

One billion people still lack electricity, says WI report

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Dar es Salaam. More than a billion people in the world still lack access to electricity, while another one billion have unreliable access stalling efforts for improving health, livelihoods and conserve the environment.

Findings from a new research published by the Worldwatch Institute (WI) urge governments and development organisations to invest in electrification to achieve critical health, environmental, and livelihood outcomes, a statement released by the Institute in the city yesterday said.

Citing data from the UN and the International Energy Agency (IEA) the WI research says between 1990 and 2008, close to two billion people worldwide gained access to electricity. But more than 1.3 billion people still lack access to electricity, while another one billion have unreliable access.

According to the IEA, some \$1.9 billion was invested worldwide in 2009 in extending access to modern energy services, such as electricity and clean cooking facilities. The

agency projects that between 2010 and 2030, an average of \$14 billion will be spent annually, mostly on urban grid connections.

"Modern energy sources provide people with lighting, heating, refrigeration, cooking, water pumping, and other services that are essential for reducing poverty, improving health and education, and increasing incomes," write the WI research report authors Michael Renner and Matthew Lucky.

At least 2.7 billion people, and possibly more than three billion, lack access to modern fuels for cooking and heating, according to the research.

They rely instead on traditional biomass sources, such as firewood, charcoal, manure, and crop residues, that can emit harmful indoor air pollutants when burned. These pollutants cause nearly two million premature deaths worldwide each year, an estimated 44 per cent of them in children. Among adult deaths, 60 per cent are women.

Traditional energy usage also contributes to environmental impacts including forest and woodland degradation, soil erosion, and black carbon emissions that contribute to global climate change.

Electrification varies widely between rural and urban areas in developing countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, the rural electrification rate is just 14 per cent, compared with 60 per cent in urban areas.

"As new approaches to electrification evolve----ones that don't rely on expensive regional or national grids but rather a diversity of locally available energy resources----we can begin to reach for the goal of access to electricity for all, rural as well as urban," said Worldwatch president Robert Engelman.