

# Energy News from Practical Action

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## Preparing for the UN's 15th Commission on Sustainable Development

Practical Action's energy team is again targeting the UN's Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), and working with GTZ, WHO, and the USEPA, we will be urging governments to commit to tackling energy poverty and the indoor air pollution crisis.

At the Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting of the CSD we are jointly organising a side event entitled 'Healthy and affordable household energy - let's scale up what works!' It will be held in the German House in New York on Tuesday 28th February, and speakers from China, Uganda and Sierra Leone have been invited. With our partners, we are also producing a joint position paper on household energy, indoor air pollution and health, which will be used to lobby governments at the CSD. The paper calls on governments to endorse the household energy target: by 2015, to halve the number of people without effective access to modern cooking fuels and to make improved cooking technologies widely available. The position paper will be available through HEDON and the PCIA, along with supporting materials which will help NGOs and civil society groups to lobby their own governments in the build up to the CSD. For further information please visit:

[www.hedon.info/goto.php/CSD15](http://www.hedon.info/goto.php/CSD15)

Practical Action has also been lobbying at the national level to ensure that the UK government prioritises energy poverty and indoor air pollution at CSD 15. We have been persuading British MPs to sign a parliamentary motion on the subject (Early Day Motion 421), and have asked our supporters to sign postcards to the government and write letters to their MPs.

## Practical Action networking event on Smoke at the World Urban Forum, Vancouver, June 2006

This third session of the World Urban Forum had particular significance because 30 years earlier in 1976 the UN held its first conference on Human settlements in Vancouver. This conference led to the birth of UN-Habitat.

In 2006, the conference was attended by some 10,000 participants from over 100 countries. The conference offers an open platform to all stakeholders (NGOs, grassroots organizations, governments, multi-lateral agencies, the private sector and so on) to present their ideas by hosting networking sessions or contributing to the main dialogue sessions.

Practical Action hosted a networking session which aimed to bring the issue of indoor air pollution to a new audience. We chose to focus on the use of subsidies in programmes to alleviate IPA, as this would be of common interest to a wider audience. The session took the form of a debate around the following statement:

This house believes that direct subsidies for improved technologies to reduce the 1.5million deaths caused by indoor air pollution are always misguided.

Practical Action staff presented examples from our work in Nepal and Sudan. In Nepal, interventions (smoke hoods) have been subsidised. In Sudan, the introduction of LPG gas stoves has been on a fully commercial basis without any subsidies, despite high levels of poverty among the internally displaced people with whom the project has worked.

Speaking against the motion (arguing that direct subsidies can be positive), Don O'Neal of HELPS International argued that well-placed subsidies could be seen as an investment in a more stable world. They help alleviate extreme poverty: quoting Kofi Annan 'A world where millions still live in desperate

conditions will not be a world at peace'. Very often the real cause of the problem is badly targeted subsidies that are used to prop up a badly designed project.

Speaking against the motion (arguing that direct subsidies are always misguided), Keith Openshaw (Energy Consultant) showed how subsidies often reach all the wrong people and lead to failures due to market distortion. He cited many instances where fuel subsidies had reached the poorest least. The majority of successful stoves have been introduced through commercial approaches. Subsidies should not subsidise the products themselves, but are better used indirectly to support training, capacity-building, research and so on.

The session was introduced and facilitated by Prof Michael Brauer. There were plenty of questions of clarification about the case studies, and a brief discussion on the appropriateness of three other technologies:

- Solar: good where it is appropriate, but usually too expensive and may not suit lifestyles
- Biodiesel, jatropha oil, methanol from wood. Biodiesel has wastewater issues where produced on a large scale.
- Fireless cookers: generally well-received by all where they fit with local cooking practices.

Overall, there was consensus on the need for indirect subsidies in the form of technical support, loans to producers to kickstart businesses, demand creation and infrastructure development. There was recognition that there are different issues for those who are willing and able to pay compared with those living in extreme poverty. Participants called for more good quality research into the problem, into appropriate and affordable technologies, and into the market for them. Monitoring and evaluation is needed after projects have finished – perhaps for 10-20 years. The motion was narrowly defeated.