

## Policy pointers

**Cooking solutions** in refugee and host community contexts must be holistic and multisectoral if they are to achieve significant and sustainable positive impacts on gender dynamics. Donors and humanitarian actors can recognise this through holistic project design.

**Humanitarian actors,** donors and implementing partners should look beyond technology-focused market assessments and invest upfront in understanding community needs, socio-economic contexts, political economies and gender dynamics to inform cooking solutions.

**Donors and humanitarian actors** should routinely and effectively identify context-specific financing options and solutions that integrate cooking interventions, livelihood creation and best practices for mitigating the risk of gender-based violence.

**By linking longer-term** development programmes to shorter-term humanitarian cooking interventions, development donors and host governments could stabilise integrated cooking solutions in camps while still meeting their development objectives.

## Can cooking solutions for refugees better serve gender dynamics?

Cooking in refugee camps is complex. To feed their families, women and girls must often collect firewood outside the camps, exposing them to the risk of gender-based violence (GBV). Interventions that seek to reduce this risk, such as cooking solutions, can also create opportunities for participation in other activities, including childcare and education. But to reduce GBV and be sustainable, interventions must be holistic, cross-sectoral and incorporate important gender and socio-economic considerations; considerations that will vary across refugee camps and can change rapidly due to short-term budgets and politics, among other factors. Stakeholders recognise the need for a holistic approach, yet many cooking interventions continue to be technology-focused. This briefing collates some lessons and recommendations from past interventions (including IIED's research in camps in Kigoma, Tanzania) to support donors and humanitarian actors in their efforts to improve the impacts of cooking solutions and to reduce GBV in refugee camps.

The gender dimensions of cooking solutions in refugee camps are numerous and complex. Women and girls are usually responsible for meal preparation and so are often also tasked with collecting firewood from the areas surrounding refugee camps (which most refugees living in camps rely on as cooking fuel).<sup>1</sup> This activity may mean walking for many hours and carrying heavy loads, and it also places women and girls at risk of GBV.<sup>2</sup> Men and boys also leave the camp to gather wood, often for other purposes. While cooking may largely be 'women's work', men will usually hold decision-making power over, and manage the means necessary for, purchasing fuel, cookstoves and cooking utensils.<sup>2,3</sup>

While many of these gender dimensions, particularly in relation to women and girls, are well documented and widely accepted in

humanitarian and development spheres, the design and implementation of cooking solutions seems to lag behind accepted theory. Projects often focus on technological solutions, such as alternative fuels or cookstoves. While positive impacts on gender issues and dynamics, including reducing the risk of GBV, are not ignored, they often take the role of an assumed output. Assumptions tend to ignore the complexity of life in the camps, including the fact that women and girls can face violence within and outside camps. So the tech-led approach (favoured for many reasons, such as donor priorities, funding models, political pressures and so on) may not only fail to achieve widespread uptake of these cooking alternatives, but may also fail to meet the needs of women and girls, or address broader gender issues. Some may even exacerbate problems.<sup>4</sup> To avoid this, some useful

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lessons and recommendations from our study of past interventions are captured below.

### **Integrate interventions**

To design cooking solutions that also mitigate the (often multiple) risks of GBV, we must

embrace complex scenarios. Careful consideration must be given to household dynamics and to the links between violence and household energy issues; both will be highly context-specific. The issue of potential loss should also be explored: if an intervention affects where women and girls go

and opportunities for interactions with their peers, will it encroach on any existing safe spaces or social networks? Finally, for best effect, these interventions should also connect with awareness-raising activities around domestic violence and to GBV prevention resources and programming.

