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# **Introduction**

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## Background

Water and energy are essential resources for human survival and well being. Over the years, poverty, increasing population, and inappropriate development interventions in the Himalayan region have led to adverse effects on the environment, including the degradation of forests and water resources, a decrease in soil fertility, and land and air pollution. Adverse socioeconomic effects are also visible, most importantly, migration and its resultant social dislocation. Caught between poverty and environmental degradation, mountain women are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their water and energy (W&E) needs in a sustainable manner. With increasing water- and fuel-related work burdens, women are even forced to keep their children, especially their daughters, out of school to assist with household activities including fuel and water collection – thereby perpetuating intergenerational poverty. Besides lost opportunities, women are also faced with a variety of health hazards from fetching heavy loads, cooking for long hours in smoky environments, and others (Dutta 2003; UNDP 2001).

Meeting the water and energy needs of rural households can release large amounts of time and energy that women spend in collecting water and firewood, cooking, cleaning, and doing other household chores. Despite the significant positive effects of reducing women's drudgery by providing improved access to W&E services in rural livelihoods, the whole issue of saving women's time and effort (the reduction of drudgery) has not received the attention it deserves. Most of the W&E-related institutional and technological interventions of the past have failed to consider women as active partners in W&E programmes, despite their primary responsibility for managing the household's W&E needs. To meet the needs, perceptions, and aspirations of women it is essential to (a) bring them to the forefront of the dissemination of technological options that are pro-environment and pro-poor; and (b) focus on interventions that first identify their needs and then provide them with options which they can use and control. Women's role as managers of W&E resources at the household level has not been recognised and there are hardly any efforts to set in place mechanisms for the meaningful participation of women in W&E programmes. The participation of women in most development interventions in the past has remained marginal, leading to a situation where they are disempowered, unable to voice their concerns, and unable to make strategic choices. Gender and poverty sensitive W&E projects and action research are still the exception rather than the rule (Denton 2002).

In light of these experiences, UNEP and ICIMOD initiated a project entitled 'Incorporating Needs and Roles of Women in Water and Energy Management in

Rural Areas in South Asia – Capacity Building in Rural Areas of the Himalayas’, with financial support from Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA). The objective of the project was to promote the integration of women in decision making, and in the implementation and management of household W&E initiatives by building their ability to organise themselves and identify their needs and roles, and to implement energy- and water-related technologies. This pilot implementation project was designed on the premise that any new intervention for women in rural areas of the Himalayas should aim to reduce their workload, reduce drudgery, minimise the hazards and risk to health and life, increase productivity, enhance equity in the sharing of work and benefits, and widen the options for productive work through the saving of time and energy. Collecting water and fuelwood are the main activities that take labour and time. This project has identified W&E as the key entry point for addressing the practical needs of mountain women’s empowerment, the interventions addressing women’s productive as well as strategic needs. The project provides space for women to participate in and benefit from multiple activities, addressing the twin challenges of engendering W&E and empowering women for sustainable development.

ICIMOD coordinated the overall project implementation that was carried out through its national collaborating partners in the three Himalayan countries. The collaborating partners were the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) in Bhutan, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in India, and the Centre for Rural Technology (CRT/N) in Nepal. Activities were implemented at field sites in Phobjikha and Limukha in Bhutan; Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh in India; and Dhankuta and Palpa in Nepal.

A short time after the start of these interventions and the adoption of W&E-related technologies in two hill/mountain settlements each in the three countries (Bhutan, India, and Nepal), women experienced time saving and drudgery reduction of up to 60%, as well as health benefits. The establishment of a revolving fund and the credit made available through the savings and credit group that was formed by the women has helped to widen the options for productive use of the time saved and has also reduced market barriers to accessing technologies. Social mobilisation has empowered women through their own self-help groups and has enhanced their capacity to plan and implement W&E-related activities based on their prioritised needs.

Women have been able to demonstrate some innovative good practices with the potential for replication on a wider scale. More recently, using a number of internationally accepted criteria, the activities of this project in Nepal were selected as an example of good practice with a promising approach (WICEE 2004). A technology demonstration model village (demonstration of field-tested technologies that are practically operated by women at project sites in Nepal) has proved to be an innovative replicable model for speeding up the technology transfer process. The adoption of this model in the nationally recognised Village Development Programme (VDP) illustrates how a good practice can be anchored to policy using a bottom-up initiative. Recharging traditional water springs/sources through micro-reservoirs and

plantation activities on mountain slopes (Uttaranchal, India) is another innovative experiment carried out by local women to address their water problems in a sustainable way. Women are being empowered to have their say in making decisions concerning community development activities and are also beginning to function as energy entrepreneurs (Bhutan).

The importance of bringing gender perspectives to W&E policy analysis and design is still not widely understood and consequently is not fully integrated into mainstream W&E development activities. These guidelines, based on lessons from the project, seek to identify approaches and actions to mainstream gender concerns in policies and programmes and in their implementation. It aims to assist in finding answers to these issues, based on demonstrated successes and lessons from the project, for the future design, implementation, and replication of W&E management policies and programmes in the region.

## **Purpose and Rationale of the Policy Guidelines**

The purpose of these Policy Guidelines is to facilitate the mainstreaming of gender roles and environmental sustainability in national W&E development policies and programmes, assisting policy makers and planners to integrate women's roles and concerns. The guidelines include lessons learned regarding good practices and approaches in pilot project experiences and those emerging from country-specific case studies. The goal is to support the building of national institutional and human capacities in cross-sectoral approaches to addressing women's issues and concerns in W&E management practices for the better design of sustainable W&E policies and programmes.

The guidelines are intended to examine the normally overlooked aspects of integrating women in the management of household W&E resources as an entry point for engendering development and empowering women. They also address the specific policy measures necessary to address linkages between gender, W&E services, and poverty. It is expected that the guidelines will serve as a useful tool for policy-advocacy, and for replicating and up-scaling pilot experiments in other parts of the Himalayas and beyond. The guidelines could be instrumental in designing future women-focused W&E programmes for implementation by line agencies and other development organisations.

More specifically, the guidelines are designed to:

- identify important policy issues covering technical, financial, and organisational elements to be considered in designing W&E services and systems for meeting the needs of women and communities;
- identify critical development bottlenecks that need to be addressed in policy formulation and suggest areas needing direct policy support for expanding opportunities to women;
- identify criteria for good project design, implementation, and sustainability; and
- demonstrate approaches that work best in reaching women and rural communities through modern forms of W&E management technologies.

## Overview of the Policy Guidelines

These Policy Guidelines have been divided into an Introduction and Parts One and Two. Part One, which follows this Introduction, discusses the background, framework, and steps towards the introduction of gender-sensitive policies in water and energy, with a literature review on women in water, energy, and development in the global and regional context; a conceptual framework dealing with the policy objectives, underlying approaches, enabling conditions, and critical elements that are deemed important for realising gender-sensitive policies; and suggested policy directions, based on the experience gained overall in the country-specific activities. Part Two looks at the specific learning from the project activities with a summary of the lessons learned from the project and the major policy gaps emerging, and a section summarising the country-specific reviews of national policies and programmes on gender and water and energy. Part Two is followed by a Bibliography.