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Exploring the relationship between renewable energy and gender relations at household level

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ABSTRACT

Energy poverty is one of the developmental challenges facing the world today. Even though energy poverty affects both men and women, its impacts on the two are different. This is due to diverse gender roles which result in different energy needs. The burden of energy poverty lies mainly on women. Growing evidence indicates synergies between energy use and intra-household relations. An understanding of intra-household relations which culminate in inequalities in energy access is therefore essential in ensuring universal access to energy. This study aimed at exploring the relationship between renewable energy and gender relations at household level. Using the Gender Relations theoretical framework, the study explored the relationship between intra-household gender relations and adoption of RETs. It sought to assess the extent to which RETs affect the division of labour, who makes decisions to adopt RETs and who benefits from them. The study was conducted in Malawi using a qualitative research design. Participant observation and narrative in-depth interviews were used to explore the intra-household decision making processes which influence adoption of RETs.

Findings indicated that men and women in Malawi have distinct gender roles which influence their bargaining power. Both social and economic resources were found to have a significant influence on women's decision making power. The findings further indicated that men dominated decisions on adoption and utilisation of RETs. Women's lack of economic resources and technical knowledge were found to be barriers in their access of RETs. Findings demonstrated that RETs greatly benefited both men and women, however, men sometimes controlled how the RETs were used which lessened the benefits to women. Though not conclusive, findings indicated that RETs may increase women's burdens.