In Kigeme Refugee Camp in Rwanda, a complete ban on the distribution or use of firewood likely contributed to a significant reduction in the overall risk of non-partner violence and violence associated with firewood collection specifically, which meant a drop in overall incidences of GBV. At the same time, an unconditional cash transfer scheme was run at Kigeme.<sup>5</sup> Recent research suggests unconditional cash transfers have an overall positive impact on household gender dynamics (including reducing physical violence).<sup>6</sup> There are other dynamics. For instance, providing cooking solutions will not necessarily stop refugee households from collecting firewood, especially those that rely on firewood to sell or trade. It is because of these types of intricacies that the Safe Access to Fuel and Energy Humanitarian Working Group (SAFE) recommends that solutions be integrated across sectors, for example with livelihood creation, economic empowerment and training, focused in particular on women but not exclusively (see Box 1).<sup>2</sup>

Refugee spending power is another key consideration when designing more integrated and sustainable cooking solutions for refugee populations. This is especially true for market-based approaches, which UNHCR and others are increasingly pursuing. These approaches support arrangements in which buyers and sellers exchange goods and/or services; in the context of cooking, this typically

means refugees purchasing cooking solutions directly from private providers (rather than solutions being provided to them by, for example, the World Food Programme). Host governments, and consequently UNHCR, regulate camps closely. Therefore, refugees often have limited opportunities to generate income. So market-based approaches have continued to rely on donor-funded cash transfer mechanisms to increase the spending power of refugees to afford these cooking solutions.<sup>7,8</sup> The sustainability of such interventions in refugee camps will rely on the continuation of these cash transfer schemes, along with long-term funding for integrated livelihood programmes and host country policies that allow refugees to earn cash.

Some cooking solutions may translate into less time spent on fuel collection, preparation and use, but this shift alone will not translate to greater social or economic empowerment for women. Women's time is broadly valued less than men's in households, which means that any time saved may be redirected to activities that do not support empowerment goals,<sup>9</sup> though they may be safer. Integrated projects remedy this by identifying and helping women to engage in more productive activities, such as developing skills, income generation opportunities, or education and training. To the extent appropriate and possible, men should also be included in these activities to create positive behaviour change.

### **Build from norms, needs and aspirations**

In analysing cooking solutions in refugee camp contexts, it became clear that success hinges in no small part on deeply understanding the people that projects seek to serve. Two key lessons emerged in this area that can help inform future work:

**Gender roles related to cooking are shaped by norms.** Cooking is not solely the concern of women and girls, so interventions that exclude men could have unintended, even negative, consequences for gender dynamics within households.<sup>5,10,11</sup> Initial learnings from the Kigeme Camp study found that coupling a cooking solution with empowerment training for both men and women saw an increase in the sharing of child and older-person care between genders, as well as positive trends towards greater sharing of responsibilities for meal preparation and washing dishes and clothes.<sup>10</sup> The study highlighted that norms and expectations can reinforce gender roles, with some women saying that they would not be good wives if their husbands helped with household chores.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, men experienced a loss in standing with their wife and family if they

were unable to provide. To have a positive impact on gender roles, cooking solutions must look beyond more efficient cooking technology or cleaner fuel and seek to act holistically and in context. Improving gender dynamics means exploring men's roles, for example as traditional income earners, to ensure no further tensions are added to displaced families — particularly when designing cash transfer or livelihood-focused interventions.

### **Cooking solution aims don't always reflect needs, limiting their uptake and impact.**

Household cooking choices are complex, and in refugee contexts households must make difficult trade-offs focused on survival.<sup>11,12</sup> Cooking solutions may be sacrificed to meet more immediate needs: in Tanzania, many refugees sold the movable stoves and solar lights they were provided with, and in Niger, some people sold their liquid petroleum gas canisters, in both cases to procure food.<sup>7,13</sup> Solutions may also ignore people's preferences or other socio-cultural factors. For example, many women living in camps in Tanzania preferred familiar three-stone fires to 'improved' mud stoves, saying that the former can cook food faster and is compatible with the utensils used for the type and quantity of food being prepared. So in reality people inevitably use different combinations of fuels, stoves and other cooking appliances ('stove stacking'). This can limit the positive impacts intended by cooking solutions, from a gender perspective and more broadly. To achieve project goals, humanitarian donors must first understand, then prioritise women's needs and desires (such as speed of cooking), even if these don't tally with their expectations.

