

SEVEN SOUTH ASIAN NATIONS CHIP IN THEIR RESOURCES

Full steam ahead for new stove



BY JENNIHER HENRICUS

Seven South Asian nations are to pool their resources and technical know how to devise a cooking stove that is fuel efficient and non-polluting.

An improved cooking stove has been identified as the greatest need in the region. Women in South Asia—(Sri Lanka included) walk five miles everyday in search of fuel wood to feed a stove that is only ten percent fuel efficient.

This inefficient stove which comprises three stones placed at right angles, while contributing towards the depletion of the region's diminishing forest reserves has also posed a major health hazard in the region—the incomplete combustion being responsible for the high incidence of lung diseases here.

These factors have now become the concern of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) which is to embark on a major scheme to develop a stove that will be fuel efficient and acceptable to the vast majority in the region, Protem Director of SACEP, Dr. Leslie Herath said.

The programme will be launched in June this year with funds from the United Nations Development Programme amounting to 245,150 US dollars.

The scientific studies on fuel efficient stoves that have been done in the region over the past few years will be collated and the region's scientists will get together to devise the final product.

The chief development objectives of the project are:—

- * The identification of the casual factors as well as the remedial measures for the current wasteful use of fuelwoods for cooking and other domestic uses.
- * Reduction of the current exploitation of the dwindling forest resources for fuel purposes by the proper utilisation of fuel wood thus preventing the degradation of the forest ecosystem and the environment.
- * Greater involvement of the community in the production of fuelwoods in their immediate neighbourhood.

The project is based on the request of these developing countries in South Asia which have given this item a high priority. The project will design and fabricate an efficient stove and identify and grow suitable fast growing fuelwoods best adaptable to different agro-climatic zones.

In the first phase of the project about 10,000 stoves will be field tested in equal number of families along with other



WOOD FOR THOUGHT

packages of activities in the countries which include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives.

The focal point in each member state would be to identify an institution to carry out the field trials in collaboration with the SACEP secretariat. The duration of the field trials is programmed to last 12 months to cover all four seasons of the year.

It is expected that these trials will give a good indication and guidelines to launch the second phase of the project, Dr. Herath said, where each country would fabricate the targeted requirements of stoves for sale or distribution as determined by the respective member states.

The reduction of the consumption of fuelwood in Sri Lanka by 10 percent would amount to a saving of 5.5 million US dollars. In a country like India which consumes 150 million cubic

metres of fuelwood, if 10 per cent of fuelwood is saved by the introduction of an efficient stove, the direct saving at current cost (Rs. 100 per cubic metre) is in the region of US \$150 million.

Dr. Herath explained that this was most timely in view of the enormous sums of money spent by most of the South Asian countries for projects and programmes in the forestry sector. These programmes were essentially aimed at increasing the forest cover by reforestation through various methods.

The new programme would have both a social forestry concept to increase the tree cover as well as conservation element due to the more efficient use of the resource. Thereby, a lower rate of exploitation will be obtained.

The meeting of the Governing Council of SACEP in Colombo on Thursday at the BMICH will ratify the programme which will be given priority among the policies of SACEP.