



Women's Energy Action Project

Caprivi Region, Namibia and Mbala, Zambia

December 2010 Progress Report

Introduction and Background

The Women's Energy Action Project has joined with local women in Namibia and Zambia to develop a model to help meet the long-term energy needs of rural African women, enlist women in the fight against climate change, and reduce the amount of money spent on inefficient energy products like candles and wood, freeing up resources for women to devote to other needs, like healthcare, education, communication, and income generation. Thus far, the project has provided 60 women who previously had no access to electricity with access to technologies such as solar-powered flashlights and lanterns, solar-powered radios, cell phone chargers, cookstoves, and braziers. The project is facilitated by Elephant Energy (www.elephantenergy.org), a U.S. and Namibian non-profit organization with funding from the Open Meadows Foundation (www.openmeadows.org).

A woman in Mbala, Zambia shines her Big BOGO torch (www.bogolight.com) beneath her to reveal a small scorpion. Barefoot, she is quickly aware of the dangers looming in her otherwise dark home. She manipulates the light in order to chase the arachnid from her hut, bravely ridding her home of the potentially lethal creature and protecting her family.

Another woman, Angelicah, just over the border in the Caprivi Strip of Namibia, uses the Kiran Lantern (www.dlightdesign.com) to read her bible. Women here do not usually have personal time until all of the household work is completed. Typically, domestic chores are not finished until well after dark and access to light is rare.

Ten kilometers away, Kachitomwa Annetty saves US\$7 this week because candles are unnecessary. With this saved money she buys soap and soup for the family. The Firefly solar-powered light (www.barefootpower.com) that she uses provides enough light to illuminate her entire house. Her neighbor, Kalyanga Betty, uses the EnviroFit Cookstove (www.envirofit.org) to prepare food this week. She usually spends two hours, three times a week to fetch wood. This week, Betty goes to the bush to collect wood one time for only one hour.

Summary of Activities

Starting in July 2010, Kaitlin Wiedeman, the project administrator, began the process of forming women's groups in the Kwandu Conservancy area in Namibia and the Mbala area, across the border in Zambia. Each woman participating in the project was chosen with the referral and permission from the *khuta* (tribal authority). The project is administered by two local Field Coordinators, one in Zambia and one in Namibia. In Namibia, the Kwandu Conservancy area is split into six sections and the Field Coordinator, Brideness Muatuli, oversees six Area Leaders, who oversee the seven other women in each women's group. The Mbala area in Zambia is split into three sections and the Zambian Field Coordinator, Memory, oversees all 14 Zambian women. After the formation of the women's groups, the project kicked off in October with training for Area Leaders. Baseline energy surveys (See Attachment 1) were administered to the six Area Leaders by the two Field Coordinators and Area Leader/Field Coordinator MOUs were completed. Finally, training on technology use/maintenance for the eight technologies, including solar-powered torches, cookstoves, crank radios, cell phone chargers, etc., that would rotate within each women's group was completed.

The next weeks were spent administering baseline energy surveys to the remaining 54 women in Caprivi and Mbala. Technologies were distributed, training on technology use/maintenance was completed, and technology rotation schedules were established. Finally, weekly feedback surveys were explained and distributed.

Every Thursday (through January 2011), the Area Leaders meet with the participating women in their area to facilitate weekly feedback surveys and hear general feedback about each of the technologies. On Fridays, the Area Leaders and Field Coordinators meet at the Kwandu Conservancy building in Caprivi to report to Elephant Energy on how the project is progressing, if all of the technologies are still functioning, and specific advantages and disadvantages about each individual technology. Elephant Energy then compiles the information into records that will be further analyzed after the completion of the project. Lastly, on Friday, the eight women in each group rotate the technology that they used during the past week to another group member.

Impacts

The Women's Energy Action Project has two significant impacts. First, women in rural communities are now enjoying the benefits of renewable energy sources. They can read and study at night, enjoy indoor activities at night more easily, and avoid outdoor dangers such as venomous snakes and crocodiles. They are better connected to the world because of access to local, national, and international news through radio, as well being able to use their cell phones more often because of easy charging. From a preliminary analysis of the baseline energy surveys, we found that women spend excessive amounts of time fetching firewood for cooking. On average, women spend almost five hours every three days fetching firewood. Through the Women's Energy Action Project, women saved time by cooking with cookstoves and braziers because: 1) the cooking devices require less wood and thus women need to fetch less (preliminary results show that women now only spend two hours fetching wood one time per week) and 2) The efficiency of the stoves yields a much faster cook time. With this extra time, women have been reading, studying, and contributing to community events. They have also shed the economic cost of constantly replacing candles and batteries, while reducing their use of firewood.

Secondly, the Women's Energy Action Project provides a venue for women to come together and support one another. Women encourage each other to read and study with various lights. They debate different ways to earn money, specifically by using the solar-powered charger to ask for payment for cell phone charging services within their communities. Members of the women's groups discuss issues as simple as weekend plans and as serious as female/male relationships. They bring up topics they hear on the solar-powered radio about HIV/AIDS, conservation, and family planning. In a culture where women are not often provided public places to support one another, the Women's Energy Action Project provides a culturally-appropriate scene for women to communicate.

Way Forward and Conclusion

Thursday and Friday meetings will continue on for a total of eight weeks. Baseline energy surveys will be fully analyzed during this time. On February 9, 2011, a final pilot project meeting will take place. Here, Elephant Energy will promote trans-boundary women's initiatives and gather all 60 women from Zambia and Namibia in Caprivi at the Kongola Agricultural Hall. The women will be able to openly discuss each of the technologies and how they have affected their lives, which ones they like enough to buy, and solutions on how to earn enough money to purchase these technologies in the future. Additionally, a lottery will take place with all of the participating women, allowing each woman to keep, at random, one of the technologies as compensation for their time and efforts in the project. The final pilot project meeting will also result in a path forward for a broader Women's Energy Action Project in the future.