

Household energy and health: WHO rationale for action:

- Worldwide, 2 million tones of biomass are consumed by about 2.4 billion people for cooking in households on a daily basis.
- The use of biomass fuel accounts for between 10% and 15% of global energy use. Demand for biomass fuel is expected to rise due to population growth, and reduced availability of alternative fuels.
- Unsustainable harvesting of wood as biomass fuel can put pressure on forests and local ecosystems where wood is scarce and population is dense:
 - In South East Asia, alarming rates of deforestation lead to land degradation and deforestation:
 - In China, the illegal cutting of fuel wood rendered forest plantations unproductive, leading to the roll out of the Chinese National Improved Stove Programme.
 - In sub-Saharan Africa, many countries have witnessed the depletion of more than three quarters of their wood cover.
- Combustion in open fires and traditional stoves tends to be highly inefficient resulting in energy loss and emission of products of incomplete combustions.
- Products of incomplete combustion contain potent greenhouse gases and hazardous substances, the exposure to which is linked to more than 1.5 million deaths per year.
- Improving household energy practices or switching to alternative fuels can save energy and reduce emissions and hence make an important contribution to achieving MDG 7.

Planned activities

WHO aims to mitigate local deforestation mainly by supporting the improvement of household energy devices. WHO plans to contribute to this through the following 4 focus areas:

A broadened evidence base:

- Quantification of the links between household energy, deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions, and development of win-win policies for health, energy and the environment.
- Comprehensive comparative review of the effectiveness of different household energy and health interventions.
- Updated assessment of the burden of disease attributable to indoor air pollution from solid fuel use.

Technical support to countries:

- Guidance material and technical support for the health sector and other sectors.
- Assistance to regional and national efforts in implementing household energy and health policies and programmes.

Ongoing monitoring:

- Updated statistics on solid fuel use and household energy practices in developing countries.
- Development of indoor air pollution indicators.

Practical normative guidance:

- Global indoor air quality guidelines for household combustion and technology-based guidance.