

## AN INTERVIEW WITH... ANITA GEORGE

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**The World Bank Group and its Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP) are key players in efforts to improve sustainable energy access, especially in the developing world. Can you please tell us how clean cooking, and especially LPG, is part of these efforts?**

As part of its support for the Sustainable Energy for All goal of universal access to modern household energy services, the World Bank Group is undertaking a number of initiatives related to energy access, including supporting the development of sustainable cooking and heating solutions. This includes ongoing regional programmes in Africa, Central America and East Asia. We are also scaling up our efforts in South Asia.

In these efforts, the World Bank Group largely remains technology- and fuel- neutral. In some cases, biomass may make sense, given local conditions and affordability, whereas, in other areas or countries, national priorities are moving to LPG and improving supply chains.

One of the main strengths of the World Bank Group in providing this support is its multidisciplinary expertise cutting across poverty reduction, health, environment, household energy, forestry, natural resource management, climate change and gender. Currently, we are developing a programmatic approach for working across practices in order to provide a coordinated platform and targeted support for clean and efficient cooking and heating.

**In the last few years, there has been increased interest in women in energy with a lot of attention being given to biomass cookstoves. What new opportunities would LPG bring to women that would add to achievements from other fuels?**

Many of our efforts on clean cooking focus on improved fuels, technologies and adoption and, as I mentioned, we are for the most part fuel- and technology- neutral in our approach. However, evidence shows the adverse impacts on women of fuel collection, including time lost and security issues including exposure to gender-based violence. Moreover, if traditional biomass or inefficient stoves are

used, women and children suffer disproportionately from health impacts from the resulting air pollution.

As a recent report developed by Sustainable Energy for All, ENERGIA and the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves notes, switching from traditional biomass to modern fuels such as LPG for cooking can reduce women's work and time burden, improve health and decrease deaths.

**A knee-jerk reaction when discussing the need to increase access to LPG in developing countries is often that it is not a renewable energy source, despite studies showing that increases in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions would be minimal and that lives would be saved as a result of reduced indoor air pollution. What would your response be to such critics from the perspective of benefits for women?**

LPG is one of the cleanest-burning fuel options for households ready to switch from cooking with biomass, and can greatly reduce indoor air pollution related to cooking with resulting health benefits. Expanding the use of LPG for cooking is certainly one of the options to be considered in addressing the significant health impacts associated with emissions from cooking and heating with traditional fuels and stoves. Moreover, in cases where efficient use of LPG replaces inefficient production and use of charcoal, the GHG impact may be very small.

However, the cost of LPG is often a limiting factor. Experience with ongoing fuel subsidies has generally not been positive, placing a significant burden on public resources, and often resulting in shortages or unreliable supply to households. Other barriers include an inadequate distribution infrastructure and regulations. Policy and regulatory improvements can lead to safer, more reliable and affordable LPG, which could make LPG more accessible. However, for many households, affordability will remain a barrier for some time to come, so work on alternatives, including cleaner, more efficient solid fuels and stoves, is very important.

We should also note that policymakers sometimes overlook the negative effects that charcoal use has on the environment. Given the increasing prices of charcoal, there is an urgent need to find suitable alternatives. The World Bank is committed to facilitating this transition in client countries where this is a priority.

**What can governments do in order to improve LPG access in a manner that benefits women and especially poor women?**

One of the key barriers for women, especially poor women, is the lack of access to information about new fuels, technologies and financing. Governments can integrate consumer-awareness programmes and informational campaigns that address some of these barriers. It is also important for the sake of adoption and sustainability to demonstrate the efficiency of modern fuels, both in

terms of timesaving and fuel efficiency. At the same time, affordability needs to be addressed and supply chains strengthened to improve access to LPG as a cooking fuel.

**Are there any examples that you can share of women's engagement in the LPG sector, not just as consumers but as entrepreneurs and decision-makers? Given the low levels of women's involvement in the sector, how have these unique cases come about?**

In Senegal, the Second Sustainable and Participatory Energy Management Project focuses on increasing female participation in decision-making bodies, particularly forest management systems, and on ensuring that women benefit more equitably from income-generating activities. There has been a considerable focus on training women – in building both technical capacity on charcoal production and commercial gardening, and leadership capacity to help women serve as effective leaders in community committees. These lessons can be applied to the LPG sector: engaging women in the various roles and activities within the sector can provide economic empowerment for women, while also enhancing the LPG market with improved consumer awareness and distribution channels. The World Bank Group is working hard to mainstream gender in our energy programmes and policy dialogues, including by supporting teams to carry out gender assessments and baseline work and developing gender action plans with client countries. Under our global gender and energy programme, support has been provided to several countries, including Senegal, to work with the government and the rural energy agencies to develop entrepreneurial or financial literacy training to help improve access to and use of energy services.

**In your opinion, what key components are needed in projects, policies and business models to increase women's participation in the LPG sector?**

As in the rest of the energy sector, gender equity must be improved throughout the value chain. This means not only thinking about how women and men are using and accessing energy services, but also how to improve the inclusion of women in areas such as research, development, marketing, distribution and policymaking. Given that women are often in the leading role in the kitchen and in using cooking fuels, having them be part of consultations, design and distribution can improve adoption of modern fuels.

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