



WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 5 JUNE 2019

A public statement from the Associated Country Women of the World, marking this year's theme: #BeatAirPollution

Since 1970, the Associated Country Women of the World has worked to draw attention to the impact of pollution on the environment. This year, we mark World Environment Day and its theme, #BeatAirPollution, with a reminder that whilst many may assume air pollution and quality are urban issues, rural areas are also deeply affected. The emission of greenhouse gasses, and the ensuing damage done to the atmosphere is causing climate change and, as always, because of the poverty and remoteness often associated with rurality, rural people suffer disproportionately compared to their urban counterparts.

While primary pollutants are higher in urban areas, secondary pollutants like Ozone (not to be confused with the Ozone Layer) are concentrated in rural areas. This is caused by the sun's rays reacting with air pollutants as they travel away from urban areas. Ozone can damage crops, leading to lower crop yields. Unfortunately, this is especially true in developing countries, where crop yields can be reduced by up to 15%.

Of particular concern is the lack of data and research done to measure air quality, and the necessary adjustments in rural areas. Though studies have indicated that air particulates from agricultural practices can impact the health of farmers, exacerbating underlying chronic conditions, most research into the health impacts of air quality on health have been focused on urban areas. Recognising that this lack of research is likely an understandable exercise in cost benefits, we call on research bodies, Governments, and the United Nations to remember that agricultural people are the backbone of urban society. Preliminary research shows that rural people are suffering from airborne pollution, and it will take a concerted effort at every level to establish exactly the impact on Rural Communities. The move of industrial factories away from urban areas into rural areas in an effort to reduce urban pollution has simply moved the source of pollution, placing the burden of impacts on the part of society least able to carry it.

ACWW member societies in rural areas must act to educate their members on the effects of using solid fuels in their homes, recognising that chimneys and pipes directing smoke out of the home only displaces the pollution by a few feet and it is not a sustainable solution. Governments and research bodies must invest in sustainable and accessible sources of energy for rural families, especially those in developing countries. ACWW also calls on its members and Member Societies involved in agriculture and farming to ensure that whenever possible they are using technology and fuels that contribute as little as possible to air pollution in their area.

Magdie de Kock
ACWW World President

NOTES

<http://www.irceline.be/en/documentation/faq/why-are-ozone-concentrations-higher-in-rural-areas-than-in-cities>
<https://research.msu.edu/studying-the-impact-of-air-pollution-in-rural-environments/>
<http://ehs.sph.berkeley.edu/newsbefore2014/2015/1/26/rural-air-pollution-often-overlooked>
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/gcb.14381>

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