Understanding the norms, needs and aspirations of displaced people is a vital first step. Projects must then build these considerations in.

### **Notice, apply and share best practice**

It is clear the humanitarian and development communities have learned much about inclusive project design over decades of good work. But in Tanzania, IIED observed that humanitarian actors and implementing partners risked failing to integrate lessons learned into practice. For example, experts widely agree that hand-made briquettes cannot meet household energy requirements, yet a UNHCR pilot promoted their production as part of a livelihoods programme. Similarly another intervention centred around refugees building their own mud stoves, when IIED observed stoves in disrepair and refugees noted that aspects of the training and follow-up had been insufficient.<sup>13</sup> There are already

### **Box 1. Violence and arrest: the risks men face when leaving the camps**

For refugees living in camps, it is not only women who run the risk of violence when leaving the camp borders. In Tanzania, interviewees told IIED researchers that when male refugees leave the camps, whether to help collect firewood or for economic activities, they can face abuse, violence and robbery (for example, bicycles used to help carry firewood have been stolen). Some women said they preferred to collect firewood without help, as men are likelier than women to be arrested and detained for long periods. To go beyond reducing violence and contribute to a broader and more sustainable positive change in gender dynamics, it is important to incorporate these contextual challenges and, where possible, include men in programme activities.<sup>13</sup>

resources available to support the routine application of learning and emergent best practice: the Global Plan of Action for Sustainable Energy in Situations of Displacement (GPA) is coordinating, sharing and nurturing best practices; Mercy Corps is currently producing a handbook that seeks to begin addressing the gap between global best practices and implementation in refugee camps.<sup>14</sup>

Humanitarian donors must continue financially supporting wider sector efforts to ensure that lessons are captured and shared the first time, and best practices implemented without repeating past mistakes.

### **Align efforts with and support host communities and governments**

The viability of a cooking solution depends on context-specific factors that will vary in every refugee camp: political and economic considerations, infrastructure, natural resources, budgeting and so on. These factors will guide options for delivery and financing for cooking solutions that support refugees and host communities. Though slightly dated, SAFE's Decision Tree is helpful in laying out some of these issues.<sup>15</sup>

For host governments, most of whom are grappling with limited resources amid complex domestic and regional politics, linking regional development with refugee camps will enable them to better integrate investments by donors and other financiers, and to maximise the benefits of solutions for host communities. For example, Project Gaia has had some success linking ethanol stove use in refugee camps to Ethiopia's desire to develop its domestic ethanol production and use (although the project has not been without challenges).<sup>8</sup> For humanitarian and development actors, aligning projects with the priorities of host governments can help dismantle political barriers, transform any negative host

community perceptions of refugees and promote more sustainable cooking solutions that can have a positive long-term impact on gender dynamics.

Humanitarian donors should consider providing flexible technical support facilities that can respond to rapid political and socio-economic changes, especially to those factors that contribute to reducing GBV. This technical support should be institutionalised and aim to build the capacity of local implementing agencies, rather than be delivered through short-term consultancies.

Another encouraging approach has come from international development donors, who are establishing regional development funds to support communities and districts hosting refugees. With the humanitarian system hampered by short-term financing structures and donor fatigue, the development sector is better placed to provide longer-term planning with more stable budget windows that anchor projects in community development, but explicitly linked to areas hosting refugee camps. There are some promising examples, including the World Bank's IDA18 Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities, the EU Emergency Trust Fund's call for Uganda and the UN's Joint Kigoma Development Programme in Tanzania. These types of funds are one way in which international development donors can better engage with and support people living in the complex setting of a refugee camp, while not straying from their core development objectives.

