

Breaking Barriers: Improving Access to Clean Cooking in Displacement Settings

The bottom line. Cooking programs in camps and other settings for the world’s 100 million displaced people have typically provided substandard stoves and fuelwood rather than clean, modern fuels. But clean cooking solutions are gaining ground, with new operating models that improve affordability. The goal should be the integration of clean cooking within basic service packages provided to displaced populations and a framework to provide such services for as long as the displacement lasts. This Live Wire provides evidence of constructive change from refugee camps and other displacement settlements around the world.

Why is access to clean cooking important?

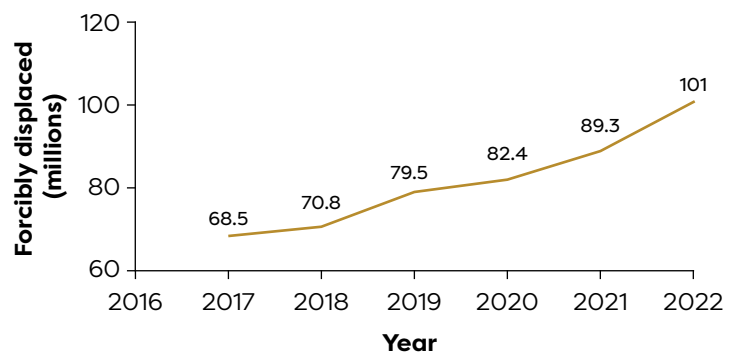
The shortage of clean cooking solutions in displacement settings increases food insecurity, exposes women and children to violence, contributes to deforestation, and causes health problems from indoor air pollution

Conflict, persecution, and violations of human rights, sometimes accompanied by natural disaster and climate change, have pushed millions of people from their homes in recent years. Displaced people often migrate to formal camps maintained by the United Nations and other organizations, or to surrounding host communities. As of June 2022, the number of forcibly displaced people in the world exceeded 100 million, a 50 percent increase since 2017 (figure 1).

Forcibly displaced people fall into three groups: (i) refugees, who cross national borders; (ii) internally displaced persons

(IDPs), who are forced to move within their country; and (iii) asylum seekers, who leave their home country as refugees and seek asylum elsewhere (figure 2). They frequently face difficult living conditions, including limited access to housing, water, sanitation, fuel, and food.

Figure 1. Growth in the number of displaced people around the world, 2016–21



Source: UNHCR 2021.



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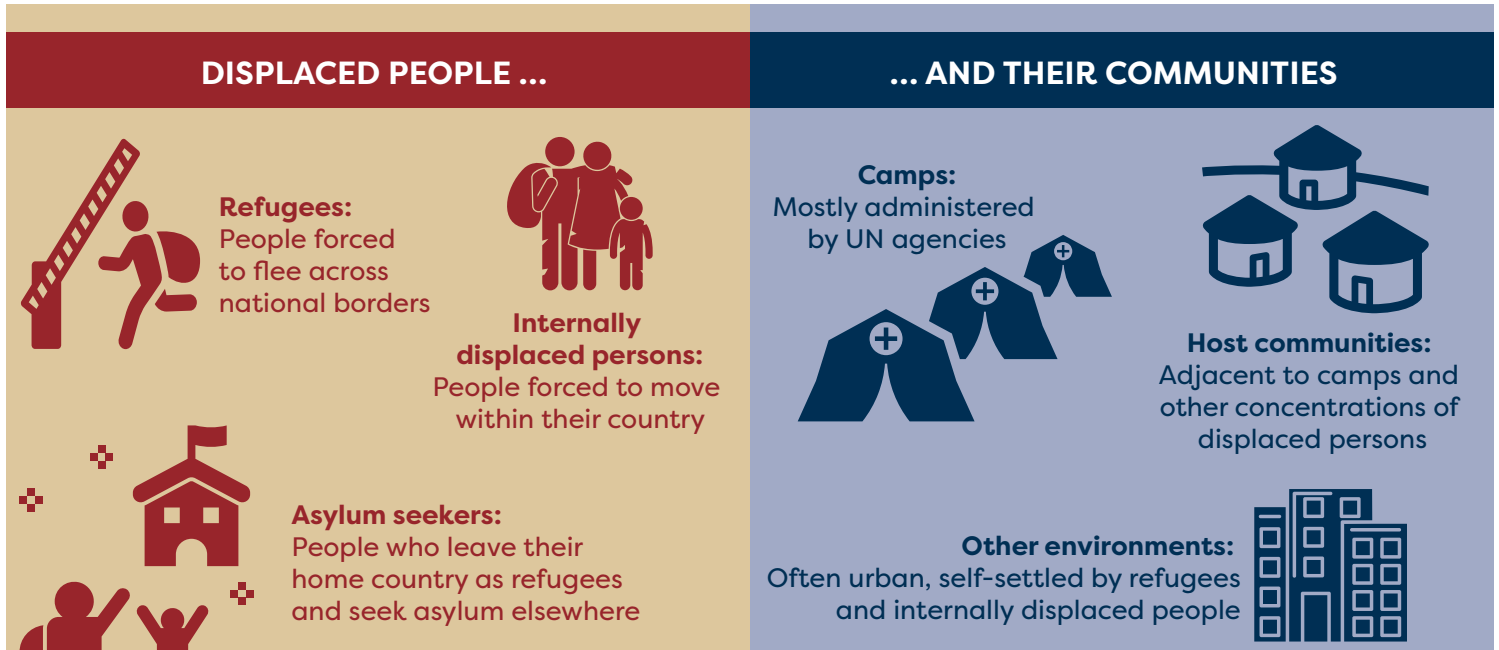


