**Interview with Dr. Delia Saenz on Gender Inclusion**

Dr. Delia Saenz holds a faculty appointment in the Psychology Department, and a research professorship, in the Hispanic Research Center at ASU. Her scholarly research focuses on diversity, tokenism, intergroup processes, inclusion, acculturation, and family dynamics, and is often cited for its innovation and contributions to the understanding of diversity in work groups. Dr. Saenz’ research has been funded by several funding agencies including the National Institutes of Mental Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Ford and WT Grant Foundations. Currently, she serves as co-PI on the Sustainable Energy Education Consortium’s “Vocational Training and Education for Clean Energy” (VOCTEC) program. This initiative is a USAID–funded project that focuses on enhancing knowledge, awareness, and capacity-building in renewable energy technologies among developing nations with a primary goal of broadening participation by women and other minority groups. Her specific role in VOCTEC project builds on her scholarly expertise and provides gender inclusion training for policy makers, trainers, and technicians. Training sessions have been conducted in Guyana, South America, and in Fiji. Beyond her contributions to scholarship and administration, Dr. Saenz has been recognized at both institutional and national levels for outstanding contributions to the teaching and mentoring of undergraduate students and graduate students of color. Her service to the university has included leadership roles on the Diversity Policy Council, the Chicano/Latino Faculty Staff Association, the Faculty Women’s Association, the Provost’s Native American Advisory Council, and the Southwest Borderlands Initiative. Dr. Saenz earned her doctorate in Social Psychology from Princeton University in 1987.

1- What is the significance of gender inclusion and women’s empowerment in the solar energy sectors?

**Dr. Saenz:** Currently, women have higher levels of poverty than men. According to the United Nations Development Program, there are 1.2 billion people in the world who are living on one dollar or less a day, seventy percent of whom are women. Because women traditionally have to collect fuel and water, they will benefit the most from improved access to energy by preventing health problems related to those duties such as exhaustion, smoke inhalation, danger of attack while collecting fuel, and house fires caused by indoor stoves. Additionally, increased empowerment will enable women to engage in more educational and income-generating activities.
2- What are the common challenges and misconceptions of involving women in the solar energy sector and how can we overcome them to promote gender equality in energy sectors?

**Dr. Saenz:** Women have traditionally been excluded from decision-making bodies at local and national levels that make laws pertaining to energy. This is because, culturally, women are not perceived to have interest or skills related to the energy sector. However, women are primary users of energy equipment and, as a result, have valuable knowledge about local conditions and resources. Additionally, women who have access to energy for their homes and are trained to operate and maintain energy systems can participate in income-generating activities that increase resources for their families and communities.

We can work to overcome these challenges by designing educational programs that invite full participation of the intended beneficiaries, including women. Training should take care to understand the specific responsibilities and constraints that exclude women in a target community, and specific measures should be adopted to enable women to effectively contribute. For example, separate planning committees for men and women will create an environment where women feel free to speak up.

3- From a gender perspective, how are energy sector characteristics or specifications different than other sectors?

**Dr. Saenz:** A primary difference is that while women are the primary consumers of energy, they do not always play a role in decisions about energy that is derived from non-biomass sources. As a consequence, women are more likely than men to suffer from energy poverty, or the absence of sufficient choice in accessing adequate, reliable, high quality, safe energy services that support economic and human development.

4- How would you describe the current situation of the women’s roles in solar energy development in developing countries?

**Dr. Saenz:** Currently, women in developing countries constitute a minority of participants in the decision-making, design, and implementation of energy transactions. Likewise, the numbers of women participating in training within solar energy are relatively small. However, efforts by aid organizations such as USAID are making inroads and helping to facilitate change along these dimensions.

5- What are your impressions on how gender issues are being addressed internationally and by aid agencies?
Dr. Saenz: I believe the emphasis on gender inclusion that has become a standard criterion for funding and support of energy projects/training in developing nations is a good idea. Unless parameters are identified in advance of projects, participation by women is likely to proceed slowly. The successes to date are encouraging and are anticipated to serve as examples for how women can be included more broadly in development programs.

6- After conducting the solar training in Fiji in February 2013, what are your impressions of gender issues in the Pacific Islands and why is it important to have gender sensitivity topics in solar training?

Dr. Saenz: The cultural norms in the Pacific Islands, not unlike many places across the globe, are differentiated by gender, such that men are associated with technology and women are not. There is also a strong sense of segregation in employment. Nonetheless, it was gratifying to see two women participate in the training, and to learn that all the trainees—both men and women in our session not only understood the importance of gender inclusion, but were enthusiastic about making a difference upon return to their respective nations and communities. I believe that continued opportunities for teaching and training about gender can be beneficial not just for the women, but for their communities as a whole.

7- Do you have any other thoughts or advice that you would like to share?

Dr. Saenz: The work on gender inclusion that VOCTEC (and other organizations) conduct is very important. It is imperative, however, to complement this work with early outreach in primary and secondary schools, where interest in solar energy can be generated among girls as they develop career aspirations and make subsequent academic and career decisions.

Thank you