ,sun and biomass. Renewable energy can be more accessible in

rural and poor environments, not only because it is cheaper, but also because the technology used to produce it is simpler and more easily affordable. This technology can also be generated and developed by the communities themselves UN-ESCWA calls for the (1) diversifying the energy mix; (2) increasing energy accessibility; (3) combating poverty; (4) improving the quality of life for women (5) facilitating water desalination in remote areas; and (6) protecting the environment.









# Special events in the ESCWA Centre for Women

- ECW will be holding an EGM on the impact of wars and armed conflict on the advancement of women in the Arab region on January 23, 2007.
- ▶ ECW will host the third session of the Committee on Women from 24 -25 January 2007.
- PECW will soon launch an e-forum for the national Mechanisms for the Advancement and Empowerment of Women in the Arab region.

#### Highlights:

- 3-How is Gender Related to Renewable Energy?
- 4-How Can Renewable Energy Help Women?
- 5-Are Women Able to Access, Use and Control Energy in the Same Manner as Men?
- 6-How to Move Forward Towards More Gender Equality? What Are the Steps to be Taken?
- 7- Matrix
- 8- Facts and Figures



"Gender is a main determinant that determines access, ways of utilization, opportunities and control over all energy resources."

"Gender defines the different needs, priorities and perspectives that men and women have in different societies because of the roles they are playing."

#### How is Gender Related to Renewable Energy?

Energy, in general, and renewable energy, in specific, are not gender-neutral issues. Gender is a main determinant that defines access, ways of utilization, opportunities and control over all energy resources.

Gender is the socially constructed roles of men and women. Gender defines the different needs. priorities and perspectives of men and women in different societies. For a very long time, many people could not visualize a clear link between gender issues and concerns on the one hand and renewable energy on the other. Today, as awareness in gender issues grows, it becomes essential to examine the gender dimension of every aspect of life, in order to better service both men and women. This includes, not only examining and

understanding how men and women differ in terms of access, usage and control over resources, but also, addressing women's needs, roles and priorities in addition to attempting to bridge the gender gaps especially that men and women differ in technical skills, literacy and experiences with hardware.

Gender is important not only because men and women use, benefit from and access renewable energy differently, but because sometimes the opportunity of one of the sexes may impact the opportunity of the other. Moreover, examining the gender concerns will help us determine the barriers toward equal access, use and control over energy resources and help us find solutions to serve men and women equally.

#### How can Renewable Energy Help Women?

#### It can free them from Drudgery

The roles of men and women differ and as such their usage of renewable energy differs. Women, especially in the rural areas, tend to use energy for domestic purposes and for subsistence. Men, on the other hand, tend to use energy more for income generating activities.

Women in particular have greatly benefited from access to energy in general as it helped them cut down on long hours of vigorous manual work at home and in the field, as these tasks are now served by engines and machines. Access to energy services and the shift to modern energy for lighting, cooking and productive activities, have positively impacted women's literacy, education, economic opportunities and involvement with community affairs.

Women in rural households typically devote 25 percent or more of total domestic labor to wood collection<sup>1</sup>. Water collection is another difficult and time-consuming chore for rural populations, traditionally, the responsibility of females, preventing many

girls from attending school<sup>2</sup>. Because women spend many hours performing domestic tasks inside and outside the households, women and girls are likely to gain benefits due to time saving especially in water and fuel collection and improved health if they use clean fuels. If this time saved is sued to receive better education or to engage in income-generating activities, then indeed use of various sources of energy would lead to more gender equality and as such lead to more women empowerment.

Energy can also contribute to gender equity with regard to domestic work, as men are more willing to take over some domestic tasks, if these tasks are facilitates by energy-dependent household appliances.

- 1- Clancy, Joy. "Gender Equity and Renewable Energies." International Conference for Renewable Energies, Bonn (February 2004). Accessed at <a href="https://www.renewables-2004.de/pdf/TBP12-gender.pdf">www.renewables-2004.de/pdf/TBP12-gender.pdf</a> on 8-6-06.
- 2-Flavin, Christopher and Aech, Molly. Energy For Development – The Potential Role of Renewable Energy in Meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Paper prepared for the Ren 21 Network by the Worldwatch Institute found at

http://www.ren21.net/pdf/REN21Report%20RETs%20for %20MDGs.pdf (June10,2006)

"Access to energy for lighting, cooking and productive activities, have positively impacted women's literacy, education, economic opportunities and involvement with community affairs."

#### It can improve their health conditions

Shifting to renewable energy in particular, has positively impacted women's health as they no longer have to be exposed to smoke and carbon monoxide when they cook as they did before when they used wood and charcoal for cooking.

An estimated 570 million households worldwide rely on traditional biomass for cooking<sup>3.</sup> These represent almost one-third of the global population. Since women are the ones who traditionally cook in the household, research shows that women are typically exposed to very high levels of indoor air pollution, many for 3–7 hours a day over many years. By providing clean energy for

cooking, renewable energy resources reduce the disproportionate health burden of indoor air pollution on women <sup>4</sup>

Renewable energy substitutes the need for traditional biomass, alleviates the drudgery of fuel wood collection and promotes gender equality and women's empowerment.

- 3- Clancy, Joy. "Gender Equity and Renewable Energies." International Conference for Renewable Energies, Bonn (February 2004). Accessed at <a href="https://www.renewables">www.renewables</a> 2004.de/pdf/TBP12gender.pdf on 8-6-06.
- 4- Flavin, Christopher and Aech, Molly.
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### Are women Able to access, Use and Control Energy in the Same Manner as Men?

Access of women to renewable energy differs from that of men especially when dealing with the poorer categories of society. Urban areas also tend to benefit more from renewable energy.

