

Innovation of the Week: Reducing the Things They Carry

The majority of farmers in sub-Saharan Africa— in some areas up to 80 percent— are women. The average female farmer in the region is responsible not only for growing food but also for collecting water and firewood—putting in a [16-hour workday](#).

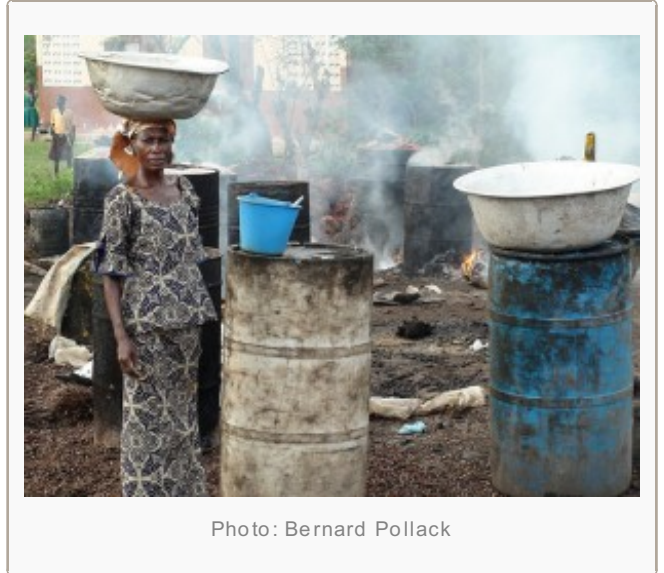
Deforestation and drought brought on by climate change have further increased women's time spent doing activities like gathering firewood and collecting water for bathing, cooking, and cleaning. Many women in Africa lack access to resources and technologies that might make these tasks easier, such as improved hoes, planters, and grinding mills; rainwater harvesting systems; and lightweight transport devices.

In Kenya, the organization [Practical Action](#) has introduced a [fireless cooker](#) to reduce household dependence on wood charcoal and other forms of fuel. Made easily by hand and at home, fireless cookers use insulation to store heat from traditional stoves that can then be used to cook foods over a longer period of time. Meals that are placed in a fireless cooker in the morning are baked with the stored heat and ready to eat later that day, reducing the need to continuously fuel traditional cook fires.

Meanwhile, [biogas units](#) that are fueled by livestock manure can save, on average, 10 hours of labor per week that would otherwise be spent collecting wood or other combustibles. The Rwandan government, recognizing the value of this time savings, hopes to have 15,000 households nationwide using biogas by 2012, and is subsidizing installation costs. (See also "[Building a Methane Fueled Fire](#)" and "[Got Biogas?](#)")

The "[Mosi-o-Tunya](#)" (Pump that Thunders) pressure pump, produced by [International Development Enterprises](#) (IDE), is a lightweight pump that sits on top of a well and is operated by foot. The pump's weight makes it easy to operate as well as to transport by foot or bike. Veronica Sianchenga, a farmer living in Kabuyu Village, Zambia, explained how, in addition to improving her family's diet and income, the pump gave her more independence: "Now we are not relying only on our husbands, because we are now able to do our own projects and to assist our husbands, to make our families look better, eat better, clothe better—even to have a house." (See also "[Access to Water Improves Quality of Life for Women and Children.](#)")

In Ethiopia, [Catholic Relief Services](#) (CRS) helped women living in the rural lowlands near Ajo improve their incomes and livelihoods by creating a milk marketing group. Before the USAID-funded project was implemented, women were carrying 1–2 liters of milk for seven or eight hours to sell at the nearest market in Dire Dawa. The milk would sell for only some 20 cents a liter, and after spending the night in town, the women returned home only to make the same trip again days later, forcing them to neglect their homes and gardens. Now, the women take turns selling each other's milk at the market, making the long trip only once every 10 days and keeping all of the profits from the day, putting some of the money into savings and using the rest to pay for food, school, and household supplies.



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