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# ENERGY AND GENDER

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India ©2002 Katie Richey, Courtesy of Photoshare

Women account for roughly half of the world's population and have a key part to play in all aspects of development, including energy. Over the past decade substantial progress has been made with regard to women's rights, roles, and capabilities, and women are emerging as a stronger force in all aspects of political, social, and economic advancement. Women's health, education, economic opportunity, and human rights are at the core of successful, stable societies and economic growth.

Despite progress to date, much more needs to be done, particularly in developing countries, to bring women on a par with men. Gender-based obstacles in many parts of the world limit the effectiveness of poverty alleviation and economic growth initiatives. A majority of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty are women, and their ability to enhance wealth and social status is often hampered by legal and social structures that restrict their rights to own land, enter into contracts, receive education, find employment, or engage in business.

When women do participate in farming or entrepreneurial endeavors, they may not be permitted to own or lease property or borrow money without a man's signature or permission. It may also be difficult for women to receive training and extension services or acquire necessary equipment, supplies, and natural resources.

The biases begin early. In many developing countries, girls are more likely to be kept home from school to share the daily burden of domestic chores, because their education is considered of less importance than that of boys.

### The Energy-Gender Nexus

Energy is essential in expanding economic and social opportunities for women. Looking carefully at the energy priorities of both women and men, and understanding the constraints that particularly affect women, helps ensure that the needs of families are better met, and earning potential is improved. Because women are household energy managers, energy users and suppliers, and budding energy-consuming entrepreneurs, including them in energy sector decisions that affect them can help ensure more effective use of resources and satisfied customers.

Some of the important ways that providing modern energy services can empower women include:

### Poverty Relief and Economic Development

Because of traditional gender-based divisions of labor, women typically have fewer opportunities to seek employment outside the home. However, in both urban and rural communities, many women supplement family

ENERGY FORM	WOMEN'S NEEDS		
	Practical	Productive	Strategic
Electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pumped water supplies reduce the need to haul and carry</li> <li>Mills for grinding</li> <li>Lighting to improve working conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater possibility to increase activities during evening hours</li> <li>Refrigeration for food production and sale</li> <li>Power for commercial enterprises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make streets safer, allowing participation in other activities (e.g., evening classes and women's group meetings)</li> <li>Improve health and increase income</li> <li>Open horizons through radio, TV, and Internet</li> </ul>
Improved biomass (supply and conversion technology)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved health through better stoves</li> <li>Less time and effort spent in gathering and carrying firewood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More time for productive/ social /educational activities</li> <li>Lower cost for process heat for income-generating activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Control of natural forests in community forestry management frameworks</li> <li>Children able to attend school, improve lives/livelihoods</li> </ul>
Mechanical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Milling and grinding</li> <li>Transport of water and crops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased variety of enterprises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transport to facilitate access to commercial and social/political opportunities</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Clancy, Skutsch, and Batchelor (2003) *The Gender – Energy – Poverty Nexus*

incomes by engaging in small-scale businesses that fit with, and are often extensions of, their household activities. Consequently, improved electrical services and better fuels not only lighten the burdens of women's daily chores, but also open up new opportunities

mechanized or motorized equipment for planting, watering, fertilizing, harvesting, storing, or processing their crops. This limits productivity, income, and the family's nutritional intake. Men engaged in commercial farming tend to control any available modern equipment.

**“We must ensure that women acquire the political and economic access to become full participants in society. I’m inspired by the words of Farahnaz Nazir, founder of the Afghanistan Women’s Association. She said, ‘Society is like a bird. It has two wings. And a bird cannot fly if one wing is broken.’”**

**Laura Bush, First Lady, United States of America  
Remarks at the World Economic Forum, May 2005**

to start or expand small-scale enterprises, thereby promoting economic independence and empowerment. Electricity enables women to increase their activities and information sources by supporting radios, TVs, phones, computers, and small enterprises such as sewing centers and grinding mills.

**Water**

Women are generally responsible for securing water for the household. When there is no indoor running water, women and girls go to wells, springs, rivers, and streams to fill water containers and carry them home, often over difficult terrain for many miles. Energy for water pumps from potable sources can ease this time burden for other activities and improve family health, sanitation, and hygiene.

**Education**

Girls are regularly kept home from school to help their mothers complete domestic chores. With electricity and modern fuels that reduce the time and effort required for household maintenance activities, girls are free to go to school, and women have time and opportunity for adult education and other activities.

**Agriculture**

In places where women are responsible for growing food for their families, they generally do not have

Women, too, benefit from access to irrigation pumps, transport systems, and modern processing equipment.

**Natural Resources Management**

Women in rural areas use plants, forests, lakes, rivers, and other natural resources to provide food, fuel, water, and medicine for their families. As a result, women are particularly vulnerable when ecological systems are damaged or destroyed. They also hold proprietary access to traditional practices that can be helpful in sustainably managing forests, agricultural land, and other sources of energy.

