

# Cooking Fuel Saves Lives: A Holistic Approach to Cooking in Humanitarian Settings

## Women's Refugee Commission

### Background

The Women's Refugee Commission's Fuel and Firewood Initiative is a far-reaching and cross-cutting effort to strengthen the capacity of the humanitarian community to respond to the rampant problem of violence against women and children during firewood collection, mitigate the negative health consequences of breathing cooking smoke, stem environmental degradation and reduce the dependence of women on unsafe livelihoods activities.

Working in partnership with key UN agencies and NGOs, we are leading the effort to institutionalize fuel-related interventions into respective agency funding proposals, strategic programming priorities and workplans and to ensure that the critical guidance created by the SAFE task force will be implemented and institutionalized among humanitarian organizations. By doing so, the Fuel and Firewood Initiative is effectively benefiting millions of women and children in conflict and natural

disaster-affected settings by addressing the root cause of much of their vulnerability: the lack of safe access to appropriate cooking fuel.

The SAFE task force guidance was launched in 2009 (see sector sheet #1, Overview), and the Women's Refugee Commission spent two years shipping thousands of copies to field offices and training hundreds of humanitarian staff around the world on when, why and how to implement it. Our key focus now, though, is turning these policies into reality on the ground. To this end, we have been partnering since 2010 with the UN World Food Programme (WFP) on its SAFE Initiative, through which it is reaching six million displaced women and their families with projects that ensure safe access to appropriate cooking fuels.

While we are pleased that WFP has taken on this major commitment, ultimately it falls on the entire humanitarian community to contribute to the SAFE process. The ultimate goal of the Women's Refugee Commission's Fuel and Firewood Initiative is therefore to **ensure that cooking fuel becomes institutionalized and a systematic part of humanitarian response**, in the same manner as food or water distribution—meaning that it is consistently, predictably and sufficiently staffed and funded in all phases of humanitarian response—and by all sectors. All of the Fuel and Firewood Initiative's program priorities address this key goal.

### **FUNDING: Identify and institutionalize funding streams for fuel-related interventions**

Advocacy for funding is the highest priority, since predictable, dedicated funding mechanisms for

What Next?



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cooking fuel response—particularly in emergencies—are not yet in place. Without funding, minimal impact can be made in the places that most urgently need new ideas and technologies (post-earthquake Haiti, for example). The Women’s Refugee Commission is engaging new donors and institutions and working to develop long-term, dedicated support for ensuring safe access to appropriate cooking fuel in humanitarian settings.

Key funding goals include:

- 1) deploying appropriate fuels and energy technologies to humanitarian settings and/or developing local capacity to produce such technologies in the affected regions;
- 2) building human resource capacity to address fuel-related needs and implement new interventions, and, equally important, to coordinate fuel-related interventions across a wide range of humanitarian response sectors; and
- 3) ensuring technical and research capacity within the humanitarian community to develop appropriate fuel-related interventions.

### **STAFFING: Develop and deploy SAFE-trained experts to emergency and other humanitarian settings worldwide to ensure sufficient technical capacity for addressing household energy-related needs**

Human resource capacity to address cooking fuel needs is a critical gap in the humanitarian assistance regime. The creation and deployment of a roster of household energy experts to critical locations and emergencies around the world will help to address this gap. The experts—modeled in part on existing “ProCap” and “GenCap” schemes that send protection and gender experts to key field sites—will be trained on the SAFE guidance and tasked with working with partners to coordinate and oversee the implementation of safe and appropriate cooking fuel strategies, and with local capacity-building to ensure long term sustainability of the projects.



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To be sustainable, cooking fuel strategies must be supported by the cooks themselves—nearly always women and girls. As such, women must not only be continually consulted in the design and development of cooking fuel strategies, but must be trained on all aspects of the production and use of household energy technologies like fuel-efficient stoves and empowered to engage in capacity-building and awareness-raising of other women and women’s groups.

### **INFORMATION-SHARING: Broaden and strengthen the Fuel Network**

The International Network on Household Energy in Humanitarian Settings (the “Fuel Network”), which was developed by the SAFE task force and is managed by the Women’s Refugee Commission, aims to become the key source of information and technical support for the development and institutionalization of safer, more appropriate cooking fuel strategies in humanitarian settings. We are building the capacity of the Fuel Network to reach this goal by: developing and implementing learning activities on its website; expanding membership and working with the Network’s Advisory Committee to develop new content and resources; and closely partnering with the new Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves.

For more information, please see [www.fuelnetwork.org](http://www.fuelnetwork.org) and [www.cleancookstoves.org](http://www.cleancookstoves.org).