



Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE): Preliminary Findings from Musasa and Kinama Refugee Camps in Burundi

A Rapid Assessment Report



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Research. Rethink. Resolve.

The Women's Refugee Commission works 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.

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Assessment Team:

Nadia Tabaro, SAFE Senior Project Manager, Women's Refugee Commission

Joselyne Bazahica, Associate Program Officer, UNHCR

Elvira Rwagasana, independent research consultant

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Cover photo: Women using the project stove with briquettes in Kinama refugee camp in Muyinga Burundi.

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Women's Refugee Commission

122 East 42nd Street

New York, NY 10168-1289

212.551.3115 | info@wrccommission.org | womensrefugeecommission.org

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

BQS	Burundi Quality Stoves
COPEDE	Council for Education and Development (Conseil Pour l'Education et le Développement)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FES	Fuel-efficient stove
GBV	Gender-based violence
ONPRA	National Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (Office National de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides)
SAFE	Safe Access to Fuel and Energy
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme
WRC	Women's Refugee Commission

Executive Summary

Most people displaced by conflict or crisis depend on energy resources such as firewood for cooking and to heat and light their homes. Finding and using these resources poses enormous risks to their safety and well-being.

In humanitarian settings, essentials like food, water and shelter are provided, but cooking fuel generally is not. Biomass, including firewood, charcoal, animal dung and agricultural waste, is the most common energy source in displacement settings. Women and girls bear the greatest burden of collecting fuel, risking attack, rape, robbery and even death.

In 2012, the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) launched "Protecting Women and the Environment of the Great Lakes Region of Africa," a three-year project funded by the MacArthur Foundation to research and document cooking fuel issues for displaced communities in the region. A key component of this project is to conduct assessments throughout the Great Lakes region to determine current needs and challenges related to cooking fuel, environmental protection, and sustainable fuels in order to establish an of understanding and recommendations for future programming. It is in this context that WRC undertook a rapid assessment in Musasa and Kinama refugee camps in Burundi, which together are home to some 17,000 refugees from the DRC.

Key Findings

These findings are based on information collected from refugees, as well as from staff of organizations working on cooking fuel issues and environmental protection in these two locations.

- Burundi faces a number of environmental challenges, including massive deforestation, which are exacerbated by high population density, land scarcity and the high dependence on wood as the primary source of energy.

- Refugees are not allowed to leave the camps to collect firewood, and therefore are not exposed to the associated protection risks.
- In addition to providing community cookstoves, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partners have been regularly providing cooking fuel – previously in the form of firewood and now in the form of briquettes – to refugees in an effort to protect both the refugees and the environment. The majority of the provided cookstoves, however, were designed to use firewood use and do not appear to function properly with briquettes.
- Communities are not engaged in making or distributing briquettes, which may ultimately inhibit long-term project sustainability.

Key Recommendations

WRC recommends that humanitarian organizations and local actors undertake a holistic approach to address cooking fuel and related environmental challenges in Musasa and Kinama refugee camps.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its implementing partners should:

- test and improve the quality of the briquettes and stoves;
- provide dry storage sheds for briquettes;
- support livelihood activities by engaging women in stove and fuel production;
- scale up environmental activities within the refugee camps and surrounding host communities;
- establish a SAFE Working Group in Burundi.

Background

The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) spearheaded the first-ever guidance on safe access to cooking fuel in humanitarian settings through the Inter-agency Standing Committee Task Force on Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy. This worked has evolved into Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE), a multisectoral program area that ensures safe and sustainable access to cooking fuel and other energy resources for displaced and crisis-affected people worldwide.

In 2012, with the support of the MacArthur Foundation, WRC launched a three-year SAFE initiative entitled "Protecting Women and the Environment in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: Turning Policy into Practice to Develop a Scalable, Sustainable Cooking Fuel Strategy." As part of this initiative, WRC researched SAFE needs and challenges throughout the region in effort to build the evidence base, generate response on the ground, and ultimately to stem the threats faced by displaced people and the environment in which they live. Moreover, it seeks to demonstrate – for regional and global adoption – how a coordinated and multi-sectoral SAFE strategy is needed to improve physical protection, livelihoods of women and girls, and reduce reliance on the unsustainable cooking fuels that cause environmental degradation.

