

Honorable Shri K.C. Pant, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning and welcome. I am extremely impressed and pleased to see that the issue of household energy and indoor air pollution encouraged so many people to come from so many places, some as far away as South Africa. I believe that 15 countries are represented here today.

Why are we here? My colleagues and I at the World Bank regard indoor air pollution as a very important issue. It is estimated to take the lives of two million young children and women each year in the developing world, mainly affecting poor rural families. It is among the major contributors to child mortality in India and many other countries.

As you know, the international community just re-committed itself at the Monterrey Conference to the Millennium Development Goals, one of which is to reduce child mortality by two thirds by 2015. In a country like India, this goal is not achievable without addressing Indoor Air Pollution and other major environmental health risks such as poor access to water and sanitation. Not surprisingly, we see Indoor Air Pollution as a key priority from the perspective of several different sectors – energy, public health, environment. Indoor Air Pollution is a cross-sectoral issue. This is reflected in the agenda and audience of this workshop.

In your folder, you will find a draft report entitled “Household Energy, Air Pollution and Health in India.” The study was started about two years ago, with the generous support from the joint UNDP/World Bank Energy Sector Management Assistance Programme (ESMAP). Reflecting the cross-sectoral nature of the problem, the study covers several areas – improving the information base for assessing and predicting the health impacts of Indoor Air Pollution, promoting cleaner modern household fuels, designing well performing programs to disseminate improved biomass stoves, and raising awareness of all these issues among stakeholders.

From the very beginning, there was a high level of consultation and local ownership. A launch workshop in March 1999 with a wide range of Indian stakeholders set out the directions for this work. Counterpart institutions – the Planning Commission, the Ministry for Non-Conventional Energy, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Indian Council of Medical Research; and the Departments of Civil Supplies and Environment in Andhra Pradesh – provided valuable guidance and support. We have been privileged to partner with such excellent research institutions in India. We have also benefited from collaboration with Professor Kirk Smith from the School of Environment Health at the University of California in Berkeley, who was one of the first researchers to bring attention to Indoor Air Pollution.

Over the past two years, there has been a growing recognition of the Indoor Air Pollution problem around the world. Bilateral institutions are also reacting and are adjusting their programs of support accordingly.

We count very much on the contribution of all of you during this workshop – in providing feedback on the findings of the study, sharing your experiences, identifying major gaps and challenges, brainstorming approaches to possible solutions, and, finally, turning the wealth of knowledge represented here and the discussions into specific recommendations for future actions. I hope that you will leave this place equipped with enhanced knowledge, energy, and more importantly, a strengthened network of colleagues and friends to tackle these issues in your own state or country. I hope that all of us together will make possible what each of us alone could not achieve.

I wish you two interesting, productive days and a successful workshop.

Thank you.