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Figure 2. Displaced people and their communities



Source: UNHCR 2022.

In addition to increasing food insecurity, exposing women and children to sexual and gender-based violence, and causing health problems from indoor air pollution, the shortage of clean cooking solutions also leads to conflicts with host communities, deforestation, and environmental degradation such as soil erosion, landslides, and desertification.

In 2022, an estimated 81 percent of refugees and IDPs living in camps had only the most basic biomass fuels for cooking, while the rest had access to fuels such as kerosene or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) (GPA 2022). Most cooking programs in displacement settings provide only enough fuelwood to meet 50–75 percent of a family’s weekly fuel needs, based on survey analysis and authors’ interviews of experts from the humanitarian sector. Poor access to fuelwood forces displaced populations to either miss meals or spend hours gathering firewood from surrounding areas. This situation is worse during protracted crises, when camps for refugees and IDPs are often set up in locations with limited resources.

What are some of the challenges of bringing clean cooking solutions to the displaced?

Although the basic energy needs of displaced populations are roughly similar, the resources available to meet those needs vary widely

Providing adequate, efficient, safe, reliable, sustainable, and affordable fuels and technologies to the displaced is a complex task. End users—households and community kitchens—are found in various types of settlements, including rural camps, urban camps, and self-settlements of refugees and IDPs in diverse host communities.

The challenges facing clean cooking programs in those varied settings can be grouped into six categories (Tran, To, and Bisaga 2020).

Policy and structure. Access to energy, including clean cooking solutions, has historically received short shrift in humanitarian response. The global humanitarian system, managed by organizations like the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, prioritizes 11 topics such as food, water, shelter, health,

and protection, over clean energy (UNHCR 2022). This has led to a lack of support and funding for clean cooking initiatives. For IDPs, governments, too, tend to prioritize food, water, and shelter over access to clean energy. The inclusion of clean cooking as a formal priority in humanitarian response would improve the allocation of resources to it.

Planning. The humanitarian sector is primarily designed for short-term emergency response. Lacking are frameworks to address the long-term needs of displaced populations, who often live in displaced circumstances for more than five years. Because of the emergency assumption, the stoves provided through cooking programs in displacement settings are often free and of low quality, distorting the market and hindering the dissemination of high-quality, clean cooking solutions through market-oriented approaches.

Finance. The reliance of displaced populations on humanitarian agencies binds access to cooking solutions to the constraints of humanitarian budgets, with cooking programs often receiving low priority and being underfunded through ad hoc programs.

Limited earning opportunities. Earning opportunities for displaced people are limited by the circumstances of specific camps and host government policies. Constraints include limitations on the right to work, restrictions on movement, and difficulties in finding employment. All affect the ability of displaced persons to afford basic services, perpetuating their reliance on free cooking solutions and limiting their ability to pay for modern, commercial cooking solutions.

