

The impact of woodfuel collection on forests has been controversial and its role in rural livelihoods and deforestation is the subject of considerable debate. This study reviews the main dimensions of this discourse and the resulting responses from the forestry sector. It assesses new information that has come to light over the past decade, looking at national and global trends on woodfuel production and use and the evolution of patterns of urban and rural demand and supply. It examines livelihood and environmental dimensions of relevance to forestry and outlines some of the main issues that warrant additional attention. It is thus intended more as a foundation for further discussion, rather than being a set of prescriptions for action by forestry, though where these are evident they are identified.

"The available evidence does not substantiate earlier concerns that woodfuel demand has been outpacing sustainable supply on a scale that makes it a major cause of deforestation. It appears the balance between the two seldom an issue requiring forestry intervention on a national scale. However, the rapid rise in charcoal production and its concentration, to supply large urban markets, certainly warrants further investigation. Overall, the woodfuels situation is an important consideration for particular areas within a country and for particular groups of users and suppliers. Globally, fuelwood consumption appears to have peaked (although charcoal consumption is continuing to rise) and in some developing countries, it now appears to be in decline. However, the total quantities of woodfuels being used, and the number of people using them, are still huge. In poor households almost everywhere, woodfuels are among the main forest related inputs, although the level of attention they receive does not currently reflect this, despite the growing focus on giving forestry a stronger livelihood orientation. Forestry initiatives need to be compatible with the energy sector's objective of helping poor users move up the energy ladder to greater fuel efficiency and alternative fuels. The main task though, is likely to be facilitating access to supplies for those who continue to depend on biomass fuels, for their own use or as an important source of income. Forestry measures will need to integrate meeting this demand into wider forestry objectives, rather than, as in the past, developing responses focusing on the fuelwood issue alone."