



SAFE ACCESS TO FUEL AND ENERGY



**WOMEN'S
REFUGEE
COMMISSION**

Leading the international effort to ensure that refugees have safe access to fuel and energy

Background

More than 51 million people are currently displaced by conflict and crisis, forced to flee their homes and seek safety in camps, urban areas and with extended family. Most depend on energy resources for use in everyday life that pose enormous risks to their safety and well-being.

In humanitarian settings, essentials like food, water and shelter are provided, yet residents often still experience poor access to energy. Biomass, including firewood, charcoal, animal dung and agricultural waste, is the most common energy source in refugee settlements — these dangerous and unsustainable fuels are used to cook meals and to heat and light homes.

Women and girls bear the greatest burden when it comes to energy poverty. Every day, millions risk being raped, beaten or even killed as they collect firewood miles from their shelters and move around in unlit camps.

Complex emergencies and protracted crises make this precarious situation worse. Displaced communities often have no choice but to exploit natural resources to survive. The longer a refugee camp exists, the more locally available natural resources are depleted. This causes serious environmental degradation, as well as increasing energy insecurity and risks

for women. Moreover, population density and competition for resources creates tensions between refugees and with host communities.

Women and children are also at greater risk from breathing toxic smoke while huddling over cooking fires. The World Health Organization estimates that 4.3 million people died in 2012 because of household air pollution, with poor air quality now the world's largest single environmental health risk. Burning biomass indoors is also the leading cause of blindness in developing countries.

The vast majority of distributed food must be cooked to be eaten. Without cooking fuel, families are susceptible to malnutrition and food- and water-borne illnesses. In many instances, families trade or sell their food for fuel, sometimes leaving them with less food than they need to survive.

How We Work

Founded in 1989, the Women's Refugee Commission is a research and advocacy organization. We are a thought leader on how to most effectively serve women, children and youth affected by conflict and disasters. Our experts work with affected populations to research needs and gaps in humanitarian responses.

Through our Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE) program, WRC works in crisis settings worldwide to assess energy needs and identify challenges — such as the heightened risk of gender-based violence — faced by vulnerable communities due to a lack of safe and sustainable energy resources.

WRC campaigns for policy and program transformation with the United Nations and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) to address those needs and mitigate the challenges. This transformation is critical for protecting and improving the lives of displaced women and children, as well as safeguarding the natural environment on which they depend.



Our Impact

WRC's pioneering research and advocacy work has led to safe access to energy becoming widely recognized as essential for the well-being and productivity of the people served by the humanitarian community.

Our landmark 2006 report, *Beyond Firewood: Fuel Alternatives and Protection Strategies for Displaced Women and Girls*, paved the way for the creation of the InterAgency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on SAFE, which WRC co-chaired with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP).

This work has evolved into an emerging SAFE sector involving UN agencies and INGOs. Under the WRC's leadership, the IASC Task Force produced the first-ever tools and guidelines for promoting safe access to fuel and energy in humanitarian settings, including:

- a Matrix on Agency Roles and Responsibilities for Ensuring a Coordinated, Multi-Sectoral Fuel Response in Humanitarian Settings, which sets out roles and responsibilities for an effective fuel response;



- Decision Trees Diagrams on Factors Affecting the Choice of Fuel Strategy in Humanitarian Settings, which outline the different cooking fuel options that will be appropriate in specific emergency settings, whether it is Burmese refugees cooking rice in Thailand or displaced women making *assida* (millet porridge) in Sudan.

We also developed an e-learning tool and smartphone application to make the SAFE Task Force guidance as user-friendly as possible.

In 2008, WRC brought together over 100 inventors, engineers, scientists, UN representatives and humanitarian workers for the first international research conference on alternatives to firewood.

In 2011, we were invited to co-chair, with the WFP, the Humanitarian Working Group of the UN-led Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves (GACC) and subsequently became the GACC humanitarian strategy advisor.

We have led a major three-year SAFE project in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, "Protecting women and the environment of the Great Lakes Region of Africa: Turning policy into practice to develop a scalable and sustainable cooking fuel strategy."

