

The use of fuel wood in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Student tasks

1. Read the information cards carefully.



Many people in the DRC do not have access to mains gas or electricity.	The DRC in Central Africa is currently the least developed country in the world.
Wood for fuel is usually freely available to those in rural areas willing to gather it.	Historically and culturally, people in the DRC are used to cooking on charcoal or wood fires.
Forty HEP projects are planned in the DRC. However, the local people will not be able to afford electric ovens.	Charcoal is brought to local markets daily, either on peoples' backs, on their bicycles or in vans.
Fuel wood consumption varies between 1 and 1.6 m ³ of fuel wood per person per year.	Women and young girls traditionally collect fuel wood. The men generally attend to charcoal production.
Large tree trunks are needed for charcoal production. Fuel wood bundles can be made from smaller twigs.	Local people harvest between three and four hectares of forest in the Virunga National Park every month.
Fuel wood could be carbon neutral if managed sustainably, but current rates of deforestation are too high to allow this.	As the areas around towns are deforested, the price of fuel wood rises, as it has to be transported over increasing distances.
Shrinking forests destroy the habitat of local species. This can lead to a lack of biodiversity and possible extinction.	Increasing urbanisation leads to a greater demand for fuel, particularly charcoal which is lighter and easier to burn.
The DRC loses 0.6% of its forests every year through deforestation, for timber, fuel wood and charcoal.	Charcoal production harms the environment in two ways: deforestation and the release of CO ₂ gas.
Deforestation increases the rate of soil erosion and likelihood of flash flooding.	Less than 5% of forests in the DRC are protected officially.
Burning fuel wood in confined spaces is associated with lung and eye problems.	It takes 10 kg of wood to make 1 kg of charcoal.
Only 10% of homes in the DRC have an electricity supply.	Charcoal consumption varies between 85 and 90 kg of charcoal per person per year.
Increasing forest loss may change global climate patterns.	Collecting fuel wood takes girls out of school and prevents women from being able to do economically valuable jobs.

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2. Sort the cards to answer the following questions:

- What is driving the increase in fuel wood use?
- What problems are created by the over-use of fuel wood?
- Buying fuel wood
- Why is the use of charcoal regarded as even worse for the environment than burning fuel wood?
- What are the benefits of fuel wood use in less developed countries?

3. The image below left shows a traditional wood fuel stove. Why is this a poor method for cooking?



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4. Write a caption for the image below:



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