



Making Cooking SAFE: Addressing Household Energy Needs in Crisis Settings An ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment Side Event

Tuesday, 19 July 2011 | 8:15am – 9:45am

Event Summary

On Tuesday, 19 July the Permanent Mission of Liechtenstein to the UN, the Permanent Mission of the United States to the UN, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Women's Refugee Commission co-hosted a side event entitled "Making Cooking SAFE: Addressing Household Energy Needs in Crisis Settings" at the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment in Geneva. The panel discussed the next steps required from the humanitarian community to advance solutions to ensure that women can cook their food safely, without risking their lives, health or security.

Despite the fact that the food provided in crisis settings, such as refugee camps, or in the aftermath of natural disasters must be cooked in order to be eaten, the fuel required to cook this food is rarely provided. Thus, women have no choice but to leave the relative safety of their homes and walk as many as five or more hours a day to find sufficient fuel – usually firewood – to cook for their families.

Particularly in humanitarian settings, the collection, supply and use of firewood is associated with a variety of dangers. Women and girls risk rape and assault during firewood collection. Cooking over indoor fires releases toxic smoke, causing respiratory infections that result in 1.9 million premature deaths annually, with women and young children the most affected. The collection of firewood exacerbates environmental degradation in the sensitive areas where so many of the displaced are located, threatening livelihoods and food security.

The panelists discussed the challenges that the humanitarian system faces in addressing this multi-sectoral issue, as well as the progress that has been made in recent years as a result of the guidance created by the IASC Task Force on Safe Access to Firewood and alternative Energy in Humanitarian Settings (SAFE) and the new Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, with its goal of having 100 million homes adopt clean and efficient cookstoves and fuels by 2020.

H.E. Mr. Norbert Frick, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations in Geneva, gave the opening remarks for the event. In addition to framing the dangers associated with cooking fuel, Ambassador Frick emphasized the multi-sectoral nature of cooking fuel and the need for coordination within the humanitarian community, noting Liechtenstein's commitment to the issue. After opening up the discussion on identifying challenges as well as discussing progress that has been made in addressing household energy needs in crises settings, Ambassador Frick introduced **Sarah Costa, Executive Director of the Women's Refugee Commission,** who moderated the panel.

In addition to framing the serious problems related to cooking fuel in humanitarian settings, Dr. Costa presented the ways in which a lack of safe access to cooking fuel impacts women and girls specifically—including sexual attacks, physical violence, a lack of schooling, respiratory illness, back and neck injuries from carrying heavy loads of wood and burns from unsafe cooking methods. Dr. Costa explained the origin of the Women's Refugee Commission's work in exploring the issue, beginning in 2005 and eventually leading to the creation of the Fuel and Firewood Initiative. After conducting assessments in Darfur and Nepal, the Women's Refugee Commission published a seminal report, "Beyond Firewood," with findings that highlighted the ad hoc responses to cooking fuel in humanitarian settings as well as the lack of a single agency to ensure a consistent, coordinated and predictable strategy to deal with the multi-sectoral issue.

Dr. Costa highlighted the progress that has been made to address this issue including the work of the IASC Task Force on Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy in Humanitarian Settings (SAFE) which was co-chaired by the Women's Refugee Commission, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) from 2007 until 2009. Dr. Costa explained that the Task Force's two key guidance documents – the Matrix on Agency Roles & Responsibilities for Ensuring a Coordinated, Multi-Sectoral Fuel Strategy in Humanitarian Settings and the Decision Tree Diagrams on Factors Affecting Choice of Fuel Strategy in Humanitarian Settings – together comprise a framework for ensuring a comprehensive and coordinated response to the protection, health, environmental and other concerns associated with cooking in humanitarian settings. She also presented an overview of the next phase for the SAFE guidance, including current challenges, partnerships and next steps. Dr. Costa concluded by stressing the fact that the policies and tools to address the issue are already in place and that now is the time to act, emphasizing the necessity of securing resources in order to address the issue as well as the importance of thinking big to realize unlimited possibilities and opportunities in the field.

Panelist **Paul Larsen, Director of Multilateral and NGO Relations for the World Food Programme,** provided an overview of the WFP's global "SAFE Initiative," which is striving to provide safe access to appropriate cooking fuel to six million crisis-affected people by the end of 2011. After showing a video presenting the agency's SAFE work in Darfur, Mr. Larsen discussed WFP's partnership with FAO, UNHCR, the Women's Refugee Commission and others, take forward the recommendations of the IASC Task Force SAFE via a four-pronged strategy that will allow WFP to: 1) reduce the vulnerability and frequency of exposure of women to risk through the major scaling up of dissemination of fuel-efficient stoves and alternative fuels; 2) explore energy technologies that can be effectively applied to address protection, livelihood and environmental needs; 3) promote the creation of livelihoods opportunities to reduce the

reliance of women on the collection of firewood for income; and 4) provide schools with fuel-efficient stoves to help ensure that the cost of cooking fuel is not an obstacle to school attendance.

Panelist **Eduige Kavugho, Mercy Corps' Project Manager of Sustainable Resource Management and Food Security in the Democratic Republic of Congo**, presented the work of Mercy Corps in addressing household energy challenges in DRC. Ms. Kavugho discussed the household energy crisis unfolding in the DRC, including the impacts upon poor households, protection risks, deforestation and climate changes that negatively impact the environment. She also discussed the role that the charcoal industry, including its production and consumption, plays in fueling conflict in the region. Ms. Kavugho presented the work Mercy Corps has done to produce and distribute fuel-efficient stoves beginning in Goma in September 2008 with the distribution of fuel-efficient stoves in six IDP camps, as well as their success—rare in the humanitarian sphere—in receiving carbon credits for this project.

Ms. Kavugho further presented a wide variety of different types of fuel-efficient stoves that are available for use in the Great Lakes region and beyond, the lessons Mercy Corps has learned throughout the roll-out of their project and next steps for local Congolese production.

Next Steps:

In moving forward, it is essential to remember that simple solutions to this complex problem exist—from clean cookstoves to safer fuels to innovative new energy technologies. The challenge remains, however, to take action that makes a real difference on the ground and in the lives of the people most affected. The panel stressed that now is the time to move forward to solve this daily health and safety burden on millions of women around the world. Unlike so many other subjects that the humanitarian community works on, here we know *what* is needed and *where* it's needed. It is not controversial; it has a global impact; it addresses multiple key challenges all at once. We have the tools and technologies to get clean cookstoves, “green” fuels and other new technologies into the hands of women. We have the policy; we have the commitment from the leaders of the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, which includes so many of the governments represented here today. Now we just need to act.

Despite this positive momentum, one of the key stumbling blocks since the launch of the SAFE guidance in 2009 has been lack of resources and capacity within the majority of humanitarian agencies to sufficiently address cooking fuel in a predictable way. Resources are necessary to make sure that we get sufficiently trained staff on the ground quickly; that we get the right technologies to the right people; and that we can develop the local capacity to ensure long-term sustainability. After all, the need to cook—and to do so efficiently and cleanly—will continue long after the humanitarian emergency is over. In going forward it will also be necessary to think large-scale in considering the possibilities and opportunities to implement long-term and lasting changes in the cooking fuel sector.