FUELING EQUAL COMMUNITIES

Megatrend: Climate Change and Resource Scarcity
Sustainability Challenge(s): Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7) & Gender Equality (SDG 5)

Climate change is here and now and the energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy is at the heart of climate solutions. Within the total consumption of fossil fuels, power generation and transport together accounted for over two thirds of total emissions in 2019 and have been responsible for almost all global growth since 2010[1].

Living standards across the world are strongly correlated with access and reliability to power: think about the impact of the increasing access to power in our societies at the end of the 19th century, or you could think of how a power outage would disrupt your weekly routine.

In this respect, an often-overlooked aspect is the social impact of power inaccessibility (or even energy at large): lack of electricity shortens the time available for professional, recreational and educational activities and hinders access to internet connection devices. Looking at basic human needs, lack of cooking fuels forces many women and girls to forage to feed their families, hindering their work options and exposing them to health risks.

It is estimated that currently in the world, some 770 million people live without access to electricity (mostly in Africa and Asia) and more than 2.5 billion people around the world lack access to clean cooking facilities, relying instead on wood, other solid biomass, kerosene or coal as their primary cooking fuel[2]. Moreover, the unsustainable harvesting of wood and solid biomass also contributes to forest and environmental degradation: reducing the resulting adverse of ecological and health consequences will have to involve a mix of adopting renewable fuels and natural resource sustainable strategies[3].

Women and girls bear the brunt of the consequences of not having electricity or clean energy access on multiple levels: the task of collecting firewood or other fuels falls predominantly on them, wasting scarce time and effort that could be instead invested on e.g. education. Access to higher education for women has repercussions on their societies at large, as women's ability to plan their pregnancies is associated with improvements in their children's education and socio-economic success.

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[1] **IEA. 2022.** *CO2 Emissions in 2022.* Paris : IEA, 2022 - Link
[2] **IEA, 2022.** *SDG7: Data and Projections.* - Link
[3] **Daka, Ephraim. 2023.** Adopting Clean Technologies to Climate Change Adaptation Strategies in Africa: a Systematic Literature Review. *Environmental Management.* 2023, 71 - Link

YOUR CHALLENGE

What can your company do (alone or in collaboration with other companies) to ensure that the energy transition also contributes to the development of underprivileged communities and the improvement of women's conditions? Identify an area (geographical or other) in which your solution could have the biggest impact. Be specific on whether your solution addresses the needs of a rural or urban community, or perhaps both. Work on a solution (product, service or other) that your company can deliver, build the business case, and prove that it will work, with impact!