First WHO Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health: Improving air quality, combatting climate change – saving lives

Preconference Workshop

Universal Clean Energy Access for Women’s Health, Sustainable Development, and Wellbeing of Women and Children

Co-Organized by WHO and Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves
Monday 29 October, 14:45–16:15
World Health Organization, Geneva – Salle A

Background

There is a global consensus and ever-growing body of evidence that expanding access to clean household energy for cooking, heating and lighting is key to achieving a range of global priorities, such as improving health, gender equality, equitable economic development and environmental protection.

The co-benefits of clean cooking can help achieve 10 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This includes SDG 5: to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, as unpaid work, including collecting fuel and cooking, remain a major cause of gender inequality. Unfortunately, nearly 3 billion people, or 40% of the world, cook their meals and heat and light their homes using dangerously polluting fuels and devices with tragic consequences. For example, traditional cooking practices and lack of access to cooking energy contribute to gender inequality and disproportionately impact women and girls, who are primarily responsible for managing household energy. Breathing in smoke from inefficient cooking fires is estimated to contribute to almost four million deaths each year – most of which are women and children. These cooking practices can also cause non-communicable cardiovascular and respiratory diseases in adults and pneumonia in children. In addition to illness, polluting and unsafe fuels pose substantial risks for burns and injuries. Fuel collection over long distances with heavy loads can result in personal safety risks and injury. Traditional cooking practices and lack of access to cooking energy has disproportionately negatively impacted women and girls, who are primarily responsible for managing household energy. This burden of household responsibilities and unpaid work collecting fuel and cooking often manifests in women and girls spending up to five hours a day collecting solid fuels, further deepens household gender inequalities and is a significant contributor to women’s time poverty.

The adoption of clean household energy provides an integrated approach to deliver dramatic gender and empowerment impacts, while also improving health, protecting the environment, and enhancing livelihoods – all of which help to achieve SDGs. Clean cooking solutions particularly, significantly benefit women and girls, including reducing time-intensive cooking and fuel collection tasks and allowing women and girls to engage in other activities such as income-generating opportunities, education, or rest – as they choose. While women can benefit from clean cooking solutions in a myriad of ways, they are also vital contributors to the growing sector and play a critical role in the widespread adoption and use of clean household energy. Universal clean energy access can not only prevent the loss of countless hours spent gathering wood, but also create new pathways for women’s economic empowerment, providing significant opportunities for income generation and entrepreneurship.
WHO’s First Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health (30 October - 1 November 2018)

The first WHO Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health: Improving air quality, combating climate change – saving lives, will take place at WHO Headquarters in Geneva from 30 October to 1 November this year. The conference is organized by WHO in collaboration with UN Environment, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC), the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

The conference will host about 400 participants, including representatives of WHO Member States, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, academia and the media. It aims to share with participants the current evidence on air pollution exposure and its health impacts; tools for informed decisions on healthy policy choices; and knowledge on effective interventions that may improve air quality and promote health. Several outcomes are anticipated, including a “Call for Urgent Action” by health and other sectors to reduce the number of deaths due to air pollution. The conference will call for commitments to improve air quality from countries, cities, relevant intergovernmental organizations and non-state actors.

Session objectives:

- Provide an overview of the importance of achieving universal access to clean energy for women and children
- Focus on key barriers and opportunities to accelerate access and attain benefits to health, livelihood, and well-being for women, children, and the most vulnerable communities

Provisional agenda:

Opening Address: H.E. Hajia Samira Bawumia, Second Lady of the Republic of Ghana

Panel discussion

Moderator: Heather Adair-Rohani, Team Leader for Household Energy and Health, WHO
Moderator will open with a discussion on the importance of achieving clean household energy access for women and children (10 min)

Panellists (10 minutes to present each):

- **Donee Alexander**, Sr. Director of Evidence and Impact, Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves: *Opportunities for improving gender equity and income generation through clean household energy*
- **Lucy Stevens**, Senior Policy and Practice Advisor, Practical Action: *Value of focusing on total energy access, beyond a focus purely on cooking*
- **Marion Verles**, CEO, Gold Standard: *Methodologies for gender and health*
- **M. Jackson Machuhi**, Director, Barefoot Power (Africa) Ltd (individual): Barefoot Power’s project on gender & energy
- **Harry Clemens**, HIVOS: *Women as agents of change for scaling up clean energy*

Open discussion (30 minutes)