Smoke – the Killer in the Kitchen: IPCRG supports Practical Action’s campaign

Subject: Smoke – the Killer in the Kitchen: IPCRG supports Practical Action’s campaign
Date sent: 27 November 2006

Message:

Indoor smoke from cooking fires claims over 4000 lives a day in the developing world, yet, claims Practical Action, the international community is failing to act.

The IPCRG would like to encourage its members to join the campaign by the charity Practical Action to lobby at an international and national level for action to tackle the killer in the kitchen.

Practical Action claims that round the world, poverty condemns nearly half of humanity to cook using fuels that produce smoke when burnt - fuels such as wood, dung, crop-waste and coal. Over 1.5 million people die every year from illnesses caused by this smoke – a life lost every 20 seconds.

Indoor smoke is not an indiscriminate killer – it hits women and small children the hardest. Women across the developing world typically spend three to seven hours a day cooking by the fire, exposed to levels of smoke over 100 times the recommended limits. Respiratory illnesses caused by smoke include chronic bronchitis, acute lower respiratory infections such as pneumonia, and lung cancer. There is also increasing evidence linking it to asthma, TB and low birth weight.

The scale of the problem is immense, but there are practical solutions. Practical Action (formerly ITDG) is an international development agency that has been working with communities in Kenya, Sudan and Nepal to develop improved stoves and smoke hoods, improve ventilation, and provide micro-credit to enhance access to clean cooking fuels. The IPCRG is in discussions with Practical Action about a possible research project combining both indoor smoke reduction and tobacco smoking cessation activities. However, as this is a global problem it needs a global solution.

The international community is slowly gearing up to tackle indoor air pollution, with initiatives from the World Health Organisation, the launch of the Partnership for Clean Indoor Air and the United Nations Development Programme's LPG Challenge. However, compared with the international community’s response to hunger, HIV/AIDS, dirty water and poor sanitation and malaria, there has been extremely limited funding and insufficient high-level political backing for such initiatives. Without concerted action on indoor smoke, the international community will fail to meet its own targets for poverty reduction - the Millennium Development Goals.

Practical Action is calling for a comprehensive action plan to tackle indoor air pollution and the establishment on an internationally agreed target to improve energy access for the poor. The 15th session of the UN's Commission on Sustainable Development will meet next year in New York to discuss four themes including ‘energy for sustainable development' and ‘air pollution'. The conference offers a unique opportunity for the international community to make a commitment to tackle indoor air pollution. Please consider if your organisation could join Practical Action in its campaign by:

- Signing the e-postcard to the UK’s Secretary of State for International Development found at www.practicalaction.org/smoke;
- Writing to the Minister of Environment in your own government, urging them to make tackling indoor air pollution and providing access to energy for cooking a priority at CSD 15. To check your government is a member of the Commission on Sustainable Development next year, please visit (http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd15/members.htm)
If you do so, please also use it as an opportunity to draw attention to your organisation and the importance of providing primary health care resources in these countries to help prevent and manage the respiratory problems associated with indoor air pollution and tobacco smoking.

For more information about Practical Action and its campaign on indoor air pollution, visit [www.practicalaction.org/smoke](http://www.practicalaction.org/smoke) or contact Adam Musgrave at Adam.Musgrave@practicalaction.org.uk.

**Suggested text for your letter to your Minister of the Environment:**

Dear Minister,

I/organisation name am/is writing ahead of the UN’s Commission on Sustainable Development (UN CSD) next year, requesting the X government presses for action to tackle indoor air pollution.

Poverty condemns around three billion people to rely on solid fuels such as wood, dung, coal and charcoal for cooking and heating, because they cannot access or afford gas or electricity. The smoke caused by burning these fuels is responsible for the deaths of 1.5 million people every year, the principle victims being women and children. Illnesses caused by indoor smoke include chronic bronchitis, acute lower respiratory infections such as pneumonia, and lung cancer. According to the WHO, indoor air pollution (IAP) is the fourth greatest risk to death and disease in high mortality countries. However, despite the immense scale of the problem, there has been extremely limited funding and insufficient high-level political will to tackle indoor air pollution by governments and donors alike.

The 15th session of the United Nation's Commission on Sustainable Development, taking place in April 2007, offers an important opportunity for the international community to begin to address indoor air pollution by facilitating access to energy by the poor. Next year the conference is focussing on four thematic clusters, including ‘energy for sustainable development’ and ‘air pollution’, and the Commission will agree international policies on these issues.

We are calling for the UN CSD to recommend the following measures:

- Establish an internationally agreed target to improve energy access for the poor in developing countries, as recommended by the Millennium Project: ‘by 2015, to reduce the number of people without effective access to modern cooking fuels by 50 percent, and make improved cook stoves widely available’.
- Review energy policies with a view to cooking and health in countries most affected by indoor air pollution, and embark on education and awareness-raising campaigns about the dangers of present cooking practices and indoor air pollution.
- Ensure the allocation of bilateral and multilateral resources to implement programmes in individual countries, and for research, development and co-ordination at the international level, with the aim of enabling all people to reduce the health risks associated with indoor air pollution.
- Put global political weight and resources behind the Partnership for Clean Indoor Air, to work towards a global solution and to prepare strategic plans to tackle indoor air pollution.

*Given that the X government is a member of the Commission on Sustainable Development next year, you will have an excellent opportunity to press for action on indoor air pollution at this meeting. Even though the X government is not a member of the Commission on Sustainable Development for next year, it can still play an...*
important role in influencing the negotiations at the UNCSD 15. I urge you to do all you can to make sure a significant commitment to tackle indoor air pollution is reached.

Yours sincerely,