



INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ON GENDER AND SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

High Level Policy Consultation on Networking Towards Gender and Poverty Sensitive Energy Policies

Summary

The International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy (ENERGIA) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) will organize a two-day High Level Policy Consultation on Networking Towards Gender and Poverty Sensitive Energy Policies during the week beginning 3 November 2008 at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand. The event will be preceded by in-depth discussions among leading gender, poverty and energy experts within the region drawn from government agencies, academia, industry and non-governmental organizations. Discussion papers prepared by the group on key issues will be presented at the Policy Consultation, which is expected to launch a regional policy innovation forum on gender, poverty and energy. The Policy Consultation and activities leading up to it are sponsored by the Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS), Netherlands, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and ESCAP.

Background

In the Asia-Pacific region, some one billion people remain without electricity and some 1.7 billion continue to rely heavily on traditional biomass for fuel, their main source of motive power being human and/or animal labour. Most of these people are poor or near-poor and energy deprivation remains a core cause of their chronic poverty in developing countries. In turn, poverty inhibits people from gaining access to essential energy services, resulting in a vicious cycle that has proven stubborn to break.

Caught in this vicious cycle are the women, for whom lack of access to modern fuels and electricity leaves no choice other than to depend on traditional fuels and physical labour. Long hours spent by women on daily survival tasks —fuel gathering, cooking and household chores — mean they have little room for self-development or for productive activities that can contribute to family incomes and lift them out of poverty. Steep rises in energy prices and their related impact on food prices have been a serious setback for poverty reduction. While poor women struggle to make ends meet at a rising personal cost, millions of the near-poor now find themselves sliding back into poverty.

In this worsening situation, developing countries need to enlarge their energy policy focus which currently emphasizes expanding fossil fuel supplies, accelerating privatization of the energy industry and reducing subsidies on modern fuels and electricity. While these measures might be rational from the viewpoint of enhancing the market efficiency of the energy sector, they can have a devastating effect on the

poor and the women among them by making energy even less affordable. Energy access cannot be viewed as an issue of supply (availability of energy sources) or technology (for use/distribution of energy) alone. For policies on energy access and poverty reduction to succeed, it is necessary to understand the nature of human needs that really shape the energy demand.

Women's energy needs are most often invisible in the information and analysis provided to policy makers, except for the women-fuel wood linkage which gets addressed at the periphery of mainstream energy policy. Even in countries that carry out energy demand assessments as a part of energy planning/policy making, the unit of disaggregation is typically the household, which is considered the smallest unit at which energy needs arise. This tends to lump together men's and women's energy needs without distinguishing between the characteristics of these two separate sets of needs. It is essential for energy policy and planning to go down one final level of disaggregation — that of the individual energy user — to bring in the gender dimension.

In countries committed to gender and poverty issues (many government departments have a gender desk, and are expected to undertake gender responsive budgeting), policy makers are aware of the need to 'engender' energy policy but lack knowledge on how this could be achieved. They tend to identify calls for gender-sensitive energy policies or plans with the broader gender rights movement which is viewed as a political issue. As a result, their responses are framed in a political context, with broad statements of goals on gender appearing in energy policy documents without specific directions to those in charge of implementing policy as to how these goals are to be measured or achieved. Such aspirational statements on gender offer little inducement to planners and implementing agencies to assess the energy needs of men and women separately.

Poverty issues fare somewhat better in energy policies in that policy statements are supported by certain specific measures, usually energy price subsidies and rationing/quota arrangements to cope with situations of acute supply scarcity. Nonetheless, their effectiveness is challenged by the continued energy deprivation of millions of poor households that continue to depend on traditional biomass fuels and do without electricity for their basic needs. Energy price subsidies, for instance, have proven notorious for their inability to reach the poor due to their widespread abuse under weak energy sector governance, with the bulk of subsidies escaping to those who can afford market prices. With market liberalization widely embraced as the

Energy security challenges for Asia and their impacts on the poor and women

- Escalating energy demand to fuel economic growth
 - Supply concerns for most regional countries that are net energy importers
 - Skyrocketing energy prices, led by oil prices
 - Energy-induced threats to food security
- Since 2005, oil prices have more than doubled from US\$ 70 to US\$147*
- Energy price increases, averaging 74% between 2002 and 2005 alone, have had a severe impact on the poor, making them pay
 - 171% more for cooking fuels
 - 120% more for transportation
 - 67% more for electricity and
 - 55% more for lighting fuels
 - Impacts on poor women have been the most unsettling:
 - erosion of already low access to modern fuels and electricity
 - scarcity of pumped water for drinking, cooking and other basic needs
 - longer hours collecting traditional fuels
 - rising health problems from heavy loads and smoky fires as more women revert to biomass
 - reduced time for education and employment

means to economic growth, public energy utilities as well as the private energy industry now have less, not more, policy requirements or incentives to cater for the poor.

