Why Gender in Wood Energy Development?

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Women are heavily involved in wood energy, of that there can be no doubt. In most countries, at least in the rural areas, it is primarily women who are responsible for gathering firewood or crop residues for household fuel use, and certainly it is they who do the cooking. This fact is known to all in the business of wood energy planning. So why do we need special training on how to take gender into consideration in wood energy planning?

The truth is that the majority of wood energy planners (and the overwhelming majority of them are men) rarely really sit down with the women for whom they are planning and discuss the problems from their angle. Too often, the assumption is made that, for example, a new type of stove that has been shown to use less firewood will readily be adopted by women because it saves them time in fuel gathering. In reality, women have many criteria in assessing the utility of stoves, of which fuel economy may be only one. These criteria are not universal and may need to be carefully investigated in the early stages of planning, if the stove project is to be a success.

An even more common assumption is that women will be pleased to plant some trees because this will supply them with a ready source of firewood. Whether this is the case or not may in fact depend on whether there is any land available where the women feel confident that their trees will be safe, on whether tree growing is culturally considered to be a suitable activity for women, on what type of trees are being offered, and of course on whether they have any time at the planting season to take on this extra work. Very many projects have run into difficulties when women 'unaccountably' did not appear very enthusiastic about this sort of intervention.

Less obvious, but even more common, are cases where wood energy related projects which by their nature are not intended to specifically benefit women, turn out to have inadvertent negative effects on women. Examples are employment generation schemes based on forest products use (lacquer making, uppage etc). These can end up quite unintentionally putting women out of work by displacing traditional craft centres with modernised workshops—filled with men, who for a variety of often non-explicit cultural and training reasons 'fit', or are thought to fit, with the new machinery and workshop locations better than women do. Usually in such cases the problem is simply that no thought was ever given in the planning to the fact the project might have an impact on women, which is different from the impact it has on men. A little forethought might have prevented some serious problems.

Gender analysis is the name given to the set of tools, or planning analytic procedures, which have been developed to help planners consciously and systematically take gender differences into account. Ideally, they should be applied to all projects, not just projects specially intended to benefit women, if the kinds of problems illustrated above are to be avoided. The term 'gender' is used in preference to 'women' because gender analysis is not just about women's needs, preferences and constraints, but about differences between women and men in these regards.

Gender analytic tools (and there are a large number of different ones to choose from) generally start by looking at who does what—task distribution—in the village or community. In most communities in the region there are quite strictly determined patterns of responsibility, and besides looking after the household matters, women frequently spend many hours in agriculture on the family farm, or as labourers, or in other productive work. In addition they often have community obligations to attend to. Men are perhaps more heavily involved in productive work, but rarely have time-consuming duties at home, and frequently have more leisure time. Understanding working patterns is important when planning projects since these almost always require participation of men and women in various activities.

It is not only working times and responsibilities that differ between men and women. There are also differences in the access that men and women have to different resources—forest, fields, cattle (all potential energy sources), money, credit, etc. and to the level of control they have over them. Women frequently have access to fields where the crops grow but often have no control or decision making power over what is grown there, how much is sold, and how the waste is used, for example. Access and control may be vital to the success of a project and therefore understanding who has these rights and who does not can be crucial. The point is that the situation with regards to these issues (as in the pattern of work responsibility) varies from community to community, and each case needs to be carefully studied to determine the local conditions. One should be wary of generalisations on these matters. Even within one country, districts and even villages can have different cultural customs and different traditions of authority over resources.

RWEDP is developing a training package in which gender analytic tools are presented and practised by using case studies, all of which are based on real examples of situations and projects within the region. The course starts with a general introduction in which participants exchange ideas about the relationship of women and of men to wood energy, describing the situation as they know it. For some people, the purpose of gender analysis is to highlight the fact that women in many communities are essentially subjugated to their menfolk, working longer hours for less return and

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with less control over the means of production. For others, the purpose is to improve project efficiency by designing it to fit more closely to the reality of the field situation. Both are valid starting points, and it is useful to begin the course by comparing and discussing the appropriateness of these different aims. A film prepared by the FAO Forests Trees and People programme which illustrates the application of gender analysis to community forestry projects in the region helps to orient course participants as to the nature and purpose of these tools.

Then a variety of gender analytic tools are presented. These are of two types. The first are those that are intended as 'desk' tools, for a project officer, for example, to use in assessing the probable benefit of a proposed project. They are matrices and checklists which help the officer make sure that important gender considerations are not forgotten, and give an early warning if gender problems are likely to be encountered. These tools can also be used by project designers as regular checks within the planning process. They are intended to process data in a standardised way, and can be compared to Environmental Impact Matrices, which are commonly and routinely used to ensure that any potential environmental damage is identified early in project planning.

The second group of tools are those intended as 'field' tools, in other words for gathering raw data in the field. These can help project planners to gather the kind of data which will allow the differences in gender to become apparent. Many of these latter tools are closely related to Participatory Rural Appraisal tools of the type publicised in the FAO programme Forests, Trees and People. They include methods such as preparation of 'seasonal calendars', differentiated or disaggregated by gender, and 'resource maps' in which gender specific resource access becomes clear. They also include methods for running discussions or focus groups. The kind of data gathered through use of these field tools will provide input for analysis using the first group of analytical tools.

In the final part of the course, attention is turned to how a 'gender sensitive' approach, using both types of tools, can be integrated into the normal working procedures of typical wood energy planning offices, and how resistance to it (perhaps itself due to fears about the real purpose of gender analysis) might be gradually overcome.

The course is being designed as a set of modules, each complete in itself, with trainers' notes, lecture material, exercises, case studies and reading material. A module can take from half a day to three days, depending on the complexity of the material. This modular design means that courses can be put together in a very flexible way, according to the particular needs and time available in a given situation. The materials are in preparation and are being tested, but should be available from RWEDP in the course of 1996. It is planned to run several courses in the near future.

Senior wood energy planners met to discuss and consider the application of gender analysis in Chiang Mai, 28–30 June