



6th World Sustainability Forum

27 – 28 January 2017

Cape Sun Hotel

Cape Town, South Africa



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75 Productive Uses of Energy: Gender and the Informal Sector

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Unequal access to economic opportunities between men and women is more prominent in developing countries than it is in developed countries. There are various contextual factors that contribute to such inequality. One of the survival mechanisms that is used by the poor in developing countries is to create income generating opportunities in the informal sector. In many developing countries, the informal sector is the most important source of employment mainly due to the ease of entry and participation. The Informal Food Sector is dominated by women where they are active in food preparation and processing. This sector is also one of the most energy intensive where heating (among other energy needs) is the important need for processing various food products. This paper aims to bring together results from literature and a field survey from three African countries to illustrate women's and men's participation in the Informal Food Sector and the role gender plays in the access and use of energy sources in this sector. Energy transitions in developing countries raise a number of issues that are often taken for granted at both policy making and implementation levels. In the developing countries context, micro-enterprises owned and operated by men and women are a common strategy to guarantee income generation and day-to-day survival. Energy plays a very important role in ensuring that a majority of these enterprises continue to operate, even if it means their growth is not guaranteed. It is therefore important to use a gender lens in analyzing energy use patterns and finding energy solutions that consider the complex nature of informal micro-enterprises, particularly in the food sector. Using the results generated from a current study and from literature, this paper will highlight the energy use patterns of informal micro-enterprises and make policy recommendations that will take into

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consideration the complex nature of energy use and transitions in the Informal Food Sector.

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