



I spent yesterday at an important University of Colorado [conference](#) organized by [Lakshman Guruswamy](#) on energy justice. The conference dealt with a frequently overlooked part of the energy problem. In our discussions of energy policy, we often focus on those who, like Americans, are already high consumers of energy, or the needs of those who, like the Chinese, are rapidly increasing their consumption ~~compensation~~. But there is a third group — the billion or more people whose only energy source is burning firewood, animal dung, or other organic material in primitive indoor stoves.

Given poorly ventilated housing, the result is a major public health problem, especially for women and children. Women also generally bear the burden of collecting the material to burn, which can take hours of their time and expose them to the risk of attack as they walk miles to the nearest source. And the poor combustion produces lots of black carbon, with substantial greenhouse effects.

This is a huge problem, but it has not brought forth a commensurate level of effort. Nevertheless, valiant efforts are being made by NGOs, academic researchers (including [significant work at ERG](#)), and government agencies to promote safer, more efficient cookstoves. There is some hope that more funding may become available as offset systems expand and mature — the reduction in black carbon could result in valuable offsets that could bring a good price from companies in the developed world.