Embedding gender and poverty into energy policies will require:

- A clearer understanding and appreciation of the specific energy needs of the poor, distinguishing between the needs of men and women, and the unique challenges to energy access posed by the current climate of spiraling energy prices.
- Clear policy directives translating broad goals on gender and poverty into specific, measurable, objectives: such as, enhancing per capita electricity and modern fuel consumption of men and women separately, reducing gender-distinguished impacts of rising energy prices, assessing the progress of transition from traditional biomass and human labour to modern fuels and electricity (e.g., number of improved stoves disseminated, number of wood stoves replaced by stoves using modern energy, number of kerosene lamps replaced by electric lighting, time spent by women on fuel gathering), and monitoring levels of energy access for livelihood (e.g., number of income-earning enterprises set up by the poor, additional employment generated by such enterprises, value of assets owned by the poor).
- Systematic processes that allow energy policy makers to monitor and reflect upon the poor's and women's energy access levels and the effectiveness of strategies and policies intended to enhance them through interaction with policy makes from other countries and through grassroots feedback mechanisms.
- Changes to energy planning and policy formulation institutions, processes and methodologies to mainstream poverty and gender considerations.

Objectives

In order to address the foregoing, the International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy (ENERGIA) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) will organize a high level consultation among senior policy makers in Asia on the integration of gender and poverty concerns into energy policy. The policy consultation will:

Why should key decision makers attend the policy consultation?

- An opportunity to network with like-minded (and positioned) people in the region
 - An opportunity to be among the first ministries/departments to implement gender and poverty sensitive policy in energy sector
 - An opportunity to learn about examples and case studies of making energy policy and programmes gender and poverty sensitive
- Share concrete evidence/examples from developing countries to demonstrate how energy policies or planning approaches with closer attention to gender and poverty considerations can widen energy access and reduce poverty more rapidly.
 - Present and discuss tools and approaches for gender and poverty sensitive energy policy formulation, planning, implementation and monitoring.
 - Inform policy makers about ways to develop strategies and policies to integrate gender and poverty concerns into energy policies and programmes in a more systematic, cost-effective and culturally harmonious manner.
 - Assist planners to explore changes to planning processes and methods, training and capacity building, and reviews of existing energy plans and programmes.

Audience

- Energy policy makers from countries in which ENERGIA and ESCAP have been active.
- Senior administrators in the energy sector and those who advise policy makers;
- Senior administrators in relevant other sectors, such as poverty reduction, women's development, agricultural/rural development, water supply and health, small and medium enterprise development, and financing/micro-financing.
- Representatives of energy financing institutions, donor agencies, and leaders of women's movements and trade unions;
- Individuals involved in intergovernmental policy processes;
- Research/training institutions or policy think tanks that feed into government decision making processes;

Activities

Step 1: Focused e-discussion: identification of issues

The programme will start with a focused e-discussion, moderated by two senior gender and energy experts. The e-discussion will deal with key questions on:

- What is the emerging gender, energy and poverty scenario in developing countries?
- Which are the most pressing issues that need attention (e.g., oil and food price rises and their implications for the poor and women)?
- What information do policy makers need to address these issues?
- What concrete actions are being sought from governments, donors, the energy industry and the international energy community?
- What actions and commitments can the group make ahead of and beyond the policy consultation?

The e-discussion will be limited to 2-3 'prime movers' in each country who are closely linked to national energy policy formulation and planning. ENERGIA national focal points (NFPs) will help identify such individuals. It will also include authors of discussion papers on selected themes identified and commissioned by ENERGIA and ESCAP. The papers will be reviewed/commented upon by the e-discussion group before being finalized for presentation to the policy consultation. Technical advisors from ENERGIA will guide/supervise their work. While the theme papers will form the primary basis of the policy consultation, ENERGIA and ESCAP may also commission a limited number of country position papers authored by other members of the e-discussion group to highlight policy innovations and best practices¹.

Depending on the commitment and availability of its members, the e-discussion group will form the nucleus of the regional policy innovation forum, to be launched at the end of the policy consultation.

