TURNING PROMISES INTO ACTION:

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Universal access to affordable, reliable and sustainable modern energy is crucial to achieve sustainable development and gender equality. It is key for mitigating and adapting to climate change and helps ensure the supply of safe drinking water and water for industrial and productive uses in a changing climate. Energy and energy-related time poverty most affect women and girls in poor households, who are largely responsible for collection of fuel for cooking and heating and for manually processing grains and other foods.

At a glance

- Globally, 1.1 billion people lack access to electricity, including 65 percent of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa.[1] 84 percent of those who do not have electricity in their homes live in rural areas.[2]
- Over 3 billion people depend upon biomass fuels, such as wood, animal waste and charcoal, as a primary source for cooking, lighting and other household energy needs.[3]
- Under current trends, 2.3 billion people will still lack access to clean-cooking facilities in 2030.[4]
- Women and girls account for 6 out of every 10 premature deaths through household air pollution caused by unclean fuels and inefficient technologies.[5]
- Increased access to energy has benefits for women's health and well-being, reduces unpaid care and domestic work, and fosters economic empowerment – which supports the achievement of SDG 5.

Key messages

1) **Lack of access to affordable and clean energy at the household level has particular implications for women and girls.**
Given that women generally enjoy less access to and control over economic resources than men, including earnings, land and credit, they are more likely to struggle with unaffordable energy prices and energy poverty.[6] Where access to clean and affordable energy is lacking, women and girls may spend large portions of their day performing laborious and physically draining tasks such as collecting biomass fuels, manually processing foodstuffs and pumping water. In areas of fuel scarcity, fuel collection can take up as much as five or six hours per day—time that could otherwise be used for education, rest or leisure.[7] Women and girls are also disproportionately affected by long-term health problems resulting from household air pollution and carrying heavy fuel loads. In countries that rely heavily on solid biomass and coal for cooking, women and girls account for 6 out of every 10 premature deaths through household air pollution caused by unclean fuels and inefficient technologies.[8]

2) **Women can play a powerful role in the transition to sustainable energy for all, but are underrepresented in energy planning and decision-making.**
Around the world. women remain under-represented in energy sector employment and in ministerial and management positions, and are rarely considered as significant stakeholders in the design of sustainable energy

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projects.[9] Energy planning instruments also remain largely gender-blind. Out of 192 national energy frameworks reviewed in 2017, only one-third were considered gender sensitive.[10] Women's community involvement is critical for enhancing access to energy through decentralized, off-grid renewable solutions in underserviced remote rural areas and urban slums. Small-scale renewable projects can provide important entry points for strengthening women's agency, leadership and livelihoods in sustainable energy. Women's participation in the design and roll-out of new technologies is essential for ensuring uptake.

3) **There are concrete ways to make energy sector policies and investments more gender responsive.**
Expanding access to affordable, reliable and clean *household* energy services and infrastructure should be a top priority to reduce time and health costs associated with the domestic use of biomass fuels. Examples include the installation of micro hydro plants, grain mills, powered water wells, energy-efficient cookstoves, all based on renewable energy.[11] Such investments can also provide employment and livelihood options for women, taking into account the need to facilitate their access to financing and to avoid increasing their time poverty. An enabling financing package would include low-interest loans, start-up and capacity-building grants and solidarity pricing mechanisms.[12] However, renewable energy is not inherently benign. Large-scale renewable energy projects, such as hydropower plants or biofuel production, can lead to displacement and land dispossession with detrimental consequences for women and girls.[13] It is paramount that the environmental, gender and human rights impact of such investments is systematically assessed, with the participation of women's civil society organizations.

4) **Better energy policies require more and better gender statistics.**
SDG 7 is among the seven SDGs that are gender-blind at the indicator level. Moreover, sex-disaggregated data on energy access and usage is largely lacking. Women's unpaid contribution to the energy sector, as the primary household energy managers and fuel collectors in many developing countries, is undervalued and often unaccounted for in national statistics.[14] Consequently, energy planners may pay less attention to investments that respond to women's and girls' energy needs and reduce their workloads.[15] Time use surveys that incorporate fuel and water collection – and by whom – and consistent data disaggregation by sex and other relevant characteristics are necessary if we are to track progress on universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services.

References

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