

THE FAMILY CASE FOR CLEAN ENERGY: SUSTAINABLE ENERGY IN DEVELOPING CONTEXTS

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Introduction

Since 2015, SDG 7 has provided an ambitious mandate: to ensure access to modern energy for all, to double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix, and to double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency. While SDG 5 separately recognises the importance of gender equality, in reality energy access and gender are inextricably linked. Addressing these issues together can offer multiple development gains.

Poverty prevents many families from accessing and benefiting from modern energy sources, at the household level and in income-generating activities. Inadequate access to clean and modern energy disproportionately impacts women and children. The burning of biomass for heating and cooking is often fatal for poorer communities, who have less access to clean energy. Currently, three billion people lack access to clean-cooking solutions and are exposed to dangerous levels of indoor air pollution, which cause an estimated 3.8 million premature deaths per year. Women and children, who typically spend three to seven hours per day by the fire, are most at risk. These numbers are not likely to change significantly: projections show that in 2030, 2.3 billion people will still be reliant on traditional fuels for their energy needs, and more than one billion people will still be without access to electricity. While progress is being made, the overwhelming reality is that it will not be possible to meet targets for affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy access for all unless the different energy needs of men and women are met. As the 2030 deadline for the SDG Agenda looms, there is a need to do better.

Key Findings

1. Universal energy access targets are unlikely to be met unless energy policies are aligned to the energy needs of families, taking into account men and women's assets, skills, limitations and capabilities, and existing social norms.
2. Improved access to clean, affordable and reliable energy has significant health and economic benefits for poorer communities, especially women and children.
3. End-use appliances that deliver modern energy services to save time can transform familial relations, allowing women the opportunity to earn income while children can focus on education.
4. Employing both men and women in energy-system supply chains is good for families and it is good for business. Increased household income means more investment in education, healthcare and child welfare.
5. Effective energy transitions require not only a transformation in energy policy, but also a change in processes, and changes within the organizations that drive these processes.
6. Context matters. This means that local and national research must play a key role in designing local interventions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To meet universal targets, energy policies need to be better aligned to domestic needs. By developing energy policy in dialogue with the requirements of families, we will improve living conditions for millions living in poverty. Poorer communities have less access to clean energy technologies. As a result, women and children disproportionately suffer from health conditions that result from indoor air pollution. Access to clean energy therefore results in significant health benefits for communities.

Further, participation in the energy supply chain offers the opportunity to lift families out of poverty. With reliable access to clean energy, women are better able to carry out work to advance the welfare of their families. When women earn an income, they tend to invest in education, healthcare and their children's welfare. The transition to clean energy at home is therefore a win-win situation for everyone.

In order to achieve energy access targets set by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we must radically transform the way that the energy transition is designed and implemented. This means shaping policies according to family needs, in dialogue with social and economic factors. This is only possible when both men and women participate in the design and implementation of energy policies and programmes.

Policy Recommendations

In order to ensure that energy transitions work for communities, policy must reflect our improved understanding of the links between domestic energy use, health, gender and economics. Decision makers need to be aware of the very real dangers of inadequate access to clean energy for families, as well as the socio-economic benefits that come with better energy access.

1. Energy policy must be locally informed and must specifically attend to social factors, including the differing needs of men, women and children.
2. Increase the affordability of energy services through innovative financial mechanisms, such as by enabling payment flexibility and reducing payment size. Schemes must be appropriate to local needs and circumstances.
3. In order for this to happen, both men and women need to be involved in the design, implementation, and monitoring of energy policies and programmes.
4. To support women's involvement in energy-system value chains and employment, high-level policies need to be more effectively translated into practical strategies, action plans, and operational actions on the ground.
5. Improve modern energy access for domestic businesses. Specific actions to promote the use of modern energy in this sector include provision of information, financing mechanisms, investment in energy infrastructure, and targeted subsidies for women.
6. Support women's roles in energy decision-making at the household, organisational and policy levels.

A policy brief for central governments in developing countries, sub-sovereign national bodies, universities and research institutes, community organizations, banks and private investors, aid donors, multilateral financial institutions, UN agencies and other international organizations.

Implications

1. Increasing accessibility to cleaner and safer sources of cooking and heating fuel domestically will result in improvements to the health of families across developing contexts.
2. Better access to affordable and reliable energy sources means that domestic businesses are both safer and more efficient. For example, women's energy-intensive food preparation businesses need modern energy and can be supported within cooking energy programmes or through women's entrepreneurship programmes.
3. Access to modern energy also saves time on household chores. This means that women have more opportunity to earn an income, meaning that household incomes grow.
4. Research has found that women prioritise spending their income on education of their children and on health care. One implication of this is the growth of child literacy rates and health care provisions in rural contexts.
5. Improved literacy and healthcare generally mean better opportunities and employment prospects for children in the future, reducing poverty rates and therefore working towards achieving SDG 5 and 7.
6. Empowering women to take up employment across the whole supply chain will lead to economic growth in the sector and a faster roll-out of modern energy supply.

Sources

ENERGIA (2019), Gender in the transition to energy for all: from evidence to inclusive policies, ENERGIA the International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy

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