Eleven countries came together to participate in an interactive working session focused on developing action plans for the adoption of national cookstove standards and implementation planning during the workshop organized in Kampala, Uganda by WHO in partnership with the Clean Cooking Alliance.

This is the second workshop organized on this topic by WHO in collaboration with the Clean Cooking Alliance, following the success of the expert consultation that took place in Kathmandu, Nepal in December 2018.

Officials from these countries began charting short-, medium- and long-term steps towards standards adoption, adaptation and implementation of national cookstove standards based on the WHO Guidelines for indoor air quality: household fuel combustion and recently developed protocols for cookstove and clean cooking technologies.

Held over a week in July 2019 in Kampala, two parallel policy and testing workshops took participants through interactive working sessions – a combination of seminars, laboratory demonstration and training sessions, and peer sharing of experiences – focused on taking steps towards developing action and implementation plans for the adoption of these standards.

Critical to the success of any initiative to clean up household air is action and engagement from all relevant decision-makers, regardless of mandate – so, the workshops brought together officials and experts from ministries of energy, health and environment, national standards bodies and other stakeholders of clean cookstoves and clean testing solutions.
The testing workshop aimed to provide information on standards for testing clean cookstoves and clean cooking solutions. Participants were also given hands-on practical training on conducting the cookstove tests, including equipment review, test result analysis, process for determining tiers of performance of results, and how to report results. Testing is essential for technology development. It allows communication of stove performance to implementers, donors, government programmes and users, and evaluation of technologies against standards, including their potential to achieve these guidelines.

Testing is part of a larger policy focus on making sure cookstoves are safe to use. Accordingly, the second workshop saw decision-makers from the ministries of energy, environment, health and standards and other stakeholders of clean cookstoves and clean testing solutions briefed on testing standards. Moreover, the policy workshop included information on the value of setting targets and on the processes for setting tiers of performance of cookstoves (clean, transitional and polluting) and placed emphasis on implementation planning.

Both workshops were geared towards encouraging the development of national standards and testing mechanisms in line with the WHO Guidelines for indoor air quality: household fuel combustion.

The two workshops have been launched at a time when around three billion people – nearly 40% of the global population – still depend on burning solid fuels (wood, animal dung, charcoal, crop waste and coal) to cook their meals and heat their homes by using inefficient and highly polluting stoves, a practice that generates huge amounts of air pollutants.

Respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and cancer caused by breathing in these pollutants – many of them invisible to the human eye – kill close to four million people each year. The vast proportion of this burden is borne by low- and middle-income countries; and the most exposed are women and children, who also bear consequences of having to gather and transport this solid fuel, leaving them open to violence and with less time for education and other enriching activities.

It is even a significant contributor to outdoor air pollution, responsible for around 12% of total deaths from ambient air pollution.

This workshop focused in Africa, with participants from Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda.

The workshops’ organizers’ overarching hope is for countries to put in place and enforce standards for cookstoves in line with WHO guidelines that will reap real health gains.

These standards and benchmarks can also support countries’ climate and environmental goals, while providing consumer protection. That support is potentially substantial: inefficient household cooking practices contribute to climate change through emissions of greenhouse gases and short-lived climate pollutants. Up to 25% of black carbon emissions come from residential solid fuel use, including for cooking, heating and lighting.

WHO takes a leading role in developing and disseminating tools to support local, national and regional efforts to clean up household air. This effort is advancing on several fronts: helping national governments develop comprehensive action plans to tackle household air pollution engaging the health sector to improve programme delivery addressing research and data gaps and building broader awareness of health risks and solutions.