**Health**

- Lack of modern energy services has a disproportionate effect on women, whose traditional functions include supplying the household with fuel. In many rural areas women and children, primarily girls, spend long hours and suffer physical problems from gathering wood and agricultural wastes and carrying heavy loads over long and unsafe distances. Improved access to modern fuels, electricity, and transportation systems helps relieve women and their families from the time demands and physical exertion of collecting fuel for cooking, heating, and other household and income-generating uses.
- Most respiratory diseases and related problems (including acute eye infections) in women and children

in developing countries result from cooking over smoky indoor fires with poor ventilation. Even in cities and suburbs, wood or charcoal is often the primary fuel used for cooking and heating. Introduction of cleaner fuels, more efficient stoves, improved ventilation, and alternative energy sources has been shown to have positive impact on the health and well-being of women, small children, and other family members most frequently found at home near an open fire.

The types of energy sources and technologies used are generally less important than the types of services that they support. The need for cleaner cooking and heating fuels can be met in a number of ways, through better distribution systems for natural gas or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), innovative biogas or biofuel systems, solar cookers, or improved stove designs with better ventilation. Water pumps can be hooked up to

electricity supplies or run directly by wind, hydro or solar power. Electricity can be supplied using grid-connected or stand-alone renewable energy technologies based on wind, water, solar power, and biofuels, or diesel generators.

### How Is USAID Helping?

USAID recognizes that promoting a stronger and more productive role for women in development demands a broad and flexible approach designed to take both women's and men's participation into account. At USAID, the Women in Development program provides leadership on integrating gender considerations throughout all of the agency's key sectors. Increasing access to energy services is an important way of reducing gender-based constraints to economic growth, such as women's limited education and income-generating opportunities.

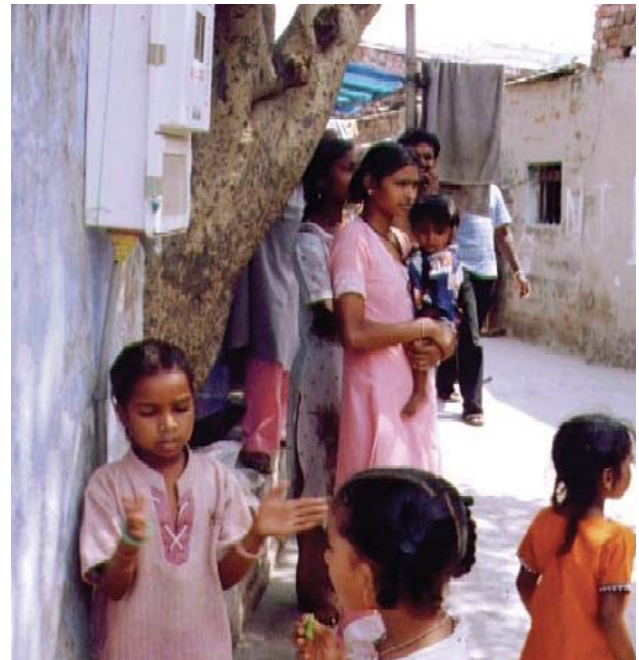
**Indoor air pollution, caused in large part by traditional cooking practices, kills nearly 2 million women and children each year.**

## AHMEDABAD, INDIA—ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY BENEFITS POOR NEIGHBORHOODS

Very few families in India's poorest neighborhoods receive electricity. This has meant that women spend their daylight hours on menial chores that could be eased greatly with dependable access to power.

With the Ahmedabad Electric Company and local organizations, USAID helped plan a system to provide safe and reliable electrical service for 1.2 million people. After the program's initial success in providing high-quality, reliable service, the local utility expanded the program to another 30,000 households and aims to reach 200,000 more impoverished customers by 2007.

Reliable service means that family members, including women, can work or study in the evenings and use sewing machines and other appliances to increase productivity and earning potential.



USAID/Virginia Foley

**ABOVE: Households in Ahmedabad's poorest neighborhoods now pay less for a more dependable electricity supply.**

## RWANDA—WOMEN EMPOWERED THROUGH BIOMASS ENERGY PRODUCTION

Ninety-eight percent of the Rwandan people use charcoal and/or wood fuel for cooking. Women in the community of SAM Muhima have received USAID support to produce high quality biomass briquettes from household garbage, which are used as cooking fuel and organic fertilizer. Their use has helped to reduce deforestation in the area and return soil nutrients to degraded land. The project has created new employment opportunities for women in the community, improved local health by disposing of household waste, and reduced costs of waste management.



M. Kithome/ARD

**ABOVE: Rwandan women's group collects household garbage for conversion to organic fertilizer and biomass fuel briquettes.**

This document is one of a set of brochures developed by the U.S. Agency for International Development to highlight energy's critical links to other sector priorities of USAID, its overseas missions, partner countries, and other stakeholders in the development community. The brochure set includes briefs on Energy and:

Gender | Small and Medium Enterprise | Natural Resource Management and the Environment | Health and Education |  
Economic Growth and Trade | Democracy, Governance, and Conflict Management | Water and Agriculture

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