## In summary

Working at the nexus of cooking solutions and gender dynamics in refugee camps is hugely complex. It also has high stakes: solutions funded to reduce the risk of GBV must not fail displaced people and must adhere to the fundamental humanitarian principle of 'do no harm'. Our study sought to draw out some, but not all, lessons and recommendations that can aid humanitarian and development actors in designing more effective solutions, capable of delivering more fully on both cooking and gender aims. There is appetite for change in this area, as evidenced by the progress being made in applying emerging best practice and in funding approaches. This is a short paper on an intricate topic; there are other aspects of cooking solutions where further research would be of value, including capturing and using data. Efforts to standardise indicators, data collection, metrics and methods to guide cooking interventions and reduce GBV risks are to some extent underway, spearheaded by GPA. But how to translate global metrics into the realities and practicalities of a site as complex as a refugee camp warrants closer cross-sector attention.

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## Knowledge Products

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the most recent available data — see: The Humanitarian Data Exchange, Moving Energy Initiative dataset. <https://data.humdata.org/organization/moving-energy-initiative> / <sup>2</sup> Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (2006) Beyond firewood: fuel alternatives and protection strategies for displaced women and girls. [www.refworld.org/pdfid/4a54bbfe3.pdf](http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4a54bbfe3.pdf) / <sup>3</sup> Mercy Corps (2019) Energy, gender, and GBV in emergencies: State of principles, knowledge, and practice. / <sup>4</sup> Abdelnour, S and Saeed, AM (2014) Technologizing humanitarian space: Darfur advocacy and the rape-stove panacea. *International Political Sociology* 8(2) 145–163. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ips.12049> / <sup>5</sup> Johns Hopkins University and Plan International (2019) Impacts of clean/efficient cookstoves and fuels, and empowerment training on gender-based violence in humanitarian settings in Rwanda. Presentation sent to author. / <sup>6</sup> Cross, A, Manell, T and Megevand, M (2018) Humanitarian cash transfer programming and gender-based violence outcomes: evidence and future research priorities. The Cash Learning Partnership. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/genderandctpwrcirc.pdf> / <sup>7</sup> Patel, L and Gross, K (2019) Cooking in displacement settings engaging the private sector in non-wood-based fuel supply. The Moving Energy Initiative. / <sup>8</sup> Interview with Harry Stokes, Project Gaia (May 2020). / <sup>9</sup> Johns Hopkins University, Babson College and ICRW (2019) Women's energy entrepreneurship: a guiding framework and systematic literature review. Research report RA7, ENERGIA. [www.energia.org/cm2/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/RA7-Womens-Energy-Entrepreneurship-Evidence-Report-Final.pdf](http://www.energia.org/cm2/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/RA7-Womens-Energy-Entrepreneurship-Evidence-Report-Final.pdf) / <sup>10</sup> Interview with Dr Anita Shankar, Johns Hopkins University (May 2020). / <sup>11</sup> Interview with Wahid Jahangiri and Alison Filler, International Life Line Fund (July 2020). / <sup>12</sup> Shankar, AV, Quinn, AK, Dickinson, KL, Williams, KN, Masera, O, Charron, D, Jack, D, Hyman, J, Pillarissetti, A, Bailis, R, Kumar, P, Ruiz-Mercado, I and Rosenthal, JP (2020) Everybody stacks: lessons from household energy case studies to inform design principles for clean energy transitions. *Energy Policy* 141. / <sup>13</sup> Johnstone, K, Perera, N and Garside, B (2019) Calibrating cooking for refugee camps and surrounding host communities in Tanzania. IIED and Irish Aid. [www.climatelearningplatform.org/calibrating-cooking-refugee-camps-and-surrounding-host-communities-tanzania](http://www.climatelearningplatform.org/calibrating-cooking-refugee-camps-and-surrounding-host-communities-tanzania) / <sup>14</sup> Mercy Corps (forthcoming) Inclusive Energy Handbook Version 1. / <sup>15</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2009) Decision Tree Diagrams on Factors Affecting Choice of Fuel Strategy in Humanitarian Settings v1.1. [www.safefuelandenergy.org/files/IASC%20Task%20Force%20Decision%20Tree.pdf](http://www.safefuelandenergy.org/files/IASC%20Task%20Force%20Decision%20Tree.pdf)