



Bread for the World Louisiana

**The Twomey Center for Peace Through Justice
Loyola University New Orleans**

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Helping Women Can Also Achieve The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Between now and 2015, national and international development efforts are expected to focus on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Although there is no specific MDG on energy, it is widely understood that increased access to energy is an essential factor in fulfilling most of the MDGs, including combating extreme poverty and hunger and empowering women. The critical role of energy in sustainable development is seen as the link between the MDGs and energy access, conversion and utilization for enhanced livelihoods and poverty alleviation.

There are more than 2 billion people who are unable to obtain clean, safe fuels and must rely on burning traditional biomass fuels such as wood, dung and crop residues. Without access to efficient and affordable energy sources, they have very limited opportunities for economic

and social advancement. Expanded energy sources are needed in rural areas to provide: mechanical power for agriculture, food processing, water pumping and irrigation; modern fuels for cooking and heating; and electricity for lighting, refrigeration, communications, commercial enterprises and community services. The regions most affected by the energy-poverty nexus are in Africa and Asia, especially areas in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) where there is no access to grid-based electricity and where modern fuels are difficult to procure. Because they are very dependent on subsistence agriculture and environmental resources for their livelihoods, people in these regions are particularly vulnerable to the depletion of natural resources, and the impacts of climate change.

GENDER BLIND APPROACHES TO ENERGY PLANNING FAIL...

It is well documented that there are more women than men living in poverty. That the gender bias in poverty does not reach the very high levels sometimes attributed to it – of the approximately 1.3 billion people living in poverty, 70% are women. Poor women in rural areas of developing countries generally have a more difficult time compared to men, due to their traditional socio-cultural roles. Women often spend long hours collecting fuel wood and carrying it back home over long distances. The time and labor expended in this way exhausts

them and limits their ability to engage in other productive and income-generating activities. Their health suffers from hauling heavy loads of fuel and water, and from cooking over smoky fires. Their opportunities for education and income generation are limited by lack of modern energy services, and as a result their families and communities are likely to remain trapped in poverty.

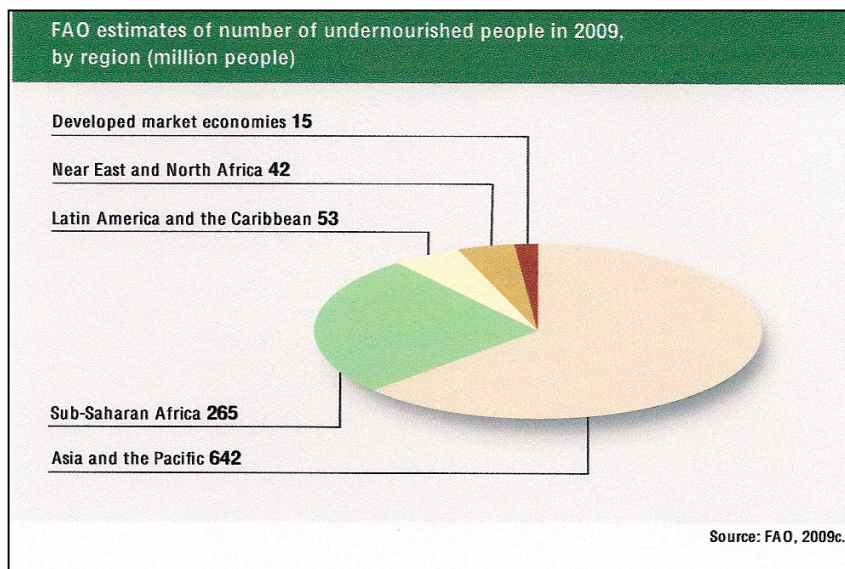
Because of the concentration of poverty in rural areas of developing countries, and the disproportionate effect it has on women because of their low social and economic status, improving the situation of women farmers through better energy services will promote both MDG 1 (reducing poverty and hunger) and MDG 3 (promoting gender equality and empowering women). It is also relevant to MDG 2 (achieving universal primary education) because girls are often kept home from school to help their overburdened mothers with fuel collection and food processing. With respect to

MDGs 4 and 5, which call for improvements in children’s health and maternal mortality rates, cleaner fuels would reduce the hazards associated with smoky indoor fires and carrying heavy loads of wood. Moreover, women, especially those in rural areas, can also be primary actors and beneficiaries with regard to MDG 7 (ensuring sustainability) given their traditional roles as managers of wood and biomass fuel supplies and other critical environmental resources.

There has been little reference to gender in the international climate change discussions. ‘Gender blind’ approaches to energy planning fail to take into account critical information about people’s real energy needs and priorities, especially in poor rural communities.

Energy use plays a key role in the climate change context, as the combustion of fuels (oil, gas, and coal) contributes to most of the production of greenhouse gas emissions.