¹ [Subject to resource availability.](#)

Step 2: Regional policy consultation: discussion of issues and solutions, and launch of regional policy innovation forum

The policy consultation will:

- Serve as a platform to highlight gender and poverty perspectives related to energy based on the theme papers and country position papers.
- Share/generate new ideas and approaches to promote sustainable gender and poverty sensitive energy strategies and policies.
- Identify needs for situation analysis, policy review, capacity building, information and advocacy for policy formulation and planning at national and sub-national levels.
- Launch a regional policy innovation forum for integrating gender and poverty concerns into energy policies and plans².

The policy innovation forum is intended as a longer term mechanism to identify new policies, approaches and methodologies to mainstream gender and poverty concerns in energy decision-making; initiate country level actions on awareness development, capacity building and policy advocacy; support policy makers, planners and project implementers at national and sub-national levels; and act as a technical backstop for future policy consultations and dialogues at regional and national levels.

Given the current urgency of energy security concerns, policy makers attending the consultation will be interested in both near-term solutions/measures and longer term process changes. The following key questions will be raised and addressed at the policy consultation:

- How do the current energy and food price crises threaten gains made in poverty reduction over the past decade, and how to protect and build upon these gains in an era of high energy prices?
- What immediate steps can governments take to build or strengthen existing safety nets to protect the poor and the women among them from the impacts of higher energy prices and potential energy supply disruptions?
- What medium to long term strategic shifts are needed in energy and related sector policies to accelerate energy access to the millions of poor and women currently without adequate modern fuels and electricity?
- Which energy planning approaches and project delivery mechanisms have proven effective in reducing poverty and empowering women?
- How can Asia-Pacific countries come together to address energy, poverty and gender concerns as an integral part of their efforts to enhance their national energy security?

The consultation will also identify major windows of opportunities within the region and internationally where policy interventions would be most effective. ENERGIA's experience with gender audits in Africa and Asia will form a crucial input to discussions on this.

² The policy consultation may also identify (formally or informally) additional individuals who could join members of the initial e-discussion group to constitute the regional policy innovation forum.

In order to ensure the participants take back the knowledge from the consultation and to track how they pursue it in their respective contexts, they will be requested to identify:

- a) existing opportunities to influence policies (e.g., COP and COP-like events that many of them might attend at regional or international levels; national consultations on medium-term development plans);
- a) concrete follow-up actions utilizing their heightened awareness of the interlinkages between gender, poverty and energy; and
- b) potential technical, informational, human and financial resources they might consider sharing to support the regional policy innovation forum.

The policy consultation will lead to two documented outcomes:

- a report on proceedings to which participants could refer to track down tools, issues, key policy options and discussion forums, list of participants, personal action plans, etc., and
- a policy brief/strategy paper summarizing the new challenges for gender, energy and poverty in the region, and the approach agreed upon at the consultation to address these challenges.

The policy brief/strategy paper will focus on marrying short-term solutions to longer term changes to policies and planning approaches. It will be drafted shortly after the consultation and shared with policy makers who took part in the event. They will be asked to provide inputs to the draft, which will subsequently be published as a joint statement/declaration of the consultation by ENERGIA and ESCAP. The final brief/paper will be distributed widely among key policy level officials regionally and internationally.

Step 3: Regional policy innovation forum: following up on policy consultation

Following the formal launch of the regional policy innovation forum at the end of the policy consultation, ENERGIA and ESCAP will reconstitute and expand the e-discussion group started in Step 1. Additional individuals identified by the policy consultation will be approached to join the forum. ENERGIA and ESCAP will also, through their respective contact networks, bring in other committed professionals from national and regional levels who could serve at the forum.

The policy innovation forum will be coordinated by ENERGIA with support from ESCAP³. As a minimum, it will include information gathering, periodic online policy dialogues, and planning for regional and international policy forums and events. Over the longer term, the aim is to develop the forum as an active community of interacting practitioners and as a lobbying force to bring about essential changes in policies at national and international levels. Additional activities that the forum might engage in will consist of:

- a) seminars or conferences at regional and national levels;
- b) policy reviews and analytical studies;
- c) gender audits of energy policies, plans and programmes;
- d) pilot projects at national and local levels;

³ To be confirmed subsequently.

- e) partnerships with private sector to mobilize investment and facilitate access to technologies for the poor and women;
- f) collaboration with civil society organizations for local level project identification and delivery; and
- g) information services, including publication of policy briefs, research summaries and case studies.