



washplus Weekly
Supportive Environments for Healthy Communities

Issue 206 | Sept. 11, 2015 | Focus on Cookstoves for Displaced Populations

Q&A with Corinne Hart of the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves

Ms. Hart is the Director of the Gender and Humanitarian Programs at the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves. She designs and manages the Alliance's strategies and programs on humanitarian response, gender, and women's empowerment. Corinne is leading the Alliance's humanitarian work to improve procurement processes for cookstoves and fuels, enhance the quality of technologies promoted in humanitarian settings, and reduce vulnerability to gender-based violence and malnutrition that can result from limited access to cooking fuel. She recently responded to the questions below about cookstoves for refugees and displaced persons.

What is the current estimate of numbers of refugees and displaced persons without access to clean stoves or fuels?

More than 30 million refugees and internally displaced people lack access to clean cookstoves and fuels.



What is the impact of this lack of access on both the refugees/IDPs (internally displaced persons) and surrounding communities?

Most of the food provided by humanitarian agencies must be cooked before it can be eaten, but cookstoves and fuel are rarely provided. As a result, women and children must risk their safety, health, and sometimes their lives to search for and collect firewood to cook food over smoky, polluting open fires.

It is well documented that in many cases, displaced women walk for hours to find firewood in conflict areas and carry heavy loads back to camp, which puts them at risk for physical and sexual attack, dehydration, and physical injuries.

For example, in 2014 in Uganda's Nakivale refugee settlement, 41 percent of households reported incidences of violence during firewood collection. Additionally, in areas where firewood is the main source of fuel for all people, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, the competition for dwindling natural resources is a trigger for tension between displaced people and host communities.

The health risks related to exposure to household air pollution are also more severe among

refugees and IDPs. One study among refugees in Nepal found that mortality rates from acute respiratory infections (ARI) were roughly 10–17 times higher among refugee populations than among those in non-crisis settings.

In Burundi, mortality rates from ARI were four times higher among refugees than their non-displaced peers. ARI is consistently among the top three causes of death in crisis settings, and yet humanitarian agencies rarely prioritize preventative interventions.

Which countries/regions have the greatest problem?

The Democratic Republic of Congo has the greatest problem. As of the end of 2014, more than 3.6 million people living in DRC were forcibly displaced due to ongoing war and conflict, and more than 93 percent of them use traditional solid fuels and stoves to cook meals for their family. Women in particular are at an incredibly high risk of attack when they go to collect firewood.

The Alliance is working closely with the DRC government's Ministry of Gender, Family and Child to integrate access to cookstoves and fuels into their policies for women and displaced people, and hope to work closely with them to implement clean cooking solutions in the coming year.

Sudan and South Sudan are two other countries that have large populations of displaced people without access to energy. Combined, more than 4 million displaced people lack access to safer, cleaner fuels and cookstoves.

Our partners at UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), Food and Agriculture Organization, World Food Program, and Oxfam have all recently put programs in place to help address the dire need for improved cookstoves and fuels.

The Alliance is also working closely with our partners in Rwanda and Kenya to improve access to clean cookstoves and fuels within refugee camps. Kenya is home to the largest refugee camp in the world, Dadaab, with nearly 350,000 displaced people.

What are some innovative and effective ways to provide clean cookstoves and/or fuels to displaced populations?

It depends on the type and phase of the crisis. During a rapid response, such as immediately after a natural disaster or during a large influx of refugees, immediate distribution of cookstoves and fuels is a necessary and effective way to ensure that displaced people can cook their food in safety.

For this phase, the Alliance works with its humanitarian partners like UNHCR to ensure that the products being distributed meet minimum standards of quality so that those suffering from disaster receive the benefits intended by aid agencies, and the follow-up necessary to ensure the products stay in working order.

In cases of complex emergencies and prolonged displacement, innovative distribution mechanisms that combine market-based principles and subsidies have been successful. For example in South Sudan, Oxfam provided fuel-efficient stoves, charcoal, and commodity vouchers to people living in a refugee camp.

The recipients of the vouchers were able to use them to buy charcoal from pre-selected

charcoal vendors within the camp. This allowed inhabitants of the camp to secure fuel for cooking, and charcoal retailers earned income from the purchases within the camp.

In Rwanda, carbon finance has successfully been used to provide fuel efficient stoves to refugees while allowing UNHCR to earn carbon credits. The money earned from the credits are partially reinvested back into the program to purchase more stoves.

In areas transitioning from crisis to development, implementers can begin to transition to market-based models and can leverage innovative financing and distribution mechanisms.

For example, the Alliance provided start-up funding for a revolving loan fund, run by Potential Energy in Darfur, which allowed users to receive improved stoves on loan while paying back in installments from fuel savings.

How is the Alliance supporting work to address this issue?

Since 2010, the Alliance has been committed to reaching the world's most vulnerable populations through its targeted humanitarian program, which complements its market-based work in development settings. The Alliance's humanitarian strategy is structured around six strategic pillars:

- Pillar 1: Coordinate the sector and share information
- Pillar 2: Commission research and build evidence
- Pillar 3: Provide technical support, tools, and guidance for implementation
- Pillar 4: Build human resource capacity
- Pillar 5: Advocate for the sector
- Pillar 6: Mobilize resources

These strategic pillars align with the global [Safe Access to Fuel and Energy \(SAFE\) Working Group](#), which the Alliance co-chairs. They were selected through detailed consultations with stakeholders in the humanitarian and energy sectors.

By working within these six strategic areas, the Alliance aims to institutionalize energy access in the humanitarian response system and to reach 1 million crisis-affected households with cleaner and more efficient cooking solutions by the end of Phase II (2017).

What other thoughts would you like to share?

Coordination of and response to energy access needs for crisis-affected people needs a formal place within the humanitarian response system. There is no designated cluster that is in charge of addressing energy needs for those in crisis, and as a result, the dire impacts caused by the lack of cooking, lighting, powering, and heating energy are too often ignored. We need to have mechanisms to fund energy access in crises, and we need to have someone who is responsible.

The Alliance strongly urges donors, humanitarian agencies, civil society, governments, and the private sector to continue to include crisis-affected people in their energy access strategies. Access to cleaner and more fuel-efficient cookstoves and alternative fuels is a crucial need in humanitarian response, and it can no longer be ignored.

Innovative solutions already exist, and new technologies are being developed every day that have the potential to save lives, protect vulnerable people, preserve the environment, strengthen socio-economic outcomes, and improve livelihoods.

As outlined in [the SAFE mapping](#), nearly 150 energy projects are being implemented in humanitarian settings using innovative approaches such as cash vouchers, revolving loan funds, and refugee-led enterprises, but there has been little formal recognition or support from the broader humanitarian community.

We must ensure that energy for cooking is recognized as a life-saving intervention for people affected by instability and crises, and that existing technologies and fuels are made accessible to those who need them most.

For additional information on this issue access the [SAFE website](#), our latest [Gender-Based Violence](#) resource, and our submission to the [World Humanitarian Summit](#).

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About WASHplus - WASHplus, a multi-year project funded through USAID's Bureau for Global Health, supports healthy households and communities by creating and delivering interventions that lead to improvements in access, practice and health outcomes related to water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH) and household air pollution (HAP). WASHplus uses at-scale, targeted as well as integrated approaches to reduce diarrheal diseases and acute respiratory infections, the two top killers of children under five years of age globally. For information, visit www.washplus.org or email: contact@washplus.org.