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Use of biogas energy a first for Limpopo

Victor Hlungwani

TWO Limpopo villages have tested biogas to be used in households as alternative energy for the first time in South Africa.

Gawula and Mahlathi villages outside Giyani are using biogas with the help of Mpfuneto Community Support in conjunction with the Netherlands Wild Goose Dutch Development Organisation.

Biogas is produced from cow dung and works together with bacteria under a minimum temperature of 40 degrees. In the Netherlands, biogas is regarded as a healthy, reliable source of energy and good for the environment.

Jotte van Iereland of the Wild Goose Organisation said most parts of Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga were suitable for the use of biogas because they are hot in summer.

"Previously in the Netherlands this type of energy was used by commercial enterprises because it was cheaper than electricity. We have also done research in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga where we discovered that most of the people use fire wood for cooking even though they have access to electricity. Most claimed that electricity was expensive," he said.

Iereland said the Mpfuneto Community Support organisation had received R500 000 in donations from various organisations in the Netherlands to construct a 'biogas digester' to supply more than 180 households in Giyani only. He said they would soon approach the South African government to discuss ways of expanding the project to the rest of the country.

Iereland also said that the rest of the world would be able to join the fight against global warming by using biogas.

Mavis Chaki, one of beneficiaries, said she was thankful to Mpfuneto after the organisation provided her with biogas.

"I previously used to go to the bush to collect fire wood for cooking. Now that I have biogas in my yard, I only collect cow dung. I no longer destroy the environment by chopping down trees," she said.