By responding to energy needs and challenges in a holistic and multisectoral way, SAFE initiatives protect communities – particularly women and girls – and the environment by:

- reducing consumption of unsustainable biomass cooking fuels, including firewood and charcoal;
- preventing exposure to risk of gender-based violence;
- increasing supply of safer, cleaner, more sustainable cooking fuels;
- diversifying livelihoods for populations that depend on wood fuel-intensive activities; and

- reducing the negative health consequences of indoor air pollution caused by the toxic smoke from cooking with biomass fuels.

Context

Burundi has experienced a great deal of civil strife since it was granted independence from Belgium in 1962. It still grapples with ethnic tensions and related challenges and continues to be affected by insecurity in the Great Lakes region at large, particularly the instability in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

UNHCR anticipates that in 2015 Burundi will be hosting over 62,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mostly from the DRC, as well as close to 80,000 internally displaced persons. UNHCR also anticipates that the Burundian government will maintain its hospitality and provide protection for refugees in the country, and will continue to work in partnership with UNHCR and other organizations to assure basic services for refugees. Livelihood activities will be at the center of UNHCR's strategy going forward to promote self-reliance for refugees.¹

Burundi is facing extensive environmental issues, many of which are due to or exacerbated by the high population density and scarcity of land, exacerbated by the influx of refugees and waves of internal displacement. The high level of deforestation for household energy needs, construction, and agricultural activities is highly problematic in Burundi.

Deforestation is inextricably linked to both food security and livelihood issues in Burundi.

Geographic Location

Musasa and Kinama refugee camps are located in Muyinga province in the northeast region of Burundi, approximately 450 kilometers from the capital, Bujumbura, and 25 kilometers east of the Tanzania border.

The camps were established in 2002 and 2007, respectively. They both house refugees from DRC.

At the time of the assessment, the Musasa camp hosted 6,937 people in 1,359 households, and the Kinama camp hosted 9,935 people in 1,998 households. Both camps are administered by UNHCR, with the support of a wide range of organizations, including the World Food Programme (WFP), International Rescue Committee (IRC), and International Organization for Migration. The camps are designed as “small cities” of iron roof huts and mud abode shelters. Boundaries in Musasa and Kinama are well defined, and permission is needed to enter the camps by car.

UNHCR Assistance

In collaboration with the government and other partners, UNHCR is focusing on delivering protection and assistance to an estimated 50,450 refugees and 6,600 asylum-seekers in Burundi.² UNHCR also provides basic goods and services to refugees in camps, implements environmental activities, and seeks durable solutions given the protracted situation.

In an effort to meet household energy needs, UNHCR has been working with its partners to ensure that refugees regularly receive cooking fuel. Up until October 2013, the fuel distributions included only firewood, harvested from neighboring areas. While these distributions helped to minimize the need for firewood collection by refugees outside of the camp and thus helped to limit competition between refugees and the host community, they contributed to the depletion of natural resources. In response to the government’s concern that the refugee demand for firewood would exceed the supply and capacity of Burundi’s forests, UNHCR and its partners recently adopted a new approach and began to distribute briquettes instead of firewood. They have also implemented cookstove projects, as well as reforestation activities.

At the time of this assessment, UNHCR was financially supporting the provincial government to maintain and manage the reforested lands, which will allow the

host community to meet its cooking fuel needs and fill cooking fuel gaps for refugees should the briquettes be insufficient.

Methodology

The rapid assessment included secondary data research, meetings with key stakeholders, and focus groups and individual interviews with refugees. WRC first met with UNHCR staff and then participated in a mid-term evaluation workshop on the briquette project at the UNHCR field office in Muyinga. Participating organizations included the Council for Education and Development (COPEd), National Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (ONPRA), and Burundi Quality Stoves (BQS), as well as refugee representatives. The mid-term review of the briquette project helped to shape the assessment questions for refugees.

Following the workshop, WRC worked with UNHCR to organize and conduct focus group discussions and four individual interviews with refugees. The two focus groups comprised of six women and girls each. The four individual interviews were with women refugees. All focus groups and interviews were conducted in Swahili.

