

23/11/2007 China considers national strategy to boost rural energy development

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["China Considers National Strategy To Boost Rural Energy development by Xinhua writer Wu Qiong" - Xinhua headline]

China considers national strategy to boost rural energy development

BEIJING, Nov. 23 (Xinhua) - The Chinese government is drafting a new rural energy strategy to boost energy development in the vast rural regions where some 10 million people in remote areas are still suffering from energy poverty, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in China.

It was revealed at the International Conference of Rural Energy Development held in Beijing on Friday, which was jointly organized by UNDP and China's Office of the National Energy Leading Group.

The UNDP said it was assisting the Chinese Office to draft the strategy, which could be released early 2008.

"We are actively carrying out researches on the draft national strategy of rural energy development," Ma Xiaohu, a top researcher with the academy of macro-economic research under NDRC, said at the conference.

Wu Guihui, deputy director of the Energy Bureau of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), said the country certainly needs such a national strategy and they are planning more research to sort out clues on the rural energy development scheme.

The UNDP in China said in a press release that the national strategy would "establish a vision for future rural energy development and increase access of the poor to sustainable energy".

No specifics about the strategy were available from any of the sources.

China's rural residents rely on coal and low-efficiency traditional biomass, such as directly burning straws and firewood, for a large share of their energy consumption.

Most of China's rural regions are not equipped with pipelines for the supply of commercial energies like natural gas and liquefied petroleum gas, which led to a small proportion of clean energy use in rural areas, according to Wu.

The current use of electricity in rural areas is also lagging far behind urban use due to the lack of infrastructure facilities. Statistics shows that China's rural population consumed less than 100 kilowatt-hours of electricity per capita in 2006, only a fourth of urban consumption.

China will further boost the development of new and renewable energies including biogas and solar energy to reduce rural reliance on traditional biomass for energy consumption, said Wu.

He said China will also extend power grids in more rural areas to enlarge electricity coverage for rural residents, and promote renewable energy technologies such as micro hydropower, wind power and solar energy at places where extension of the power grid is not economical.

Ma also called for actions to increase supply of cleaner and more qualified energies such as natural gas to meet the energy demand in rural areas.

He added that rural residents should be allowed equal access to these energies at the same prices as urbanites, or even at subsidized prices to persuade them from cutting wood and exploiting grassland for energy consumption, which was not sustainable for the whole economy.

He stressed that the government should take the major responsibility in investing in rural energy development, especially in public infrastructure construction.

Experts and officials attending the conference also agreed that power supply services such as oil and gas stations and maintenance services for facilities of new and renewable energies needed to be upgraded in rural areas.

Otherwise, they said, rural residents would be discouraged from using cleaner energies due to lack of access or lack of expertise.

They were also encouraging data about the improvement in rural energy use disclosed by experts at the conference when they tried to fix problems there.

The Chinese government has arranged a total investment up to nearly 2.6 billion yuan in rural energy development via the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) between 2001 and 2006, said Kou Jianping, director of the energy and ecology division of the MOA.

China had built 21.75 million household biogas facilities by the end of 2006, amid efforts to promote clean energy use and improve energy efficiency in the countryside, according to Kou.

These household facilities could produce 8.5 billion cubic meters of biogas annually, equivalent to saving about 13.3 million tons of standard coal or preserving 4.5 million hectares of woodland.

Kou said the country is actively promoting straw as solid and gas energy as well as power generation with straw to make better use of existing energy resources in rural areas.

There were nearly 200,000 people working for the rural energy system in China by the end of 2005, with 170,000 being licensed farmer-technicians maintaining facilities, according to Kou.

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