



International Programmes

DFID's Research into Gender and Energy

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DFID (Department for International Development, UK) recognises the strong links between gender and energy issues. Indeed, in order to achieve progress, they are inseparable. This is because billions of people still burn wood, dung, coal and other traditional fuels in their homes. The resulting impact of indoor air pollution and the drudgery in collecting these fuels falls primarily on women and children.

The issues involved are extraordinarily difficult. Over recent years, research supported by DFID around the world has tried to understand and respond to this complexity. This article looks broadly at the research issues and offers some thoughts on the future.

As many as 2.4 billion people are thought to use traditional fuels for cooking and they suffer many serious social and economic consequences. Hilary Benn, the Secretary of State for International Development, publicly recognised the implications after a visit to a villager's home in Ethiopia:

"...her three children were blinking at me in the darkness from behind her skirt. The woman was extremely ill and had a racking cough, and I remember the blackness inside the home and the stench of wood smoke which was overpowering." (Feb 2005)

The World Health Organisation has estimated that indoor air pollution causes the deaths of over 1.6 million people, mainly women and children, each year. This is more than three people every minute – more than those dying from malaria and more than half the estimated number dying from HIV/AIDS (3.1m deaths globally in 2005).

However, taking a look back at recent research in this important area, it is clear that we have come a long way. As recently as 1996, ENERGIA, in its first newsletter, identified that research on women, energy and environment is "scattered through the literature.... Not even an annotated bibliography exists to reflect the current state of knowledge."

Thanks to a wide range of local and international activities, this is no longer the case. The core messages surrounding gender

and energy are now significantly better documented, disseminated and practised.

One of the initiatives that have contributed to the debate is the DFID Engineering Knowledge and Research (KaR) Programme. This was designed to ensure that investment in the provision of basic services for the poor is carried out with the benefit of enhanced knowledge and technology. The idea being that such services are essential to economic growth and the reduction of poverty.

The energy component of the KaR programme has delivered many useful contributions to the energy and gender debate. Major research projects on key themes were undertaken, usually featuring work in a spread of appropriate countries. There are many excellent examples – and these KaR projects are a very useful guide to some of the complex issues we face. We should seek to build on this experience.

There are perhaps too many lessons to summarise in this short article and so, to get "the bigger picture", I called someone in my network for some advice.

I asked: what is the main lesson, so far, in gender and energy? This colleague, who has a lifetime of experience in such matters, advanced the view that many active in the energy sector have now been "genderised", and the main findings are now starting to be integrated in energy development policy. However, he added, the "gender specialists in the wider development sector still need to be energised."

If this is true, it suggests first that some very important links have been made. The success of ENERGIA is a good example of this link building. However, perhaps knowledge is still being retained within the energy sector and not being shared. In short, we still need better communication links across the wider development community in order to achieve faster progress. It is fair to say that while some key challenges from the past remain, new research questions have inevitably arisen. For instance, we face the new prospect of sustained high oil and gas prices. This has very serious consequences for millions of poor people, particularly women and children on the threshold of benefiting

from modern household energy services. What are the appropriate policy responses? A review in 2002, Research for Poverty Reduction, showed that much of DFID's research effort, including the KaR programme, is having a positive impact. This review was also the catalyst that brought all our research together under a Central Research Department (CRD), formed in 2004, in order to eliminate duplication and build on best practice. The CRD spent £82 million in 2002/03. This amount has been increased significantly to £119 million under the new research framework and will include new work on energy. The CRD budget will increase further to £136 million for 2007/08 (£1 = Euro 1.46). The CRD also launched a new research portal called R4D in March 2006. This provides information about all of DFID's centrally-funded research across all sectors including Rural Livelihoods, Health, Social Sciences, Education and Infrastructure, Urban Development and Communication. The information goes back to the mid-1990s, although in some sectors (especially forestry) there is research information back to the mid-1980s. It is an extremely powerful and valuable tool. DFID supports and is working towards an even more joined-up, partnership approach to development research.

We all need to build upon past experience and find imaginative ways to take solutions forward to a much larger scale in support of the MDGs. You can access material on DFID research projects and find out more about DFID's future research programme at: <http://www.research4development.info> Details on the Energy KaR programme can be found at: : <http://www.dfid-kar-energy.org.uk/> ■



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