Camp policies. Displaced people may face restrictions on accessing local energy sources. Restrictions imposed by host communities or government regulations can also limit the involvement of private businesses in providing clean cooking services, as they may face hurdles in obtaining permits to operate in camps.

Lack of data. Information on access to clean cooking and efforts to address the need is limited and not widely shared, leading to duplication of efforts and implementation of generic, one-size-fits-all cooking solutions that may not be sustainable in the long term, as they were not designed with

the specific needs and considerations of displaced populations in mind.

How has clean cooking for displaced people been handled to date?

Past practice relied on improved cookstoves and biomass—with recent movement toward modern fuels and new business models

As noted above, cooking solutions in displacement settings have centered on providing improved cookstoves funded by humanitarian agencies, philanthropic organizations, and private entities (Tran, To, and Bisaga 2020; authors' surveys and interviews of stakeholders). The predominant fuel remains firewood provided by humanitarian agencies and organizations, as well as private entities. The quantity of firewood distributed usually meets only a portion of the needs of displaced people. For the rest, displaced people travel long distances to collect firewood from areas outside their camps. In conditions where movement outside the camp is restricted, displaced people rely on bartering food for fuel, skipping meals, using their limited savings to buy firewood, and acquiring firewood illegally. These practices exacerbate deforestation and environmental degradation, causing long-term sustainability issues, particularly in protracted conflicts.

The humanitarian sector is primarily designed for short-term emergency response. Lacking are frameworks to address the long-term needs of displaced populations, who often live in displaced circumstances for more than five years.

To address these problems, host governments for refugees and IDPs are instituting policies to ban in-kind firewood distribution and encourage the use of clean, modern fuels like electricity, LPG, and ethanol with the support of humanitarian agencies.

Table 1 provides a few examples of modern cooking programs in displacement settings, their operating models, and funding sources.

Table 1. Some examples of cooking programs in displacement settings, 2005–present

| Year(s) | Cooking technology | Camp and country | Organization | Operating model | Funding sources |
|---------|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 2005–15 | Ethanol | Jijiga camp, Ethiopia | Gaia Association | The program was initially established as a donor-driven model, with in-kind distribution of stoves and fuel provided for free. In response to funding constraints, the model was later changed to a market-based approach. Refugees received vouchers from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to purchase stoves and fuel priced at market rates; residents of the host community paid the market rates. | Nordic Climate Fund, World Bank, UNHCR |
| 2009–19 | Improved cookstoves | Zamzam, Al Salam, and Abu Shouk camps; villages in North Darfur | World Food Programme (WFP) | In Sudan, WFP provided technical and operational support to the private sector to facilitate its entry into the stove and carbon credit market. ^a WFP supported the private sector by linking firms to project guarantees, reducing risk, and encouraging involvement. As a result, WFP's operational expenses were reduced, and the project generated revenue through sales of carbon credits. | Mainly private sector |
| 2018–23 | LPG and improved cookstoves | Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh | UNHCR, International Organization for Migration (IOM) | The cooking needs of 800,000 refugees and 75,000 host households were met through a donor-driven model with in-kind distribution of cooking kits, which included a stove, regulator, hose, clamp, and LPG cylinder. The 12 kg LPG cylinder was refilled approximately 9 times per year under the donor-driven model. However, the displaced population lacked the right to work and earn an income, making it difficult to implement a market-based approach. | UNHCR and its donors (Shih Wing Ching Foundation, Zakat House, Fondation EDF, Mabarrat Ghanaem Al Khair, Thani Bin Abdullah Bin Thani Al-Thani Humanitarian Fund, Qatar Charity), IOM, World Bank, FAO, WFP |
| 2019 | Solar Electric | Bidibidi, Uganda | Pesitho, Mercy Corps | Using a subsidized initial investment model, 550 households were given the opportunity to purchase an ECOCA solar electric cooker at a third of the full price of \$500, either at the point of sale or through a one-to-five-year repayment plan. Displaced households paid \$175, with the balance covered by carbon finance and grants. | Novo Nordisk Foundation, Caritas Denmark, Danish International Development Agency |