As part of this work, WRC designed and implemented an emergency response project to distribute fuel-efficient cookstoves as a tool of protection in 2013, in partnership with International Rescue Committee in Goma, North Kivu. WRC was instrumental in establishing inter-agency SAFE working groups to coordinate SAFE interventions across organizations and sectors.

WRC and the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves co-chair the global interagency SAFE Steering Committee, the primary coordination entity for energy in humanitarian settings. In 2014, WRC and GACC launched the SAFE website (www.safefuelandenergy.org), an online hub for practitioners, donors, academics and others.

The WRC was a leading contributor to UNHCR's Global SAFE Strategy 2014-2018 and is partnering with UNHCR on the roll-out. The strategy is a major step toward reaching millions of vulnerable people in



"Even 100 bags of food is useless without firewood."

Somali refugee woman in Dadaab, Kenya.



need. Years of research, project implementation and advocacy by partners culminated in this significant achievement.

Next Steps

The Women's Refugee Commission will continue to research innovative approaches for improving the lives of crisis-affected communities. We are working with partners like the WFP and UNHCR to test and distribute safer, more sustainable energy technologies that genuinely meet the needs of those who use them.

We will continue to advocate for energy policies and programs to be included as a standard part of humanitarian response.

We will build the capacity of the humanitarian community by providing training and technical assistance using tools, such as the SAFE training course we have developed for field-level staff.

Learn more about our SAFE initiative and download reports and guidelines (matrix and decision tree diagrams) at: wrc.ms/SAFEprogram.



“ For men, we can be beaten and we just wash away our tears. But, for the women, they are raped and it's a wound that follows them for their entire life. ”

Refugee man in Nakivale, Uganda.



SAFE

AT A GLANCE



||| The Issue

- Women and girls bear the greatest burden when it comes to energy poverty. Every day, millions risk being raped, beaten or even killed as they collect firewood.
- Food distributed to displaced people by humanitarian agencies must be cooked before it can be eaten — but cooking fuel is generally not provided.
- Firewood collection and overexploitation of natural resources exacerbate environmental degradation
- Burning wood and other solid fuels indoors releases toxic smoke, causing deadly respiratory infections.

||| Our Response

- Published landmark report, *Beyond Firewood: Fuel Alternatives and Protection Strategies for Displaced Women and Girls*.
- Led global efforts that resulted in the first-ever UN guidelines ensuring safe access to cooking fuel in humanitarian settings.
- Co-chair the global interagency SAFE Steering Committee. Developed, in partnership with the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, the SAFE website.
- Advise UNHCR on energy as a member of its Strategic Advisory Committee. Contributed to UNHCR's global SAFE strategy.

||| Next Steps

- Disseminate UN guidelines on fuel strategies and on agency roles and responsibilities to humanitarian workers and provide training and technical assistance.
- Continue to research appropriate technologies and innovative approaches to meet the energy needs of crisis-affected communities — particularly displaced women and girls.
- Work with partners like the World Food Programme and the UN refugee agency to develop gender- and protection-sensitive SAFE programs. Advocate for energy policies to be included as a standard part of humanitarian response.

OUR MISSION: To improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.

OUR VISION: We envision a world in which refugee and internally displaced women, children and youth are safe, healthy and self-reliant; have their human rights respected and protected; and inform and drive their own solutions and development.

HOW WE WORK: Through research and fact-finding field missions, we assess and identify best practices and find solutions on critical issues that include lifesaving reproductive health care, dignified livelihoods for refugees and, in the U.S., fair treatment of women, children and families seeking asylum. On Capitol Hill, at the United Nations and with humanitarian organizations and governments, we push for improvements in refugee policy and practice until measurable long-term change is realized.

GET INVOLVED: Learn about the ways you can help ensure that our far-reaching, life-saving advocacy for women, children and young people continues. To sign up for our action alerts and to make a tax-deductible donation, please go to:

womensrefugeecommission.org



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