Findings

Cooking in Musasa and Kinama Refugee Camps

The majority of cooking in Burundi refugee camps is done by women and girls, primarily outdoors in community spaces constructed by COPEd and ONPRA with support from UNHCR. Refugees sometimes cook indoors when it rains. Participants reported that they experience red eyes and respiratory difficulties due to cooking with firewood and briquettes.

Stoves and Fuels

UNHCR and its partners have supported several stove and fuel interventions in Musasa and Kinama, as well as in the other refugee camps in Burundi.

Cook Stoves

In partnership with UNHCR and with technical support from BQS, COPED has built and installed community stoves in refugee camps, including in Musasa and Kinama. These community stoves are made of clay and are fixed to the ground. They were primarily designed for use with firewood and do not appear to be particularly efficient or compatible with briquettes.



Community kitchens have been built in each camp.

Some refugees have homemade clay stoves that they use when it rains or when they simply want to cook inside. Participants said that these stoves allow them to cook quickly, particularly in comparison to the community stoves and briquettes to which not everyone is accustomed. They prefer to use charcoal because it is cleaner and produces less smoke than the briquettes.



A homemade stove used by refugees in Musasa camp.

In addition to manufacturing and supplying the briquettes for refugees, BQS has also developed a stove for use with the briquettes (not pictured). However, interviewees in Kinama reported that they are not yet accustomed to these new technologies and that they sometimes barter food for charcoal, though charcoal use is banned in the camp, and use the metallic stove, which they used before the introduction of the briquettes.



The metallic charcoal stove used by refugees before the briquette project.

Participants are aware of the massive deforestation caused by the overreliance on firewood and charcoal. Their understanding of the environmental challenges, coupled with the difficulty they face in accessing charcoal, makes them willing to completely shift to briquettes, but only if the quality improves.

Woodfuel

UNHCR and Caritas Burundi distributed firewood to refugees for cooking fuel purposes from the establishment of the refugee camps up until February 2014. During this time, firewood was the only cooking fuel resource that was distributed to refugees.

Briquette Project

Initiated by UNHCR through its implementing partners COPED and ONPRA, the briquette project was introduced in the Burundi refugee camps in early 2014 to reduce woodfuel consumption and curb environmental threats.

Since the introduction of the briquettes, the use of firewood and charcoal for cooking in the camps has been banned. ONPRA is responsible for enforcing this ban, but ONPRA staff reported that they do not yet know how to effectively administer repercussions for offenders other than taking away the firewood and charcoal.

The briquettes are purchased from BQS, a private company that manufactures them primarily from agricultural waste. It has a contract with COPED to make and deliver briquettes to all refugee camps in Burundi and is able to deliver up to 338 tons per month. The distribution and monitoring are conducted by COPED and ONPRA. At the start of the project, refugees were receiving briquettes based on their household sizes; households with 1 to 12 were receiving 12 kilograms of briquettes per person per month, while households with more than 12 people received 15 kilograms per person per month.

Before the assessment, WRC and UNHCR participated in a workshop in Muyinga along with implementing partners and government representatives to

discuss the effectiveness of the briquettes project. A major conclusion from the workshop was that the provided briquettes were insufficient and unable to fully meet household needs. Attendees agreed that the protocol should be reviewed and that 20, 30, and 40 kilograms of briquettes should be provided, respectively, for household sizes of one, two, and three plus.

Individuals living alone reported that 20 kilograms of briquettes is not enough to cover their monthly household needs. They said that some foods, like beans or maize, take the same time to cook (3-5 hours) regardless of the quantity being cooked.

The distribution of the briquettes is organized at the same time as food distributions and fairs organized by Caritas Burundi. Caritas organizes market places in the camps where refugees are able to trade vouchers for food from preapproved suppliers. However, in some camps such as Kinama, it is difficult to organize the distribution of the briquettes and fairs at the same time due to a lack of space.

At the beginning of the project, refugees received trainings on the use and storage of the briquettes. Sensitization and training took longer than expected, but seem to have paid off as refugee communities have largely shifted to cooking with briquettes. The fact that woodfuels have also been banned is another major contributing factor to the shift.

Furthermore, some focus group discussion participants, particularly in Kinama, reported that they are not yet used to this kind of cooking fuel and that it produces a lot of smoke and ash. Numerous participants mentioned that the briquettes are often moist, making them very difficult to light and very smoky once they are lit. Refugees do not have dry locations to store the briquettes to protect them from the humidity and rain.

