DRC: COUNTRY LEVEL LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT

An assessment of impacts on health, ecosystems and resource use of the transition to e-cook.

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Recipe ingredients, Beans Porridge and Fried Plantain.Copyright of Ekomobong Samuel, Nigeria eCookbook, 2024

The transition to e-cook from traditional cooking fuels can deliver a range of benefits (and possible impacts) to human health, ecosystems and resource use. Using a Life Cycle Assessment approach, these have been analysed across the full life cycle of cooking, from raw material extraction to final disposal of the cooking devices and the different fuels used. This analysis takes into account the split between rural and urban populations, and their access to electricity.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Taking 2019 as the base year, DRC had a population of 90 million, with an average family size of 4.82 people. The population was split 55% rural and 45% urban, with 1% of the rural population having access to electricity and 43.8% of the urban population able to access electricity (World Bank). The main fuels used for cooking were firewood, charcoal, LPG and electricity, see Table 1 below.

	% Rural pop	% Urban pop	% Total pop
Kerosene	0	2.2	1
LPG	0	0.1	0
Electricity	0.1	6.9	3.2
Firewood	91.1	26.2	61.9
Charcoal	7.7	59.9	31.2

(WHO: Primary reliance on fuels and technologies for cooking, 2021)

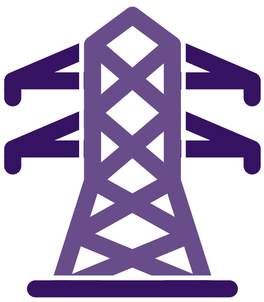
Table 1: Fuel type used per % of population

Table 2 shows the daily fuel consumption per household, assuming no fuel stacking.

ASSUMPTIONS

Ten different scenarios were analysed in comparison to the base case (S0) using the following assumptions:

(a) it was assumed that each household utilised a single fuel for cooking (i.e. no fuel stacking),



1% RURAL ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY

43.8% URBAN ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY

	Per HH per day
Kerosene	0.54 Kg
LPG	0.51 Kg
Electricity	3.2 kWh
Firewood	7.9 Kg
Charcoal	2.05 Kg

(Calculated from consumption rates from Virunga EPC trial)

Table 2: Daily single fuel consumption per household

(b) access to electricity is synonymous with suitable supply to use electricity for cooking,

(c) for rural population, if 1% have access and only 0.1% currently use electricity for cooking, then there is capacity for a further 0.9% of rural population to transition to electricity,

(d) for urban population, 43.8% have access and only 6.9% currently use electricity for cooking, then there is capacity for a further 36.9% of the urban population to transition to electricity.

(e) two hypothetical scenarios have been evaluated: 100% LPG cooking and 100% electric cooking. These are not realistic scenarios and have been included to provide an indication of the maximum possible benefits that could be achieved.

SCENARIOS EVALUATED

- Base case, in 2019 (S0)
- Shift all charcoal to electricity (S1)
- Shift rural charcoal to electricity (S2)
- Shift urban charcoal to electricity (S3)
- Shift all firewood to electricity (S4)
- Shift rural firewood users to electricity (S5)
- Shift urban firewood users to electricity (S6)
- Shift urban wood and as many charcoal users as possible to electricity (S7)
- Shift Kerosene users to electricity (S8)
- All LPG cooking (S9)
- All electric cooking (S10)

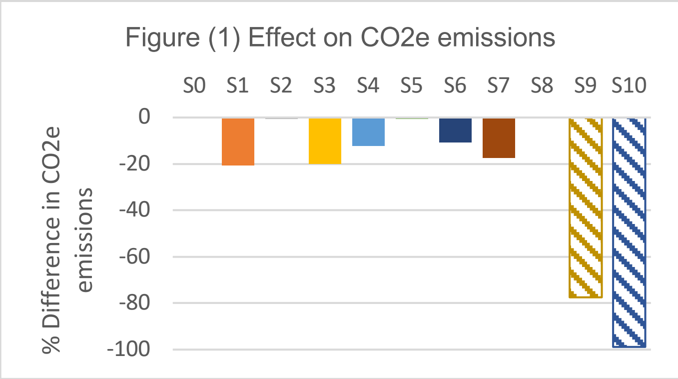
IMPACTS ASSESSED

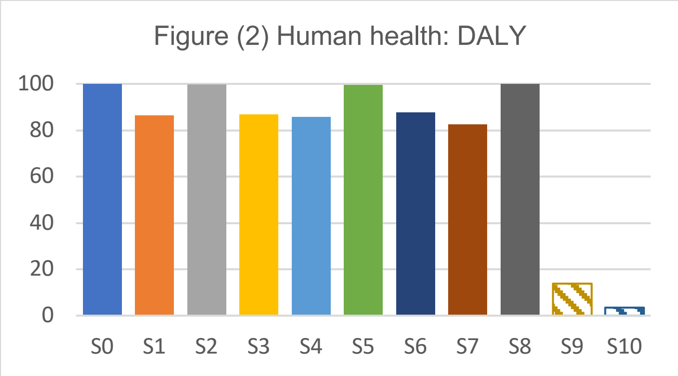
The impacts evaluated were improvement in CO_2 emissions, effect on human health, ecosystems and resource use. These are defined as:

