



New UN energy report says 1.5 billion people worldwide live in darkness



23 November 2009 – With the United Nations climate change summit in Copenhagen just 13 days away, the UN Development Programme (**UNDP**) has highlighted the need to ensure that the energy needs of developing countries are central to any new climate agreement, after a new report found that almost a quarter of the world's 6 billion people live without electricity.

The majority of the 1.5 billion people who live in the dark are in the least developed countries (LDCs) of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, according to the report, *The Energy Access Situation in Developing Countries: A Review Focusing on the Least Developed Countries and Sub-Saharan Africa*.

"Expanding energy access is essential to tackle global poverty. It needs to happen at the lowest cost and in the cleanest and most sustainable way possible to help developing countries establish a low-carbon route to development," Olav Kjørven, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Bureau for Development Policy, told reporters in New York at the launch of the report.

"Almost half of humanity is completely disconnected from the debate on how to drive human progress with less emissions and greener energy because their reality is much more basic than that: they carry heavy loads of water and food on their backs because they don't have transport; they cook over wood fires that damage their health, not with electricity, gas or oil," said Mr. Kjørven.

"We must ensure that the energy needs of these people are central to a new climate agreement," he added, referring to the pact to curb greenhouse gas emissions that countries are hoping to achieve when they meet in the Danish capital in December.

Mr. Kjørven noted that two million people die every year from causes associated with exposure to smoke from cooking with biomass and coal – and 99 per cent of those deaths occur in developing countries.

In LDCs and sub-Saharan Africa, half of all deaths from pneumonia in children under five years, chronic lung disease and lung cancer in adults are attributed to the use of solid fuel, compared with 38 per cent in developing countries overall.

According to the report, to halve the proportion of people living in poverty by 2015 – the first of the eight globally agreed targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**) – 1.2 billion more people will need access to electricity and two billion more people will need access to modern fuels like natural gas or Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), also called propane.

“We have to see Copenhagen as an opportunity. For a climate deal to work, it also has to be a development deal. Developing countries have to see that this deal would help them move forward, not slow down,” Mr. Kjørven stated.

The report was produced in partnership by the UNDP and the World Health Organization (**WHO**), with support from the International Atomic Energy Agency (**IAEA**).

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