



WOMEN'S
REFUGEE
COMMISSION

COOKING FUEL AND THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

KEY MESSAGES AND GUIDANCE FOR ACTION

Women's Refugee Commission

Food is the most urgent need in Kenya, Somalia and other neighboring countries today, and the World Food Programme (WFP) and its implementing partners are urgently distributing food rations to as many refugees and internally displaced persons inside Somalia as possible. That food, however—cereals, pulses, vegetable oil and “corn-soya blend”—must be cooked in order to be eaten, and cooking fuel is not provided to the majority of refugees. Cooking fuel is therefore just as critical as the food itself, particularly over the long term.

In Kenya, the lack of sufficient cooking fuel means that even after having trekked hundreds of miles through the desert with little food or water, Somali women's journeys are not over. Once in Dadaab, they must leave the relative safety of the camps to travel for hours into the hot desert to find the firewood they need to cook for their families. They risk rape, physical assault, dehydration and scorpion bites, but continue to make this journey because they have no other choice.

Emergency response

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Safe Access to Firewood and alternative Energy in Humanitarian Settings (IASC Task Force SAFE) has developed guidance for the humanitarian community on how to respond to cooking fuel needs in emergencies. These guidelines—a Matrix on different agencies' roles and responsibilities and Decision Tree Diagrams for choosing an appropriate type of cooking fuel—can be found at www.fuelnetwork.org.

Some of the most relevant points for the current Horn of Africa response (divided by humanitarian response sector) are:

Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM)

- Conduct a fuel-related needs assessment in collaboration with partners and beneficiaries; establish fuel strategy for the emergency context (see: Decision Tree), including development and demonstration of, and training on, alternative fuels and energy technologies.
 - o **NOTE:** The Women's Refugee Commission and WFP undertook a [SAFE assessment](#) in Dadaab and Kakuma camps in Kenya in 2010. The majority of the findings from that assessment are still relevant—all the more so, in fact, given the increased numbers and urgency of response today.
 - o The key recommendations from this report include:
 - **Provide emergency rations of cooking fuel** to ensure that women are not forced to risk their lives, health and safety to collect firewood.
 - **Reduce consumption of firewood:** a minimum of 50,000 fuel-efficient stoves are needed at the household level, and dozens more at the institutional level (e.g., in schools, health clinics, feeding centers). When used properly, fuel-efficient stoves can reduce the amount of firewood by between 50 and 80 percent. Such savings could reduce the number of trips women must make to find firewood, thereby mitigating a key protection and health risk, and slow the pace of deforestation. Distribution of tight-fitting pot lids can further save fuel at very little cost.
 - **Increase the supply of cooking fuel available:** even with reduced consumption, firewood is still not a sustainable fuel option for the more than 400,000 people now living in and around Dadaab and other semi-arid areas in east Africa. The development and use of alternative fuels—such as mesquite briquettes,

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biogas, ethanol, solar energy and even liquefied petroleum gas (LPG)—is urgently needed to stem an even more severe human and environmental catastrophe.

- Facilitate dialogue between displaced persons and local authorities/hosts regarding access to natural resources and the prevention and resolution of firewood-related tensions.
- With information, education and communication (IEC) partners, use formal and non-formal education settings to promulgate sustainable, fuel-efficient cooking practices (pre-soaking beans, sheltering cooking fires, using tight-fitting lids, etc.) and to conduct trainings on the proper use of fuel-efficient stoves for those who are receiving them.

Emergency Shelter

- Ensure that construction of shelters for the new arrivals does not further exacerbate environmental degradation surrounding the camps—and therefore increase tensions with the host community—by providing immediate access to shelter material through short-term direct provision and/or a voucher system.
- With IEC and CCCM partners, use formal and non-formal education settings to promulgate sustainable shelter construction techniques, including mandating the use of sustainable construction material in new humanitarian structures.
- Distribute fuel-saving non-food items (tight-fitting lids, etc.) as part of the general package.
- Ensure proper design of cooking areas to reduce fire risk in crowded conditions.

Environment and natural resource management

- Undertake an investigation of alternative fuels and energy technology options, including mesquite briquetting, biogas, ethanol, LPG and others.

Food and Nutrition

- Provide pre-cooked food (such as biscuits) as part of rations where feasible.
- Supply familiar, quick-cooking, easy-to-cook foods wherever possible.
- Support the development and use of alternative fuels and energy technologies to cook the foods being distributed.
- Work with camp managers to promote fuel-efficient cooking practices.
- With UNHCR, support distribution of fuel-efficient non-food items (tight-fitting lids, etc.).
- Require the use of fuel-efficient stoves in therapeutic and school feeding programs.

Health

- Provide technical advice on the development and use of cleaner fuels and energy technologies for reducing health risks associated with fuel collection and use.

Livelihoods, Development and Food Security

- Support the development and use of alternative fuels and energy technologies (including using stove and fuel production as an income-generation activity, for example) as a means of decreasing the time women spend collecting firewood and cooking, and increasing the time available to participate in productive activities and income-generation activities that are not woodfuel-intensive.

Protection

- Undertake participatory assessments with all relevant actors on protection risks related to cooking fuel and of preferred fuel options with groups such as firewood collectors, community leaders, host communities/authorities and women members of Food Management Committees. A template for conducting such assessments is available at <http://wrc.ms/nigXgd>.
- Host workshops or awareness-raising campaigns with beneficiaries, humanitarian partners, hosts and local community leaders on protection risks associated with firewood collection; encourage discussion and development of alternatives.
- Where feasible, negotiate access to safer collection areas with local authorities and host communities.

Longer-term response

Over the longer term, the economic needs of populations dependent on the collection and sale of firewood and other woodfuel-intensive livelihoods activities will need to be addressed, and reforestation and other environmental rehabilitation measures will have to be enacted in order to reduce the constant threat of food insecurity faced throughout the region.