Some of the poorest countries, with least access to modern energy technologies (hydrogen, geothermal or nuclear), are projected to be the hardest hit by climate change. Many of these countries are located in regions that are already subject to heat waves, drought, desertification, flooding, tropical diseases and natural disasters, as well as poverty and lack of infrastructure. Climate



variability is expected to cause additional negative effects on food security, crop yields, plant and animal diversity and ecosystem functioning. The Least Developed Countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, are also the ones that can least afford to adapt to expected changes in climate conditions.

The rapid succession of two major crises, the global food crisis and the subsequent financial crisis and economic recession, has delivered the hardest blow to world food security in decades. The two crises have led to a sharp increase in the number of people suffering from chronic hunger and undernourishment in the world and a reversal of the previously declining trend in the proportion of the world's population without access to adequate food for a healthy and active life.

The financial crisis and the consequent economic downturn originated far from the agriculture sector and far from the developing countries, where its most devastating effects on the poorest segments of the population are being felt. While recovery from global economic recession, however rapid, will depend on factors beyond the areas of food and agriculture, the impact of the recession requires immediate and effective measures to protect the poor and food-insecure who are the most severely affected victims of the crisis.

Ending Childhood Hunger by 2015

In a low-income budget, food is often the most flexible item. Rent, transportation, child care, utilities are fixed expenses. Food is one place a struggling family cuts corners.

“WHEN YOU’RE POOR YOU HAVE TO DO THINGS TO STRETCH THE FOOD... I WATERED DOWN MY DAUGHTER’S APPLE JUICE. I WATERED DOWN HER FORMULA, BUT STOPPED DOING THAT WHEN SHE BECAME ANEMIC.” R.H., Staunton, VA

President Obama and others have set a goal of ending childhood hunger in the U.S. by 2015. One component needed to achieve this goal is strong child nutrition programs, like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the school meal programs.

Food assistance to hungry people is vital, but it is not enough. The causes of child hunger in the U.S. are rooted in poverty. Low-income families live on the edge of a financial precipice. If the car breaks down, a child gets sick, the furnace goes on the blink, or a parent is laid off from a job, a low-income family is in trouble. Any one of these could mean the difference between having enough food or not.

Poverty forces drastic choices, like watering down a baby's formula to make it go further.

Urge Congress to protect and strengthen the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit.

Additional funding for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites, which provide financial education and free tax preparation assistance to low-income families.

In 2010, Bread for the World members will urge Congress to adopt changes to U.S. tax policy that will benefit low-income families. What do tax credits have to do with hunger? Taxes will be near the top of the agenda in Congress because a series of tax cuts and tax credits enacted in recent years will expire. In the midst of the debate over which taxes to change and which to renew, the needs of low-income people could be lost. Bread for the World will ask Congress to protect and strengthen key tax credits that can make a big difference for low-income workers and their families.

The tax code has many incentives that encourage taxpayers to make certain fiscal choices, like saving for retirement, getting a college education, or owning a home. But many of those credits are out of reach for low-income earners who often do not have the

same tools for those kinds of expenditures or long-term financial investments.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) was established in 1975 to help low-income families hold on to more of their earnings. The EITC is a refundable tax credit geared primarily toward families who have one or two children.

According to a 2006 Brookings Institution study, the EITC lifts more children above the poverty line than any other government program. In 2005, more than 22 million households applied for the EITC and received an average of \$1,864. As a result, an estimated 5 million people, including 2.6 million children, were lifted above the poverty line.

As effective as this simple program is, it could be made even more helpful to low-income families. For example, the size of tax credit does not increase for families with more than 3 children even though their poverty rates are higher. Filing for EITC is complicated, leading many eligible families to use commercial tax preparation services.

Food assistance to hungry people is vital, but it is not enough.

Another credit, the Child Tax Credit, is worth up to \$1,000 for each child under age 17 claimed on a worker's tax return. It provides close to

\$50 billion to families with children each year. Until recently, this credit was not available to families with incomes below \$11,300, meaning nearly 10 million children living in poverty did not benefit from the credit.

In 2005, half of all African-American children, 46% of Hispanic children and 18% of white children were in families that did not qualify at all or qualified for less than the full amount of the credit.

The 2010 Offering of Letters will help policy makers understand that ending childhood hunger requires a broader array of policies that address the issue of poverty as well as strong nutrition programs aimed at low-income children and their families.



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The Jindal Squeeze

✓

Rising Ambitions

✓

Shrinking Budgets

✓

Rising Needs

2910-11 budget is at 2005 levels
despite steady growth in needs.

Demand For State Services Since 2005

Families on Food Stamps	+20%
Medicaid Enrollment	+13%
Four-Year College Enrollment	+3%
Community College Enrollment	+37%
Unemployment 2005-2009	5.4% ^ 7.3%

Source: "Louisiana's Fiscal Crisis",
Louisiana Budget Project, March 2010