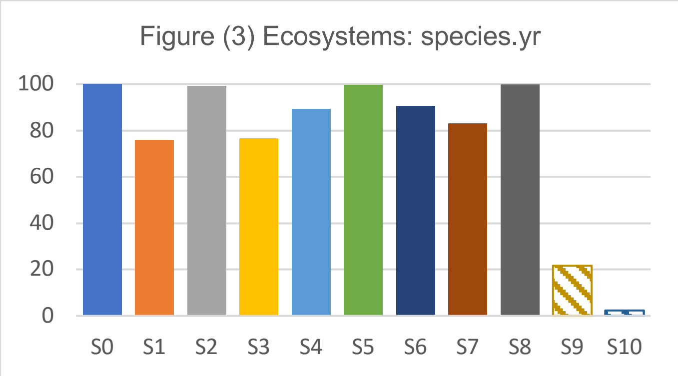
- **CO_2e emissions,** expressed as the change in CO_2 equivalent emissions for the country as a whole. Negative change suggests an improvement in CO_2 emissions, a positive change suggests an increased impact from CO_2 emissions
- **Human Health,** expressed as the number of year life lost and the number of years lived disabled. These are combined as Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs). The unit is years.
- **Ecosystems,** expressed as the loss of species over a certain area, during a certain time. The unit is years.
- **Resource scarcity,** expressed as the surplus costs of future resource production over an infinitive timeframe (assuming constant annual production), considering a 3% discount rate. The unit is USD2013.

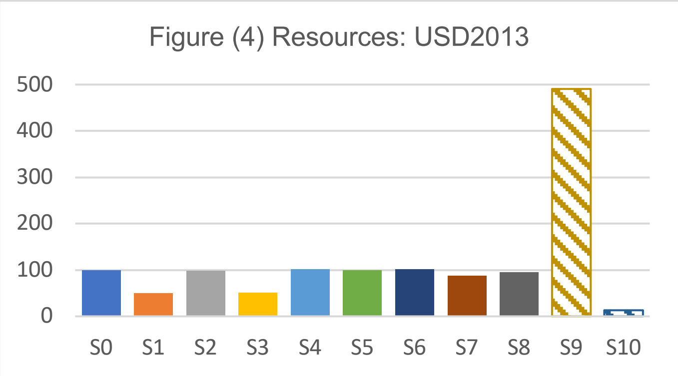
FINDINGS

1) The effect of the cooking devices was seen to be negligible, and the results are dominated by the fuel type.
2) Moving charcoal users to electricity (S1) will deliver benefit (approximately 20%) in CO_2e emission reductions, and this is driven by shifting the urban users of charcoal (S3). This shift also results in a corresponding improvement in human health, ecosystems and resource use.
3) Shifting firewood users results in a smaller improvement (under 15%), in CO_2e emissions (S4), and this too is driven by transitioning the urban community (S6). Health, ecosystem and resource use outcomes are improved, are only marginally improved in this scenario.
4) The benefits of moving either firewood or charcoal users to grid generated domestic electricity can really only be realised by the urban communities, as only 1% of the rural population has access.
5) Shifting kerosene and LPG users only shows benefits for health, ecosystem and resource use and no benefit in CO_2e reduction









For figures (2), (3) and (4): Base case (S0) = 100

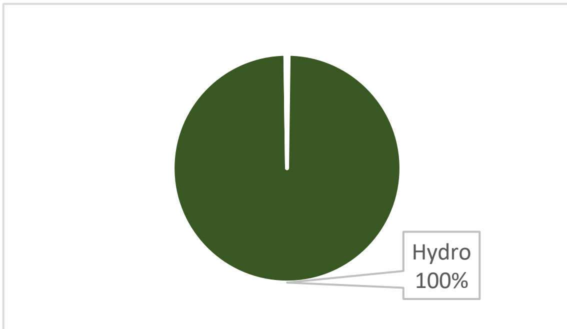
6) Comparing the hypothetical scenarios of all LPG (S9) or all electric cooking (S10) shows that grid connected electric cooking would deliver better CO_2e savings and improved health, ecosystem and resource use outcomes. This suggests that rural users could be connected to local renewably generated mini-grids, rather than transitioning to LPG as an interim clean fuel before connection to the domestic grid supply.
7) Whilst shifting to LPG cooking does deliver significant savings for CO_2e, health and ecosystems, it also leads to a 5-fold increase in resource use impact.
8) The results normalised against global damage shows that human health impacts are more significant than those for ecosystems or resources.

CONCLUSIONS

DRC generates its domestic electricity from renewable resources, and thus electric cooking is a low carbon option (IEA: https://www.iea.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/electricity) and that wherever possible, users should be grid connected.

This assessment suggests that initial efforts should be guided towards shifting urban charcoal users, followed by urban firewood users. One potential solution to ameliorate the low access to energy seen within the rural population is to consider the use of renewably powered minigrids to raise access levels, until the domestic grid supply is more widespread.

The limited CO_2e benefits, human health and ecosystem impacts of switching from kerosene and LPG to electric cooking (S8) suggest that these users should not, at the current time, be the primary focus for transitioning to electric cooking.



Domestic electricity generation sources 2021, IEA

How to use the data

This analysis uses a number of very broad assumptions that are not necessarily representative of all situations; no fuel stacking, that access to electricity is synonymous with a supply that is suitable and can support electric cooking, and that access will be via the grid system. In addition, it is assumed that the grid supply will expand using similar sources for energy generation, e.g. if electricity is mainly produced by hydro sources, then the increase in supply needed to match the uptake in electric cooking will also be supplied from hydro sources.

The results themselves are a combination of influencing factors: access to electricity (the number of households that can transition), and carbon intensity of the fuels.

As such, these results should be viewed as generic trend data, as opposed to specific values for the country assessed. The results aim to provide a broad brush assessment of the likely direction of travel for the impact categories chosen (CO_2e emissions, human health, ecosystem degradation, and resource use), as a result of a transition to electric cooking.

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