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| Proposed | LPG | Kakuma, Kenya | MEI, National Oil Corporation of Kenya (NOCK) | MEI and NOCK will implement a subsidized initial investment model and establish a \$50,000 fund for refugee households to finance LPG kits over a 3-month period. Households will make a 25 percent down payment to obtain the LPG kits and repay the balance in installments. The cost of cylinder refills will be capped at USD 5.6 per month, which is the price that households are willing to pay based on a survey conducted by MEI and NOCK (Corbyn and Vianello 2018). | Energy 4 Impact, Chatham House, Practical Action, the Norwegian Refugee Council, UNHCR and Government of Kenya |
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Note: Based on survey analysis and authors' stakeholder interviews of experts from the humanitarian sector.

a. Initially, 10,000 improved cookstoves costing \$24 were sold to displaced populations with a 50 percent subsidy in Abu Shouk camp, Zamzam camp, Al Salam camp, and villages in North Darfur, with a repayment period of 16-18 months.

Clean cooking solutions like LPG and improved cookstoves are now the most widely adopted options in displacement settings, with varying operating models based on affordability. LPG often requires support to cover the initial cost of purchasing a cylinder and stove, while refills can be purchased at market price or subsidized. Improved cookstoves can be provided for free, at a subsidy, or for purchase, while solutions like solar thermal and solar electric are still in the pilot stage.

The operating model involves a mix of subsidies, user payments, and carbon finance.

Most financing for clean cooking in displacement settings has come from grants, but new forms of finance such as results-based financing, carbon finance, and blended finance are also emerging to increase private sector participation and make serving displaced populations more attractive (table 2).

Table 2. Financing instruments for scaling access to clean cooking in displacement settings

| Type | Description | Use and examples |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Grants | Nonrepayable funds donated by a government agency, foundation, corporation or individual. This has been the most common method of financing cooking programs in displaced settings. | The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) used grant funding to provide LPG cooking kits and 9.4 refills/year to 75,000 households in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The World Bank's Emergency Multi-Sector Rohingya Crisis Response Project also provided \$2 million in funding to support the work of UNHCR and IOM in distributing LPG cookstoves. |
| Results-based finance (RBF) | Development assistance in which spending on products and services is reimbursed based on verified results. These payments take the form of grants when disbursed. | In Mozambique, SNV's BRILHO RBF program aims to improve energy access for low-income populations through improved cooking solutions, solar home systems, and mini-grids. The RBF program pays participating companies a cash incentive of around 40 percent of the product cost for the sale of a designated energy access product to a rural customer, after submission of proof of sale, which is verified by a third party. The program aims to reach 1.5 million people in the country and offers additional bonus incentives for products that provide a higher level of energy access, sales in underserved areas, and those that rank higher on a vulnerability access index (Gibson and others 2022). |

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| Carbon finance | Places a financial value on carbon emissions and allows companies to buy carbon credits to offset their emissions. | In Chad, CookIt Solar Cookers were provided to Sudanese refugees at the Iridimi camp, with support from FairClimateFund and technical partner HAMERKOP. The project has benefitted 15,000 refugees and saved 52,000 metric tons of CO ₂ emissions. TchadSolaire played a crucial role in training women to use the solar cookers and conducting field visits for maintenance. |
| Blended finance | Combines an initial investment, often from the government, with a subsequent commercial investment. | In the Diffa region of Niger, UNHCR and SONIHY leveraged blended finance to distribute 25,000 LPG kits to vulnerable families at no cost, along with vouchers for 8 cylinder replacements each year. The resulting boost in demand led to the opening of 10 filling stations and 30 LPG selling points. The scheme pushed costs down from \$10 to \$3 for a 6 kg LPG cylinder, improving the sustainability of the LPG market. 70 percent of the 25,000 UNHCR households continued to purchase LPG after using up the initial vouchers. |
| First loss guarantee | A form of credit enhancement in which a third party agrees to cover a certain amount of an investor's loss. | In Sudan, the World Food Programme (WFP) worked with the private sector to enter the market for stoves and carbon credits and helped link the private sector with guarantees to lower project risks. This attracted private sector involvement and reduced WFP's operational expenses. The project generated revenue through profitable carbon credit sales. |

Note: Based on survey analysis and authors' stakeholder interviews of experts from the humanitarian sector.

How can access to clean cooking in displacement settings be effectively scaled?

