

Official NGO Parallel Event in connection with the UN Commission on the Status of Women

**Global Alliance on Clean Cookstoves and ENERGIA
Health, Livelihood, Gender, and Environmental Benefits of Access to Energy
for Girls & Women**

**12:30pm to 2:00pm Panel Discussion
Monday, March 9 2015, New York**

Opening Speech by Joy Clancy Associate Professor, University of Twente, the Netherlands.

For many people attending events linked to the 2015 session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women their reaction on hearing that there is an event with speakers talking about energy and women and girls is probably: what's energy got to do with women's equality? Energy is all about technical stuff – power lines and electricity – what's that go to do with women? Well my response to that is: energy has got a lot to do with women and gender equality.

There is considerable inequality of access to clean energy. It is not too difficult to realise that there is social inequality: poor people use less energy in total and certainly less clean energy (like electricity and LPG). When it comes to comparing women to men – women have less access to clean energy than men. Clean energy and the technology to use it has to be bought – men in the household make the final decision about purchases, even about stoves, so men make the priorities and if a clean cookstove isn't their priority women continue to suffer. It's women, together with their daughters, who experience the greatest disadvantages of continuing to use traditional forms of energy, such as fuelwood, charcoal and animal dung. Women are responsible for ensuring that their family's energy needs are met – indeed energy is women's business. Collecting and using traditional fuels is time consuming, involves drudgery and is bad for a woman's health – for girls it can mean missing school. Ensuring women's access to clean energy can help solve these problems. While the realisation of the need to promote women's clean energy access is growing in the energy sector it still seems to take time for gender specialists to recognise that energy access is an issue of equality and women's rights which they need to take on board.

There is still a need to raise awareness about issues related to gender and energy. I say 'still' because ENERGIA, the international network on gender and sustainable energy, was established 20 years ago in the aftermath of the conference in Beijing. A small number of Northern women realised that energy was just not an issue at the conference – there was a token reference to energy under 'environment' – but we already knew that it was a serious issue and it was women's business. Academics are good at identifying problems and proposing solutions but we are not very good at getting our message out to a wider audience – to get the policy makers to take notice – so this small group of Northern women decided we needed an advocacy tool and hence the network was born. So ENERGIA is also celebrating like the Beijing Platform for Action her 20th birthday this year. The network is now run predominantly by Southern women – providing the evidence about gender and energy issues, supporting women energy entrepreneurs and undertaking advocacy activities.

What have we learned over the last 20 years? A lot! Let's take a look at the theme of today's meeting: health. Due to the pioneering work of a number of academics (here I would like to acknowledge two

male colleagues – Kirk Smith (Berkeley University) and Nigel Bruce (Liverpool University)) with the support of the World Health Organisation) who have been building a body of evidence for more than 30 years about the effects of indoor air pollution caused by smoky fires and kerosene lamps on health. We now know that 4 million premature deaths can be lined to indoor air pollution. Pregnant women and people with malaria or HIV are particularly vulnerable. Indeed, at first we thought that IAP was only a 'woman's issue' – while it is correct that women (and their children) suffer most from the effects of exposure we now know that men also suffer ill health from smoke exposure because they too spend time with their families in the kitchen.

While it seems obvious to anyone who has been in a smoky kitchen that it cannot be good for your health, policy makers want to be convinced by numbers. We are aware of other health issues related to traditional energy sources but don't have large data sets on these issues: burns from stoves and fires from knocked over kerosene lamps leading to death or serious disfigurement; damage to women's spines and internal organs (particularly reproductive ones) due to carry 20 kgs of fuelwood at least once a week for the duration of your adult life; sexual harassment while collecting wood.

One way of generating this data is by making the medical profession more aware of the issues related to traditional fuel use. Smoke from burning biomass doesn't feature in the professional education curriculum of doctors and nurses. As a consequence the reaction of nurses in clinics to questions about smoke related illnesses: smoke in the kitchen? It's not an issue - we grow up with it! If professionals are not aware of the seriousness of IAP – it is not surprising women and their men folk also are not aware.

Over the last 20 years we have been amassing a body of evidence about the positive effects of clean energy access. Clean cooking has direct effects on women's health by reducing their level of exposure to pollution and the need to carry heavy loads and exposure to harassment. We know girls school attendance increases – households with clean cookstoves are more likely to send their daughters to school than those that don't. Women's time poverty is drastically reduced which allows time for rest and the body to recuperate. There are indirect effects too. Reduced time poverty allows women to earn income. As early as the 1950s, the electric rice cooker was enabling women in Japan to enter the workforce. Women's own enterprises benefit from clean energy – at the very least giving them a healthier and safer working environment. Women use their 'time won' for spending more time with their children and electric light allows for time management of household tasks bringing a sense of satisfaction and reduced stress. It also allows time for growing and cooking more nutritious food. In this context there is interesting work being done by the Canadian NGO (CTxGreen) in Odisha (India) using an integrated approach of in which women produce fuel ethanol by fermenting cashew apple waste, giving them an income, a cooking fuel and saved time which they use to grow food to feed their family – any residue from the fermentation is used as a green manure.

Access to clean energy helps with gender equality in other ways. The interest in decentralised renewable energy systems is opening up opportunities for women entrepreneurs. There is evidence to suggest that women sell better than men do to other women – they can often enter domestic spaces that men cannot. Today you will hear about two different business models promoted by NGOs (Solar Sister and Anomena) which are looking at how best to support women as entrepreneurs. These models don't only provide women with valuable incomes which evidence suggests they invest in their children – often prioritising ensuring that their daughters get an education. The build knowledge, skills and self-confidence which can help women have a greater feeling of self-worth. Working together in communal spaces can build solidarity and support for challenging social norms – which is of course the basis of the day we celebrated yesterday (March 8th) – International Women's Day.

I would also say don't underestimate the power of electricity to transform lives and gender relations! Television allows women and men to see how things are, what is possible and what is acceptable (for example women learn that domestic violence is not something to be tolerated). In Afghanistan men who saw a documentary about the daily lives of their wives were shocked at the level of chores and physical effort involved – and were more supportive of finding solutions to reducing women's work load. We also have evidence to show that in households with access to electricity and LPG men become involved in doing daily chores such as ironing and preparing meals.

I said that ENERGIA has been in existence for 20 years. One of the developments during that period is the number and range of organisations which now address women's or gender issues related to energy – a number are represented here today. Their existence is important because they focus on different aspects and levels: the Global Alliance for Cleanstoves focuses on a specific activity with implications for women's health; UN-Women plays an important role in influencing policy makers and gender experts; IUCN's starting point is the environment in which women's livelihoods are embedded. ENERGIA works in collaboration with all the organisations represented here, as well as other partners, each bringing their particular strength, knowledge and expertise. This multiplicity of approach, plus the solidarity which symbolises the women's movement, ensures we have a comprehensive strategy for ensuring that energy brings improvements in women's health and well-being as well as contribution to gender equality.