



Reducing protection risks and women's work burden through improved energy access

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Women and children are often not only responsible for cooking but also tasked with collecting the fuel needed to prepare meals. This often involves walking long distances to collect fuelwood which exposes them to protection risks and a significant work burden, especially in protracted crises. As a result, less time is left for child-care and productive activities that can provide additional income for the household. Improving access to sustainable energy is key to tackle these issues. At the same time, it is of crucial importance to include in-depth gender analyses when planning and implementing SAFE-related projects.

Key issues

The energy needs of forcibly displaced populations can become a driver of environmental degradation, as the collection of fuelwood puts pressure on scarce natural resources. Droughts and erratic rainfall can further exacerbate **environmental degradation**. This leads women and children to walk ever-greater distances to obtain the fuelwood they need in order to cook meals for their families (SAFE, 2016). Dwindling natural resources also constitute a significant **source of conflict**. Protracted crises, inter communal conflict and associated environmental impacts have led to a substantial number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and refugees at global level. The social structures that may have previously provided various forms of protection for women are often no longer in place in displacement settings. This makes the collection of fuelwood a heavy burden on women and a highly dangerous activity.

The task of collecting fuelwood primarily falls upon women and children (FAO 2013). When women and children spend their time searching for fuelwood, it leaves **less time for other household tasks, productive activities and education**. Women are less involved in income-generating activities, childcare and other ways to support themselves and/or their family, while children may miss school. Furthermore, the collection of fuelwood poses the risk of **exposure to Gender-based Violence (GBV)**. Walking long distances in insecure

conflict-affected areas significantly increases the possibility of physical violence, abduction and rape in addition to other existing dangers such as wild animal attacks. The lack of lightning increases these risks inside displacement camps and settlements. Having a light at night will not only increase safety, but will also allow people to study during dark hours (e.g. children can do their homework), and will allow for certain kinds of income-generating activities to continue after dark (UNHCR, 2014).

In many cases, women do not have an alternative to the collection of fuelwood. Depending on the specific situation, a number of **coping strategies** are used, such as the selling of food in order to buy cooking fuel. This is most common in refugee camps, when people depend on food rations and may not have legitimate access to surrounding natural resources. Malnutrition is an important consequence of this strategy (UNHCR, 2014). Another coping strategy is survival or transactional sex. Women may be forced to trade sexual favors in order to afford cooking fuel. This strategy is often an urban phenomenon, where fuel is more likely to be purchased than collected and where prices for fuel tend to be higher. Survival sex has significant consequences for personal safety, health and dignity (UNHCR, 2014) (WFP, 2012).

Technical considerations

Women's work burden in rural areas is situated in three main spheres, namely the productive, reproductive and social sphere. This **triple work burden** is disproportionate in comparison to the work burden of men who are often paid for their work in the productive sphere and are largely absent from the reproductive roles. Women's work in all three spheres is mostly unpaid, undervalued and unrecognized. Moreover, they are restricted from opportunities to engage in income-generating activities due to the heavy workload involved in taking care of children and sick or elderly family members and other household tasks.

It is important to account for this disproportionate work burden and associated protection risks for women when assessing **energy needs**. The essential role of women in food security and nutrition, through their responsibility to provide household energy and prepare food, is intrinsically linked with issues of energy access. Due to differing household roles, women and men have distinct ways of responding to limited access to energy. Women are often hit hardest when not enough energy resources are available, since they have to prepare food for the family. When energy access is unreliable, inefficient and time consuming, women and girls will spend more time to obtain sufficient energy resources, with broad implications for their productive life. This weighs on the freedom of choice for women to organize their life and engage in activities they would prefer.

An in-depth gender analysis is necessary in order to design SAFE-related programmes. Women, as the primary users of household energy resources and equipment, often have the best understanding of local needs, resources and dynamics in the field of household energy. At the same time, women tend to be excluded from or only have limited access to decision-making processes, for example on whether or not to purchase household energy equipment such as a fuel-efficient stove. Men are in many cases gatekeepers to women's access to technology.