Promising business models have emerged

When providing access to clean cooking solutions in displacement settings, the most prevalent business model has

been direct donation, which is commonly used in emergency situations. Pay-as-you-go (PAYG) models are used where there is established telecommunications infrastructure and mobile money penetration. Peer-to-peer lending and leasing models show good potential for near-term growth in similar settings (table 3).

Table 3. Business models for scaling access to clean cooking in displacement settings

| Type | Description | Use and challenges |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Direct donation | Clean cooking solutions are provided free of charge to households in displacement settings. The solutions are invariably provided by humanitarian agencies or philanthropic organizations. | In emergency settings, direct donation is the most prevalent business model. Programs run by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) may be funded on a yearly or project basis, but in cases of protracted conflicts displacement may last for many years, requiring long-term support. Financial sustainability can be challenging in such cases. |
| Unrestricted cash transfer | Unrestricted cash transfers are direct grants with no conditions and no repayment requirements. Recipients are free to use the money as they wish. | In Jordan, UNHCR partnered with Cairo Amman Bank to provide unrestricted cash transfers to 11,000 vulnerable refugees in camps. Monitoring data showed that 90 percent of the cash was used for basic needs such as food and food preparation (UNHCR 2012). In Kenya, a thousand households in Kakuma camps were given cash transfers totaling \$2.9 million, with 82 percent reporting that the cash was used to purchase firewood. |

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| Pay as you go (PAYG) | Customers typically make payments using mobile money or an agent-based energy credit model (e.g., scratch cards). PAYG leverages digital consumer financing to make products more affordable (Leary and others 2020). | PAYG works best in settings where there is an established telecommunications infrastructure and mobile money penetration. In Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, Bboxx encountered difficulties with PAYG payment collections, as not all refugees had access to mobile money; they would use other people's accounts to make payments that would register inaccurately, causing delays and other problems (Patel 2018). |
| Peer to peer | This model works by recruiting representatives to tap into their own social networks. Target customers are friends, family, and others identified through word of mouth (Leary and others 2020). | The model was popularized by Solar Sister in Kigoma camp in Tanzania for Solar PV products. Traveling to new villages to provide training and recruiting other sisters requires an upfront cost that could limit expansion. |
| Lease or lease to own | End users pay small installments over a defined period (daily, weekly or monthly) until they own the cookstove. | The model is common in the deployment of off-grid solar systems but can be adapted to cooking. Based on the experience of off-grid solar, it can be difficult to collect payments, especially if the displaced population migrates, if the camp is inaccessible, if the product breaks before the lease has expired, or if maintenance and after-sale service are poor. |
| Cooking as a service (CAS) | Utilities may choose to offer an electric cookstove as part of a promotion and bundle it with existing services, offering on-bill financing and amortizing the cost through utility bills (Leary and others 2020). | CAS is relevant for refugees living in urban settings to whom cooking appliances can be provided in a bundle with other energy services. But many camps are in remote, inaccessible locations that lack basic energy services such as electricity; CAS may not catch on in such environments. |

Note: Based on survey analysis and authors' stakeholder interviews of experts from the humanitarian sector.

What should development practitioners consider for future interventions in displacement settings?

Think long term, raise awareness, recruit partners, shape policy, exploit carbon finance, cut costs, and gather data

Broad recommendations and principles are described below. Examples of their effectiveness can be found in tables 1–3.

View humanitarian needs as long term. Although conventional humanitarian policy and practice tends to be characterized by the implementation of short-term solutions, most conflicts are protracted. Therefore, solutions catering to displaced people need to go beyond addressing their immediate needs. To accomplish this, a departure is required from the short-termism that prevails in humanitarian settings

and is reinforced by traditional humanitarian budget cycles, whereby allocated donor funds must be spent within a given financial year (Grafham, Lahn, and Haselip 2022). What is required is the integration of clean cooking within basic service packages provided to displaced populations and a framework to provide such services for as long as the displacement lasts.

