
WOMEN HEALTH AND MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS**DR ARUNA.B.VENKAT**

Abstract: It's amazing! On an average a person takes about 20,000 breaths a day. It's almost 10,000 liters of air passing through our lungs every day. No matter where we live or in whatever state our health is, the air quality we inhale affects us. Air pollution can be a threat even when we can't see it or smell it. Good quality of air is just as important as safe water or food for life. Many people, especially women and children in the developing countries, are breathing air that is highly polluted. Air pollution in general and indoor air pollution in particular has emerged as number one killer. There is evidence that exposure to biomass smoke increases the risk of health problems such as acute respiratory infections (ARI) in children particularly pneumonia, chronic obstructive lung diseases (such as chronic bronchitis and asthma), lung cancer and pregnancy-related outcomes. It has been estimated that about half a million women and children die each year from indoor air pollution in India says KR Smith, in his study 'Indoor Air Pollution – Energy and Health for the Poor'. Negative health effects increase as air pollution worsens. The worst affected are the children, women and the elderly.

Keywords: Biomass fuel, Clean Cook Stoves, Energy and Health, Indoor air pollution, Women and Children

Introduction: We can't see it or smell it. That's air pollution. Good quality of air is just as important as safe water or food for life. Many people, especially women and children in the developing countries, are breathing air that is highly polluted. Air pollution in general and indoor air pollution in particular has emerged as number one killer. In the developing world, one of the most insidious killers is indoor air pollution. Indoor air pollution is a result of stoves which are poorly ventilated and also very inefficient. Burning of bio mass fuel leads to a large number of deaths. More than half of these deaths occur among children under five years of age.

Health can be improved only by making progress in access to alternative cooking fuels. Green household energy solutions will help overcome major heralds in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Improved household energy practices promote education, empower women, save the lives of children and their mothers and benefit our forests and our climate. Biomass smoke contains thousands of health-damaging substances. Dependency on fossil fuel and bio mass leads to deforestation, a process that contributes to the build-up of greenhouse gasses, particularly carbon dioxide, in the earth's atmosphere, and thus to global climate change. Deforestation can cause soil erosion, pollution of water bodies, loss of biodiversity and rise in temperatures leading to change in weather. All of which has an extreme impact on health. Shifting from solid fuels to cleaner energy technologies for instance, liquid petroleum gas (LPG), biogas or solar power generation can potentially yield the largest reduction in indoor air pollution levels while minimizing environmental impacts of energy production and consumption in general. Improved design of stoves and ventilation systems can reduce indoor air pollution in many poor communities. Public awareness of the health risks of indoor air pollution is also an important factor in change.

Women and Natural Resources: There is direct and critical relationship between women and natural

resources. Being a woman puts a lot of household responsibilities on her. Women have primary responsibility for rearing children, and for ensuring sufficient resources to meet children's needs for nutrition, health care and schooling. In rural areas women also have to arrange for essential household resources like clean water, fuel for cooking and heating and fodder for domestic animals. Women have the responsibility for managing household resources, but lack managerial control. As women interact with environment on daily basis, they are the worst affected by its degeneration. In India, women now spend four or five hours a day collecting fuel wood, where previously they would have done so once every four to five days. In urban areas air and water pollution may be extreme, and sanitation and waste treatment may be dysfunctional causing severe threat to women's health. In India, rivers are highly polluted resulting in contamination of water. Degraded environments force women to spend more time and energies in collecting fuel. But their household responsibilities do not diminish. To manage their homes, women need access to better health care which includes reproductive health, education and empowerment. Indoor air pollution is a major global public health hazard which requires strategic planning and research. To make lives livable, policies will have to be put in place which clearly recognize the interrelationships between poverty and dependence on polluting fuels.