A thorough analysis of these multi-faceted and context-specific dynamics can provide valuable insights into the ways in which energy access is gendered in a certain place and could lead the way for innovative solutions to be developed in a gender-transformative manner, which is inclusive of specific social and cultural norms. Focusing all efforts on the introduction of new or improved energy technologies, such as fuel-efficient stoves, will have a greater chance

of translating into long-term improvements for women if they are complemented by efforts to initiate transformative processes in gender relations. These processes have the potential to affect the social tissue of a certain community in a more profound way. Both women and men should be incorporated in these processes, in order to increase the potential for widespread acceptance. Using a gender-transformative approach at the community and household level should include:

- Focus Group Discussions, field-level workshops in local languages, exchange visits and interactions with local organizations working on gender issues in order to understand local gender dynamics;
- Collection of sex-disaggregated data and specific gender-related indicators on energy access;
- Participatory processes with the active engagement of all stakeholders (women and men) in projects related to energy access and with possibility for separate planning committees for women and men, in order to create an environment in which women feel free to speak up;
- Training and capacity development of women to enhance technical skills and knowledge related to energy access (e.g. bookkeeping and marketing) and to enhance access to leadership positions;
- Diversifying productive activities (e.g. palm oil processing, production of FES and beekeeping) and increasing income for women, which could create resources to invest in improved energy access conditions and which could raise their socio-political status and transform household dynamics;
- Facilitating the involvement of women and women's organizations in decision-making processes;
- Set-up of credit mechanisms, accessible to women, for small-scale, decentralized energy services;
- Promoting women's control over the allocation of their time;
- Advocacy on gender-related issues through media;
- Well-structured and focused interaction with policymakers, researchers and NGOs.



Sex-disaggregated Energy Focus Group Discussion help to understand local gender dynamics.

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Policy recommendations

The power differences between men and women and their different roles in relation to energy resources are most often not taken into account by policymakers. Policies which target energy access do not fully recognize the gender bias and women's energy needs tend to be **marginalized in policy documents**. Despite ample evidence that better energy access for women tends to lead to higher food and nutrition security, women's limited access to and control over energy resources is still not adequately addressed. Policymakers should seek to move away from a gender-neutral framing of energy policies. Concerns over protection risks and women's work burden in relation to energy access should feature prominently in energy policies.

One way of achieving such gender-transformative energy policies is through **gender mainstreaming**. The increased participation of women in the energy sector, e.g. in decision-making fora, could help to improve their status relative to men. A thorough integration of gender issues is required to ensure the successful implementation of energy policies. Energy should be considered a central aspect of the social and cultural setting, rather than focusing exclusively on technological solutions.

Specifically in the **context of protracted crises**, the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) and the OCHA cluster system provide strong entry points. Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) are issued each year for countries facing a protracted crisis, such as Sudan and Somalia, in which people in need, people targeted and financial requirements are stated for each emergency response sector/cluster. There has been some progress in advocating for the need to mainstream energy in the HPC, e.g. in preparedness, strategic planning, resource mobilization and inter-cluster coordination (Food Security Cluster 2014). However, there is scope for moving beyond this and highlighting the particular energy-related challenges faced by women at each stage of the HPC.

Wood selling as a livelihood activity

Communities living adjacent to government forests in Marsabit have reported exposure of women to Gender-based Violence. Women and children collect fuelwood from these forests in large quantities, not only to provide for their own cooking needs but also to sell. Since the forests are designated as protected areas, women are frequently harassed by forest guards when collecting fuelwood, including sexual harassment and beatings. Most of these incidents are, however, not reported because of humiliation and victimization (FAO, 2015).

Changes in gender-relations

Gender is not a static concept. Changes in relations between women and men are constantly taking place. For example, male casualties in fighting and loss of livestock are two important consequences of many conflicts in dryland areas in Africa. This has resulted in women taking on a more active role in income-generating activities to make up for these losses. The number of female-headed household has increased. In Turkana County (Kenya), female-headed households constitute 25 percent of the total number of households, which impacts the empowerment of women (Omolo, 2010).

Tools/references/further resources

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