Raise awareness about appropriate and available products. The lack of awareness surrounding various clean cooking solutions and alternatives to firewood and charcoal is a significant challenge in displacement settings. Governments, nongovernmental organizations, and donors may be hesitant to back clean cooking solutions for lack of complete information about which stoves are effective, whether displaced populations will make good use of them, and if they are willing to pay for them. To address

this, research institutes and development practitioners can develop knowledge products such as a database that provides country and camp-specific information on clean cooking products, their technical specifications, prices, and key distributors. Such a database can help project implementers make informed decisions and allocate resources appropriately, as well as raise awareness about appropriate clean cooking products. Providing grants to subsidize clean cooking products in the short to medium term can make these products more accessible in displaced environments and reduce barriers to entry. These grants can also help de-risk private investment, price products at an affordable level, and stimulate market creation.

Harness partnerships. Partnerships are essential for delivering energy services in displacement settings, as they provide private firms with support in navigating the camp environment and establishing a commercial presence. Working with organizations already operating in these settings can aid in making connections, engaging the community, identifying beneficiaries and retailers, and reducing uncertainty. To maximize the impact of humanitarian aid in displacement settings, stakeholders can:

- ✓ Jointly develop and execute programs through coordinated planning with governments, civil society organizations, and other development agencies
- ✓ Share technical expertise and best practices to design and implement programs that address specific challenges related to clean cooking
- ✓ Advocate together to raise awareness and garner increased resources and support for humanitarian action
- ✓ Collaborate with project implementers to optimize resources, skills, and technologies, including bundling projects and purchases, to enhance the efficient delivery of humanitarian aid
- ✓ Share knowledge and best practices to improve the overall quality and effectiveness of the humanitarian response.

Influence policy. Development practitioners have a critical role to play in advocating for policy measures that promote access to clean cooking for displaced populations in national energy access goals, project goals, and humanitarian responses. For example, they can show governments

how taxes on clean cookstoves and fuels affect their affordability for both displaced and host-country populations. Development practitioners can also be instrumental in promoting and disseminating appropriate quality-tested cookstoves through humanitarian programs, thus avoiding market distortions and improving trust and confidence among displaced populations. The Global Compact for Refugees, affirmed by UN member states, provides a blueprint for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that host communities receive support while refugees are helped to lead productive lives (UNHCR 2020). Additionally, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and the Refugee Policy Review Framework are successful tools to support policy dialogues with host governments and to measure progress toward the inclusion of displaced populations (ESMAP 2022).

Development practitioners have a critical role to play in advocating for policy measures that promote access to clean cooking for displaced populations in national energy access goals, project goals, and humanitarian responses.

Explore carbon finance. Carbon finance is an innovative financing mechanism aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions in displacement settings while alleviating fundraising shortfalls. These credits represent reductions in carbon dioxide emissions resulting from clean cooking fueled by solar thermal energy, electricity, biogas, or biofuel. The credits accumulated by households and institutions can be purchased by companies to offset or balance out their own emissions or to finance development and climate actions. Carbon finance can increase the financial viability of projects, reduce investment risks, and bring about social and environmental benefits in addition to reducing GHG emissions (HAMERKOP Climate Change and Finance 2022).

The challenges associated with carbon finance are several. They include (i) the temporary nature of displacement settings, which can produce a shortfall of carbon credits when households relocate; (ii) reputational risks from obtaining

carbon credits in return for marginal improvements; and (iii) regulatory challenges related to the lack of international regulation of the quality of carbon credits.

Adopt cost-cutting mechanisms. Where the circumstances and size of the displaced population permit, it is important to adopt measures like bulk purchasing, which can achieve economies of scale and lower production costs, lowering prices for the end user. Bulk purchasing can be done by pooling the clean cooking needs of refugees and their host communities or of two or more clean cooking programs serving the displaced.

Another cost-cutting measure (one that carries the added benefit of energy efficiency) is to reduce the frequency of refills and replenishment of cooking fuel. Distributing items that require less cooking time or cooking solutions that are more efficient, such as pressure cookers, can allow for fuel savings. Another measure is to adjust the volume of LPG cylinders to match the composition and consumption habits of recipient households.

Gather good data. Data from the field are limited owing to the shifting nature of displacement. This is compounded by a lack of accountability in the sector, with the result that very little data is shared across the spectrum of stakeholders to inform and improve program decisions. Accurate, comparable, and reliable data are needed to define the energy situation of displaced people, to establish program targets, and to evaluate progress. Development practitioners with suitable technical expertise can address this issue by collecting and analyzing energy data from camps, coupling it with the development of cost-effective and contextually appropriate cookstove interventions to make projects more successful.

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