Millennium Development Goal: By 2015, the world aims to have achieved eight goals for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. There is no Millennium Development Goal on energy. Lack of energy, in particular lack of access to alternative cooking fuels and electricity is holding back progress and hindering growth. The United Nations Millennium Project proposes to confront the energy issue directly. Cleaner energy can reduce burden of diseases like child mortality, maternal health, reduce the time and transport burden on women and young girls, and lessen

the pressure on fragile ecosystems. *The main goal is by 2015 people should have access to improved and greener cooking stoves.*

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight goals that UN Member States have agreed to try to achieve by the year 2015. The United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000, commits world leaders to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women. The MDGs are derived from this Declaration. Each MDG has targets set for 2015. Several of these relate directly to health. First Millennium Development Goal is eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. The UN also aims to reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015. Second Goal is to achieve universal primary education. Too many children are still denied their right to primary education, if current trends continue the world will not meet the goal of universal primary education by 2015. Third Goal is to promote gender equality and to empower women. Women are assuming more power in the world's parliaments, boosted by quota systems. But in India the women quota bill is stuck somewhere in the parliament. As of 31 January 2013, the average share of women members in parliaments worldwide was just over 20 per cent. Fourth Goal is reducing child mortality. But 2013 result of MDG notes that reducing child mortality remains unfinished business despite accelerated progress. Fifth Goal is to improve maternal health. To reduce the number of maternal deaths, women need access to good-quality reproductive health care and effective interventions. Sixth Goal is to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Seventh Goal is to ensure environmental sustainability. The world has now met the MDG target relating to access to safe drinking-water. The number of people living in urban areas without access to improved sanitation is increasing because of rapid growth in the size of urban populations. Eighth Goal is to develop a global partnership for development by cooperating with pharmaceutical companies, and by providing access to affordable essential medicines in developing countries.

Clean Energy Solutions: The UN MDGs have a huge potential in contributing to improving household energy practices. Extreme poverty and hunger can be eradicated, if women spend no time in collecting bio mass fuels and if women and their children are happy and healthy. Health will pave way for many opportunities for women and their families to do well economically. Children will be able to go to schools and primary education for all will become a reality. Access to alternate and green fuel for all will reduce indoor air

pollution and promote women's and their family's health. Moving up the energy ladder and using improved stoves can increase energy efficiency and decrease greenhouse gas emissions.

The UN is working in developing cleaner cooking and household solutions. This is being done in private-public partnership. UN Foundation is leading an initiative called *Global Alliance for Clean Cook stoves*. This initiative is supporting large-scale adoption of clean and safe household cooking solutions as a way to save lives, improve livelihoods, empower women, and reduce climate change emissions. The Alliance aims to enabling many million homes globally to adopt clean and efficient stoves and fuels by 2020. The Alliance works with public, private, and non-profit partners to overcome the market barriers that hamper the production, deployment, and use of clean cook stoves in the developing world. Clean cook stoves are stoves that have been designed to reduce the risk of mortality attributable to indoor smoke from solid fuel, sometimes referred to as indoor air pollution. The Alliance also provides grants for research and knowledge of the issues surrounding the use of clean cook stoves.

Every day women are breathing harmful smoke while cooking meals for their families. To cook a meal they also have to walk long distances to gather fuel. This bio mass fuel is a killer. Burning bio mass fuel causes cancer, pneumonia, heart and lung disease, blindness, and burns.

All these problems can be solved. Women can have better health, more time to take care of themselves and their families. Their physical and sexual vulnerabilities would come down and they would feel safer.

Women can utilize their time in a more productive manner, if only the women switch to improved cook stoves. These stoves can save money and time for women. Better and clean stove solutions allow women to complete other responsibilities and pursue income generating opportunities, education and feel more rested.

Conclusion: The greatest contribution to the global burden of diseases is the indoor air pollution. This causes acute respiratory infections in children and adults. Energy policy should be at the center of all environmental development. The international community needs to invest in greener and affordable technologies which help better lives of one and all and also sustain them on long-term basis. Finally, as there is a close interrelationship between poverty and dependence on polluting fuels, there is a need to invent sustainable energy solutions and achieve healthier household environments.

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