

PARTNERSHIPS

fuelling change

Shell Foundation has established an ambitious partnership that aims to cut the number of fume-related deaths caused by open fires in traditional homes

More than three billion people, or almost half the world's population, cook in their homes using traditional fires and stoves that use fuels such as wood, dung and crop waste. They spend much of their time indoors breathing in lethal fumes which, according to the World Health Organization, claim the lives of 1.5 million people a year, or one person every 20 seconds. Women and children make up the majority of these deaths due to their increased exposure in the home.

The Shell Foundation and the US-based environmental non-profit organization Envirofit International hope to change that bleak picture. They've set up a partnership that has the potential to significantly reduce the number of global deaths caused by this form of 'indoor air pollution'.

The Foundation, which was established by oil company Shell in 2000 as an independent charity, is providing Envirofit – which specializes in green engineering – with \$25million (£12.1m) of investment and organizational support to form a programme that should see 10 million clean-burning stoves sold in India, Latin America and East and West Africa over the next five years. Envirofit, working with Colorado State University's Engines and Energy Conversion Laboratory, will design, develop, market and distribute the 'clean-cook' stoves, which emit significantly less toxic emissions and use less fuel.

Scientists at a private US firm, Berkeley Air Monitoring Group, will carry out detailed evaluation of the stoves once they are put into the field. And all parties have pledged to develop the programme with a keen eye on the real, rather than perceived, needs of their future customers.

Shell Foundation initially got involved with the

indoor air pollution issue in 2002, running nine pilots as part of its 'Breathing Space' initiative in seven countries with various bodies, many of whom will be involved in the new push. One of the partners, Harish Hande, managing director of Selco India, an Indian social venture enterprise, says the programme is 'a breath of fresh air' because it's based on trying to provide something of real value to its target group, rather than handing a product down to them.

The fact that the stoves will be sold – at prices ranging from \$20–\$150 (£10–£75) – is important. The

partners believe the commercial, rather than aid-driven, model will provide a more sustainable way of tackling indoor air pollution – because it relies on market mechanisms to guide product development and drive consumer demand, instead of aid agencies

donating or subsidizing the sale of stoves. The Foundation hopes that by treating people as customers rather than aid recipients, the stoves will be seen by householders as high-quality, aspirational products. 'The only way we're going to make a significant long-term impact and achieve the scale needed is to get private sector thinking involved,' argues Shell Foundation director Kurt Hoffman.

It's early days yet, but if the model proves to be as effective as Hoffman and his partners hope, then the return in human terms could be significant.

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■ **Burning issue:** more than three billion people use open fires in their homes – as here in the Langtang area of Nepal – leading to one death every 20 seconds as a result of indoor pollution



comment

SHELL FOUNDATION

The impressive thing about the Shell Foundation's project is that it will reduce toxic emissions and use less fuel. And the problem being addressed is not due to any product that Shell produces! It will be interesting to have another report at the end of the five year period.

points of interest are:

- the partnership between high quality technological organizations and a corporate charity
- treating people as customers rather than aid recipients
- evaluation by an outside firm is already planned

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