

Community Kitchens: A Stepping Stone to Modern Energy for Lower-income Rural Communities



Did you know?

- Over **2 billion people in the world** are dependent on biomass energy and around 700 million live in India.
- According to the Census of India in 2001, about **91% of rural and 31% of urban homes** depend mainly on traditional fuels (fuel-wood, animal and crop waste and charcoal) for cooking.
- **Burning biomass can impact** on the social, environmental and economic lives of these communities.
- **Women spend hours a day** collecting firewood away from their families, wood-burning stoves emit smoke and particulate matter which is hazardous to health; and trees are also destroyed.
- Women and children could spend their time doing more productive work or going to school if they weren't collecting firewood.
- Cleaner and more efficient fuels are necessary to **reduce CO₂ emissions** and to **improve the local air qualities** in cities and also in homes. Among these fuels, **LP Gas has been recommended** both for its higher efficiency and lower environmental impact compared to most other commercial alternatives.

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Reduced cooking time frees women to do more productive work, earn wages and educate their children.

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What are we doing?

- Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) pioneered an innovative initiative for some rural communities in India by creating a facility that could be shared amongst the village population, a village kitchen or Rasoi Ghar was created. The Rasoi Ghar scheme involves **setting up a community kitchen equipped with gas stoves and LP Gas cylinders** in a space made available by the local community and accessible to all interested sections of the village.
- Hot water and clean burning fuel can be made accessible to people to cook with and to people who otherwise would not be able to afford it.
- The principle is based on managing the facility from a focal point in the village supported by **micro finance**.
- **Low income people in the village then share a modern energy facility by leasing it at an affordable rate.** There is no requirement for them to buy individual cylinders, cookers and other equipment along with a cylinder of gas. The outlay is simply based on how long the individual uses the kitchen.
- The space required for the Rasoi Ghar is normally provided free of cost by the village panchayat or villagers.
- The number of stoves and cylinders is based on the number of families.
- **Safety messages and safety tips** including operating instructions are displayed at all the Rasoi Ghars.
- The cost for setting up a typical Rasoi Ghar with three stoves, three cylinders, table top etc is around Rs.8,000 (116 euros).

What is the result?

- The result of the scheme shows that communities can put their time to **better use** and can eventually afford their own LP Gas facilities.
- **Women are saved from exposure to smoke** and particulates that is generated while burning firewood. Smoke causes respiratory and optometric problems.
- Savings due to a reduction in cooking time **free up the women** to do more productive work or allows them to educate their children or earn more wages. Women also do not need to walk miles into forests collecting firewood, and risk of attack from wild animals (boars, bears) is greatly reduced.
- Opportunities for social interaction with others in a community facility – children are seen playing outside, while mothers cook inside.
- The presence of LP Gas allows other applications such as **gas-fired generators** for local power allowing electric lights to be available in the village at night time.
- HPCL is currently running Rasoi Ghars in **many reputed hospitals** such as AIIMS, New Delhi, Lal Ded Hospital, Srinagar, PGI and Chandigarh, to ensure cooking of hygienic food at affordable prices for the relatives who normally accompany patients.
- Rasoi Ghars are also operating in **various villages** in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chattisgarh and Maharashtra.
- Today more than 1,950 Rasoi Ghars are successfully operating across the country, benefiting 22,000 families.
- **HPCL won the Golden Peacock Award for corporate social responsibility** in 2005, and has also been awarded the **National Excellence Award for Innovative Techniques** for improving the access of rural women to a modern fuel.