

How Clean Cookstoves Create Gender Equality

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Lack of access to clean cookstoves and fuel demand hours of women, that could be far better spent.

Imagine spending hours every day cooking your family's food over an open fire, your eyes burning and lungs struggling from the constant smoke. Then imagine spending additional hours, often in the dark of dawn or dusk, searching for the fuel needed to start cooking again.

That's the reality — and a fulltime job — for millions of women in the developing world, where a lack of access to clean cookstoves and fuels demands arduous hours that could be far better spent.

As the world begins to align around the post-2015 [Sustainable Development Goals](#), now is the time to recognize the critical role cleaner and more efficient cooking solutions play in achieving gender equality for millions of girls and women around the world.

Without convenient, reliable and affordable access to cooking fuels, women endure incredible hardships — being exposed to deadly smoke that kills over [4 million people](#) every year, walking long distances to search for fuel and carrying heavy loads of firewood — or they are forced to spend their hard-earned income on fuel.

Making Progress

With a 30 percent increase in fuel efficiency from an improved cookstove, a family purchasing fuel could save enough money to send two children to school. More efficient and cleaner stoves and fuels can prevent deaths and can save women up to 300 hours or \$200 per year, allowing women the time and income needed to pursue opportunities of their choice.

In rural Tanzania, 39-year-old Martha Lobulu knows the issue all too well, living for years in a small mud home with no ventilation. The traditional fires used for cooking had long exposed her and her three children to household air pollution (HAP) levels of more than 35 times the World Health Organization's standard. After learning about clean cookstoves and the dangers of household air pollution, Martha not only changed her own cooking habits, but she also went on to direct a team of cookstove installers in her community. As a result, she has reduced the levels of toxic smoke in her home and cut her own wood use by half, saving considerable time on fuel collection. In addition, Martha now serves as an inspiration to other Maasai women, leading them toward cleaner homes and healthier lives as she teaches them about the health issues related to HAP and the benefits of cleaner cookstoves.

While there is much to celebrate regarding progress made for women and girls since the original [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), a crucial driver of gender equality and women's empowerment was completely omitted from the framework — access to cleaner household energy. And while many gains have been made over the past 20 years for girls and women, they remain on the frontlines — the first responders to some of life's most difficult and dangerous moments. They are the first to feel the impacts of poverty — which is exacerbated by not having access to household energy.

Building the Market

There is a growing sector focused on creating awareness about the clean cooking issue, on enhancing the performance and availability of technologies and fuels and on strengthening enterprises so they can scale production and distribution. The efforts are being led by the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves and the organization's more than 1,000 partner organizations across six continents. A public-private partnership hosted by the UN Foundation, the Alliance is taking a market-based approach to ensure culturally-appropriate cookstoves and fuels are available and accessible to those who need them.

The [Caterpillar Foundation](#) is key supporter of the Alliance's efforts to secure access to clean cooking solutions for women around the world. The post-2015 framework and the Sustainable Development Goals present a crucial opportunity to ensure sustainable development around the world. The Caterpillar Foundation helps make it possible for the Alliance to engage in the clean

cooking sector, which is resulting in women's empowerment, economic growth, environmental protection and positive health impacts for girls and women around the world.

We must acknowledge the critical role access to clean cookstoves and fuels plays in achieving gender equality. And we must also commit to working together to improve the daily lives of millions of women whose full-time job is one of the most dangerous acts in the developing world cooking food for their families.