At the time of this assessment, refugees were not engaged in making briquettes or in income-generating activities related to the briquettes, which is a missed opportunity that may ultimately limit project sustainability. Moreover, the biomass briquettes were only



Briquettes distributed in refugee camps in Burundi.

being distributed and used in the refugee camps and not in the host communities, which limits the environmental impact and may also impede long-term behavior change.

Protection

Several studies have indicated that gender-based violence (GBV) is prevalent in refugee camps in Burundi. The International Rescue Committee undertook an assessment in 2011 and reported that all discussion groups in Gasorwe, Musasa, and Bwagiriza refugee camps mentioned GBV as a significant risk for women and girls. Specific types of GBV mentioned included physical violence (91% of groups), denial of resources, opportunities and services (71.8%), rape (69%), forced marriage (56%), sexual assault (43%), and emotional violence (28%).³

Refugee women interviewed during the WRC and UNHCR SAFE assessment reported that incidents of GBV do sometimes occur within the camp; the majority of these incidents are domestic violence. Sexual violence occurs, but to a lesser extent than domestic violence. Participants reported that the incidents of GBV are not related to firewood collection, because refugees receive cooking fuel distributions and do not typically collect firewood.

Some participants admitted off-the-record that refugees secretly collect firewood in host community woodlots, which can create tensions between the two groups. However, they asserted that these tensions rarely escalate and, at most, the host community members report the situation to the local administrator or the provincial governor.⁴

Additional research is needed to better understand GBV prevalence and risks. Additional time in the camp for observation of refugee movements, practices, and behaviors would likely reveal more information about the connection between firewood collection, cooking fuel, and protection issues in and around the camps.

Environment

In Burundi, refugees and host communities depend on the same natural resources. Participants reported that conflicts between refugees and host community members have not occurred since the refugees began using briquettes for cooking fuel.

It is clear that humanitarian actors and the government have a strong awareness of the environmental challenges in and around refugee camps in Burundi. In fact, the cookstoves and briquettes project is being implemented specifically in response to environmental concerns. However, it is also clear that there is a dire need to restrict unauthorized deforestation and improve agricultural practices for the host community, as well as prioritize agroforestry activities for both refugees and hosts. At the time of this assessment, refugees in Musasa and Kinama were not participating in environmental activities.

The introduction of briquettes and cookstoves in the refugee camps is an important start for shifting communities away from unsustainable fuels and practices while at the same time meeting their needs. If used regularly and effectively, fuel-efficient cookstoves and briquettes will drastically reduce the consumption of woodfuels such as firewood and charcoal. In turn, this reduction will mitigate deforestation, protect trees and biodiversity.

Livelihoods

In Musasa and Kinama camps, firewood collection and selling do not appear to be a major livelihood option for refugees. Restrictions on refugees' engagement in employment opportunities and movement outside the camp areas, as well as the restriction on the use of firewood and charcoal in the camps are the major barriers to collection and sale of firewood for income. Most refugees are reported to use food as currency to procure other essential household items, while some refugees engage in small business activities such as selling vegetables, bartering or selling used clothing items, and tailoring. Overall, assessment participants reported that refugees desperately need safe and sustainable options for income generation.

Host community members living around the camps sell woodfuels as a primary form of income generation. They sell woodfuels to other host community members and often trade woodfuels with refugees for food. The charcoal they sell is primarily used in towns, while the firewood is mostly used in rural areas.

Food Security, Nutrition, and Health

Refugees in Kinama and Musasa reported that the fuel distributions by UNHCR and its partners are not always enough and that they must sometimes resort to negative coping mechanisms. They frequently sell and barter their food rations for supplementary needs. Trading food rations for other food items such as vegetables and fish can help improve diet diversity and nutrition. However, when refugees must resort to trading their food for other basic needs simply because they have no other currency, it can be problematic for their nutrition, health, and well-being. Furthermore, participants reported that many refugees resort to skipping meals and reducing the meal size to cope with a lack of food after bartering. This may seriously undermine the nutrition and health of beneficiaries.

