ENERGY
a) Energy policy & equality between women and men

Looking at equality between women and men raises broad questions about the energy sector and policy

Conventional discussions on energy policy are often grounded in technical approaches that look at oil and gas extraction or electrical grid expansion. However, increased attention to the inter-linkages between the environment and energy use by both women and men has expanded the scope of attention. Several themes in recent discussions facilitate attention to equality considerations:[*]

- the focus on energy *services* ("the desired and useful products, processes or services that result from the use of energy, for instance, illumination, comfortable indoor climate, refrigerated storage, transportation, appropriate temperatures for cooking…");
- the realisation that most conventional energy strategies fail to help meet basic human needs for the poor in developing countries
- the broadening of the energy sector to include energy provided by both poor women and men through their labour; and
- the interest in linkages among energy services, environmental issues and poverty elimination.

When people - as both producers and consumers of energy services - are brought into energy discussions, there is a greater potential to introduce gender equality considerations.

A focus on people (women/men) leads to different questions: In the choice of sectoral investments, is there explicit attention to the energy service needs of women (especially poor women) as well as the requirements of men? Is there an understanding of the impact of energy investments on people and the environment? Who will be able to use the new energy services? Will women and men both benefit from these investments?

Energy policy decisions and gender inequality

Although energy policy is often assumed to be gender-neutral, policy decisions have implications for equality between women and men.

Investment decisions: Energy policy determines which energy sectors receive attention and support. Basic decisions are made to build hydro dams or improve the fossil fuel distribution system or investigate the feasibility of small-scale alternative energy sources. These basic decisions have gender implications. For example, large-scale expansion of the electrical grid without support for domestic connections may bypass poor women. On the other hand, support for village-level initiatives focused on renewable energy sources may provide women with both new energy services and employment.

Access and availability of energy supply: Energy availability trends can affect women and men differently (for example, black outs during time usually spent preparing meals can mean more work for women). Elements of energy access (cost, physical distribution, new technologies, etc.) can also offer more benefits to men than women.

Tariffs and pricing: Given gender differences in both access to and control over household income, pricing decisions can affect women and men differently. One option to increase access by the poor in particular poor women is to charge lower rates for initial usage and then significantly higher rates as consumption increases. Loans or staggered payment structures may also increase access where initial 'start-up'/'hook-up' costs are high.

Infrastructure construction: Large-scale energy projects raise gender equality issues relating to both social impact (how are women and men differently affected by large-scale dislocations?) and to employment possibilities (do women benefit from the increased economic activity?).

Community participation strategies: There is growing interest in community participation, ownership and management of energy projects. Specific attention to gender inequalities is required if women are to participate along with men.

Human resources planning: Personnel strategies for energy utilities can often benefit from attention to equity issues (including hiring, promotion, and access to training). Measures to ensure women's access to opportunities in non-traditional fields may also be appropriate.

Environmental issues: Given women's work in the home, they are more vulnerable to certain energy-related environmental problems such as cooking smoke. Given the gender trends in the labour force, men tend to be more exposed to environmental hazards in energy-related sectors (work in nuclear plants, exposure to dangerous chemicals or live electrical wires…).

[*] The first three points are from J. Goldemburg and T. B. Johansson (nd). *Energy as an Instrument for Socio-Economic Development*. UNDP/EAP. http://www.undp.org/seed/energy/policy

Questionable assumptions about gender inequalities and roles in energy planning	
Macro energy policies affect men and women equally.	▪ Investments in household energy (primarily of concern to women) are relatively recent and still only account for a minor proportion of funding. Yet even these investments have been criticised for their focus on women as inefficient cooks. Analysts such as Cecelski (1992) point out that this narrow focus has led to missed opportunities to examine broad household energy needs and different ways of meeting those needs. ▪ Energy prices and availability influence the viability of micro-enterprises. Many of the traditional activities women use to generate income are energy intensive (for example, food preparation and processing, beer brewing, pottery). ▪ Women and men have different domestic responsibilities, with women making decisions relating to domestic energy uses (for example, in food preparation and heating water). Therefore energy shortages, price increases and cost-recovery plans tend to fall disproportionately on women. They may have to work longer hours to generate the income to pay increased rates or they may cut back on their energy purchases.
Gender equality issues are only relevant when looking at small-scale energy initiatives such as fuel-efficient cooking stoves or the availability of wood fuel.	▪ When gender issues are raised in energy discussions, many planners turn immediately to the issue of stoves. However, equality issues are relevant across a much broader spectrum including pricing schedules, investment priorities, infrastructure investments (and dislocation), equitable participation by women and men in community participation schemes and even the broad definition of energy demand and supply. ▪ "The multifaceted aspects of women's rural energy problems elude planners. There is little understanding of the rural energy problem beyond open fires. This has led to a concentration on the stoves programmes as the prescription for curing energy problems. Little effort has been made in addressing a wider range of rural women's energy needs for agriculture, transport, income generating activities and their own human energy input." (Nyoni, 1997)
Technology inputs (an improved stove, a biogas plant, rural electrification) will meet women's energy needs and promote development.	▪ Many technological inputs fail to respond to actual needs and circumstances: "Many improved cook stoves were designed by male engineers without adequate consultation with the women who would have to use them. The result was very poor fuel saving performance and limited adoption of the new stoves." (Cecelski, 1992, p.9). Consultation and involvement of women will help to ensure both the feasibility and efficiency of new technologies. ▪ Women do not always have access to new technological inputs because of lack of income, lack of access to credit or limited access to extension services. ▪ Increased electrification may not provide unambiguous benefits for women (given gender inequalities and work responsibilities). For example, Cecelski (1992) quotes a study from Thailand that documented longer work hours for women in agricultural tasks once they could prepare the evening meal by electric light. There may be potential negative impacts that should also be factored into the cost-benefit analysis of any project. Compensatory measures or complementary initiatives might be appropriate.
Women have time to invest in using and/or building new stoves.	▪ Many planners often fail to recognise the multiple demands on women's time (domestic responsibilities, work to generate income, community involvement…). They often make the assumption that women have 'free time.'
Increasing the number of women in energy-related fields will automatically result in more 'gender aware' energy policies.	▪ While measures to increase the involvement of women in decision-making positions and non-traditional careers are important, these actions by themselves will not ensure that energy policy is sensitive to gender differences and inequalities. Although there is a need to increase the number of women planners, engineers and energy technicians, there is also a need to increase the understanding of gender equality issues among all energy planners.

Sources: Elizabeth W. Cecelski (1992). *Women, Energy and Environment: Some Directions for Policy Research.* Background paper for presentation at the Gender, Science and Development (GSD) Programme Development Meeting of the "Guild Inn Group", International Federation of Institutes for Advanced Study, Bangkok.

Sithembile L. Nyoni (1997). "Women and Energy: A Zimbabwean Perspective." **Energia News**. Issue 2. Available on the internet at: http://www.energia.org/energia/May1997/energia2.html

Judi Wangalwa Wakhungu and Elizabeth Cecelski (1995). "A Crisis in Power: Energy Planning for Development" in Gender Working Group, United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development, **Missing Links: Gender Equity in Science and Technology for Development**. IDRC in association with Intermediate Technology Publications and UNIFEM.

This information sheet is a companion to another Sida publication: **Mainstreaming Equality between Women and Men: Handbook on Gender Perspectives in Energy Sector Development**. Published by the Infrastructure Division, June 1998.