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WFP and Safe Access to Firewood: Protecting and Empowering Communities

'Safe, fuel-efficient stoves enable women to be the frontline champions in the battle against climate change and hunger and empower communities with immediate, practical, adaptation solutions.'

WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran



In 2007, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) decided to tackle the urgent challenge of Safe Access to Firewood and alternative Energy in Humanitarian Settings (SAFE).

Women and girls are at risk of rape, beatings and murder as they search for firewood and at the same time the environment is degraded through rapid deforestation.

Earlier this year, the IASC task force, co-chaired by UNHCR, WFP, and the Women's Refugee Commission, approved a comprehensive strategy and set of responsibilities to address the pervasive problem of safe access to firewood and fuel.

- Firewood consumption for cooking and basic household needs has become a major contributor to rapid deforestation and environmental degradation. Stripping land jeopardizes agriculture and contributes to the loss of valuable carbon sinks.
- As tree coverage is lost at an alarming rate, women are forced to travel greater distances in unsafe territory to collect grass and wood. In times of peace and predictable weather, women collect deadwood. In situations of recurring drought and ongoing conflict, women collect whatever is available since access to wood is limited.
- Some women undercook food and families often skip meals when firewood is not available or when they cannot afford to buy it. But as firewood is essential for cooking, and is one of the few commodities sold in humanitarian settings, many women risk attack and rape in order to collect it.

Fuel-efficient Stoves: A win-win solution

- Fuel-efficient technologies – combined with support for alternative livelihood opportunities – can protect women and their families and protect the environment.
- Fuel-efficient stoves protect the environment by reducing the consumption of firewood. The use of fuel-efficient stoves can lead to a 50 percent reduction in the frequency of firewood collection in North Darfur, and thus a significant reduction in deforestation and in women's exposure to violence.
- Fuel-efficient stoves lower health risks that women and families experience with the traditional three-stone open fire, by reducing unhealthy smoke and particle emissions.



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WFP and Fuel-efficient stoves

- Partnering with nations UNHCR, UNEP and cooperating partners, WFP is immediately taking the joint recommendations of an inter-agency task force (IASC) forward with a four-prong SAFE strategy which will allow us to:
 - Reduce the vulnerability and frequency of exposure of women to risk through scaling up the dissemination of fuel-efficient stoves and tree planting.
 - Explore and pilot energy technologies that can be effectively applied to environmental needs.
 - Provide schools with fuel-efficient stoves to help ensure that firewood is not an obstacle to school attendance.
 - Work with partners, including FAO, to promote the creation of income generating activities to reduce the reliance of women on the collection of firewood for income.
- WFP will pilot the SAFE approach in Sudan and Uganda in January of 2010. Both countries are already highly vulnerable to climate changes. Endemic drought and water shortages have accelerated violence and struggle over the few environmental resources which exist.
- WFP will provide and assist almost 100,000 women in North Darfur with fuel-efficient stoves, or improved mud stoves. These households will reach more than half a million beneficiaries.
- In North Darfur, WFP will provide fuel-efficient stoves and equipment to 170 schools to alleviate the household burden of cooking school meals. WFP plans to work in towns, IDP camps and rural areas.
- In Uganda, WFP will adopt a similar strategy. Focusing on the refugee settlement in the southwest and pastoralists in Karamoja, WFP will provide more than 35,000 households and 50 schools with fuel-efficient stoves in addition to engaging women in livelihood opportunities and disseminating innovative technology.
- In both North Darfur and Uganda, to alleviate the cutting down of trees as an income source, WFP will also work with its partners to promote alternative livelihood opportunities – such as the cultivation of drought-resistant crops.
- In both North Darfur and Uganda, WFP will engage a range of experts and the private sector in piloting new technologies (for example, briquette-making) to help communities meet basic fuel needs and to generate livelihood opportunities that are less risky and more eco-friendly, with the ultimate aim of wide-scale dissemination.

Positive results

- Reduced violence against women;
- Alternative livelihoods for women;
- Reduced regional dependency on unsustainable fuel (and contribution to anti-desertification and effects of climate change);
- Provide support to families sending kids to school;
- Introduce of innovative, alternative fuel technologies



In 2010, WFP will feed more than 80 million people. This includes some 12 million refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees in 36 countries. Over the next two years, WFP will work with its partners to reach half of this population through the SAFE initiative, by targeting WFP beneficiary households and WFP assisted-schools.



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