Smoke from burning briquettes is a major concern for women. They had observed many cases of coughing among children recently, but did not know if it was

related to the smoke. This issue requires further investigation with a particular focus on the rates of respiratory diseases reported among women and children since the briquettes were introduced into the communities.

Household Energy Alternatives

No energy alternatives (solar, propane, butane or electricity) have been tested or distributed in the refugee camps in Burundi, nor in rural areas. Electrification of the country would considerably diminish the consumption of firewood and charcoal, protect the environment, and improve the quality of life for end-users.

Conclusion and Ways Forward

In Burundi, UNHCR and its partners have made great strides in terms of addressing cooking fuel issues for refugees and associated environmental challenges. While there are some challenges in terms of the quality and quantity of the cookstoves and briquettes, the pilot project has been largely well received by the beneficiaries, many of whom have successfully shifted from firewood to briquettes. This shift prevents the deforestation of an estimated 300 hectares per month.⁵

In addition to reducing deforestation, UNHCR and its partners are contributing to a cleaner environment by promoting briquettes made out of agricultural waste, fostering a safer and more peaceful dynamic between host communities and refugees by reducing competition over natural resources, and helping to prevent the exposure of women and girls to GBV by reducing the need for firewood collection. Despite the numerous positive outcomes of these efforts, there are still a number of improvements to be made.

Based on the findings of this assessment, WRC recommends the following:

- **Test and improve the quality of the briquettes and stoves**

The composition of briquettes should be reassessed to

address the amount of smoke they produce and the difficulties in lighting and burning.

UNHCR and its partners should commission controlled-cooking tests with community cooks to determine the efficiency of the stoves and ensure that the stove models and briquettes are adapted as needed.

- **Provide dry storage sheds for briquettes**

To ensure proper use, continued uptake, and minimal exposure to air pollution, briquettes must be properly manufactured and then kept dry. Refugees should be given access to dry storage sheds.

- **Monitor the application of training techniques by refugees and strengthen as needed**

UNHCR and its partners should regularly monitor the application of training techniques to teach refugees how to use the briquettes, and strengthen them as needed.

- **Support livelihood activities by engaging women in stove and fuel production**

Engage refugee communities in stove and fuel production. Supporting livelihood activities to promote self-reliance and reduce the need for bartering and selling food rations.

- **Scale up environmental activities within the refugee camps and surrounding host communities**

Scale up tree planting for reforestation purposes, as well as for sustainable woodlots, to help meet the household needs of host communities and refugees. Home and school gardening should be expanded to increase opportunities for nutrition and income generation.

- **Establish a SAFE Working Group in Burundi**

UNHCR should work with its partners to establish a SAFE working group in Burundi to coordinate SAFE-related issues and activities around the refugee camps.

Regular meeting times and locations should be estab-

lished, followed by development of a working group terms of reference and work plan.

For other reports related to this project, see http://wrc.ms/SAFE_resources.

Notes

1. UNHCR. *2015 UNHCR subregional operations profile - Central Africa and the Great Lakes*. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e45a6c6.html>
2. UNHCR. *2015 UNHCR subregional operations profile - Central Africa and the Great Lakes*. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e45a6c6.html>
3. International Rescue Committee. *Assessing the Safety of Refugee Women and Girls in Burundi: SGBV Analysis Report* (2011). <http://gbvaor.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2013/02/2011-IRC-SGBV-Safety-Audit-Report.pdf>
4. There are several reasons as to why refugees may have only wanted to unofficially report firewood collection. To start, it is illegal. They may fear negative repercussions. Participants may have felt uncomfortable to fully disclose information about firewood collection with UNHCR present during the focus group discussions given its role in camp management and cooking fuel distribution.
5. COPED. *Assessment report on the use of firewood in refugees' camps in Burundi* (2013).

Annex 1: Mission Itinerary

Date	Activity	Location
22 May 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Security briefing• Meeting with the UNHCR staff• Workshop with the project stakeholders	Muyinga
23 May 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• FGD and individual interviews in Kinama camp	Kinama Camp
24 May 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• FGD and individual interviews in Musasa camp	Musasa Camp
25 May 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with COPED and BQS	Muyinga



**WOMEN'S
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122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168-1289
212.551.3115
info@wrcommission.org

womensrefugeecommission.org