Out of the 1.3 billion persons in the world who live in poverty, 70% are women and one third of households in rural areas are female single-headed households<sup>5</sup>. The lifting of subsidies and the increase in prices of energy often results in the decrease in energy quality and in an increase in illegal electricity connections. Poor households especially those headed by women tend to suffer more.

Access to energy is also linked to various limitations and social and financial barriers. Restricted freedom to mobility, for example, in some communities limits the access of women to some forms of energy and the services they make possible. Women and girls, for example, are sometimes restricted from moving during night hours, or using internet cafes because of social barriers and limitations.

Furthermore, when financial resources are limited, the distribution of resources within the household is impacted by gender, among other factors. Men and women may have different priorities, and as such, the priorities of men are more likely to be taken into consideration. While women's priorities in accessing resources of renewable energy may lie in having access to machines that facilitate domestic chores as well as those that may lead to income

generation, men's priorities may lie in improving their own income-generation opportunities or in seeking information, training or entertainment.

It has even been reported, by some gender experts that an unfair distribution of benefits of energy might lead to an increased work for women. An example of this is electricity, which can provide entertainment for men (watching TV, listening to the radio etc) and extended work for women (cooking, ironing etc.)<sup>6</sup>

While access to energy resources may be available to men and women, control over these resource remains mainly in the hands of men. If women empowerment is to be effected, and, renewable energy to be viewed as a tool for gender equality, it would be essential to examine the opportunities of women to access energy and to have control over it.

To improve access of women to renewable energy resources, providing women with credit, technical information and knowledge is necessary.

All these facts influence women's access and control over renewable energy as well as their ability to respond and be included in programmes and developmental interventions and to address gender differences.

5- Clancy, Joy. "Gender Equity and Renewable Energies." International Conference for Renewable Energies, Bonn (February 2004). Accessed at <a href="https://www.renewables-2004.de/pdf/TBP12-gender.pdf">www.renewables-2004.de/pdf/TBP12-gender.pdf</a> on 8-6-06

6-Ibid.

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#### How to Move Forward Towards More Gender Equality?

In order to empower women, one needs to address the inequalities that prevent women from benefiting from developmental interventions that affect their lives.

In order to do this, it is important to first determine how better to obtain adequate information that sheds the light on the different experiences and perspectives of men and women. This entails the following:

•Obtaining adequate quantitative sex-disaggregated data about

energy use and access as well as gender-disaggregated data on the choices men and women have.
•Using a gender analysis to understand how communities work from the perspective of relationships between men and women. An analysis of the workload and the time use of men and women can facilitate taking into account some gender considerations that may help achieve more gender equality and more solutions to numerous developmental problems.



#### Recommendations: How to Gender Mainstream Renewable Energy? Steps Needed to Move Forward:



- 1. Awareness-raising campaigns among policy-makers to ensure that there is no resistance to gender and gender issues.
- Design, formulation and implementation of more gendersensitive policies that take into consideration men's and women's needs.
- 3. Increase of efforts to raise awareness of women at large about renewable energy technologies and opportunities.
- Establishment of a network on women and energy to facilitate advocacy and knowledge sharing.
- 5. Inclusion of women in the design, planning, implementation, monitoring and as more gender- evaluation of energy programs and interventions.

- 6. Support to women in establishing microentrepreneurship income generating projects that involve renewable energy, especially when they face barriers related to gender issues and concerns.
- 7. Appointment of women decision-makers in the energy sector as well as gender sensitive men.

Finally, it is imperative to realize that gender equality and the empowerment of women, requires a holistic approach and not only one with a particular solution towards access and control over energy. This holistic approach requires addressing all forms of gender inequalities and vulnerabilities.

#### Matrix: Examples of Energy Meeting Women's Needs

Energy Form	Women's needs and issues		
	Practical needs	Productive needs	Strategic issues
Electricity	•pumping of water supplies - reducing the need to haul and carry mills for grinding •lighting to improve working conditions at home	<ul> <li>increase possibility of activities during evening hours</li> <li>provide refrigeration for food production and sale</li> <li>power for specialized enterprises such as hairdressing and internet cafes</li> </ul>	•make streets safer •allowing participation in other activities (e.g. evening classes and women's group meetings) •opening horizons through radio, TV and internet
Improved Biomass	•improved health through better stoves •less time and effort in gathering and carrying firewood	*more time for productive activities     *lower cost for process heat for income generating activities	control of natural forests in community forestry management frameworks.
Mechanical	•milling and grinding transport and portering of water and crops	•increases the variety of enterprises	•transport allowing access to commercial and social/political opportunities

Source: Clancy, Skutsch and Batchelor (2003) accessed at <a href="http://www.renewables2004.de/pdf/tbp/TBP12-gender.pdf">http://www.renewables2004.de/pdf/tbp/TBP12-gender.pdf</a> on 27-11-2006.

#### Interesting Facts And Figures

Qatar is by far the largest consumer of energy per capita, consuming 26,773 "kg of oil equivalent" per person. A distant second is Iceland, consuming 12,246 per capita. (Accessed on November, 20th 2006 at <a href="http://cafehayek.typepad.com/hayek/2004/07/interesting\_fac.html">http://cafehayek.typepad.com/hayek/2004/07/interesting\_fac.html</a>

We're on the Web!

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www.escwa.org.lb

#### **About Our Organization...**

The ESCWA Centre for Women was established on October 1, 2003, following the Commission's adoption of Resolution 240(XXII). This resolution, recognizing that a fundamental part of development is the empowerment of women, called for the creation of a Committee on Women comprising the member countries, and for the establishment of a women's Centre at ESCWA. The Centre continues and expands on the work carried out by the Women Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming Team, formerly a part of the Social Development Division at ESCWA.

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