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ACCESS TO ENERGY: SAFEGUARDING REFUGEE WOMEN AND GIRLS

A comprehensive response to energy needs and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) within Ethiopia's refugee population

Working to bring together a broad range of stakeholders committed to safeguarding refugees from protection risks, a comprehensive multi-sector approach; to be prototyped in Ethiopia's Gambella Region, aims to further access to energy solutions for cooking, and the adoption of coordinated mitigation and response interventions in instances of SGBV amongst the South Sudanese refugee population.

Incidences of SGBV while searching for cooking fuel; including rape and physical assault, although under-reported are assessed to disproportionately affect the female refugee population of around 211,000. Such realities are impacted by a high instance of female headed households; a result of the separation of family members during displacement, the death of loved-ones as a result of conflict, with many husbands and fathers opting to remain in South Sudan to safeguard family assets.

Women and children are also exposed to health risks, including respiratory infections from smoke produced by inefficient stoves and the use of firewood as a source of cooking fuel. Children who collect firewood, or stay at home alone to look after family members, are not afforded the opportunity to attend school. In certain instances, families are forced to sell a portion of their limited food rations, to be able to afford cooking fuel. Such coping mechanisms can have serious consequences to their nutritional status.

Prioritized interventions include: the expansion of community-driven mitigation measures; the strengthening of health and psychosocial interventions to support SGBV survivors, together with the delivery of fuel solutions within camps; the prioritization of in-kind support through voucher or cash modalities; and the scaling of biogas and briquette production that supports livelihoods opportunities for refugees and the host community

Medium and long-term energy solutions will be based on the engagement of all relevant stakeholders, including the refugees and the host community, and the Regional authorities, taking into account cultural acceptability of different approaches, safety aspects, and scalability. A comprehensive study to inform the planned interventions is supporting the engagement of a national Energy and Environment Working Group, to which all partners, in additional to existing humanitarian partners are invited.



The challenge

Firewood collection is a normal activity for refugee communities. Women and children carry the full burden of this activity. 72,618 households in Gambella are headed by refugee women. This is 86% of the households in the region. Due to the remoteness of the locations where they must collect firewood, women are exposed to SGBV, namely rape and physical assault. These two types of SGBV accounted for 61% of the reported cases in 2017. In the first quarter of 2018, the percentage increased to 74%.

According to studies conducted in Gambella, one refugee household uses 7 kg of firewood per day. The region hosts 84,679 households in camps. This means that 592,753 kg of firewood is used daily. Considering an average in the weight of a tree to be 4,000 kg, 150 trees are cut per day. 54,750 trees in a year. 100% of the refugee households are collecting firewood for cooking purposes.

Competition for forest resources is high among refugee households and host communities. This impacts local ecosystems and hinders peaceful co-existence. Moreover, collecting firewood can take up to six hours. During this time, many mothers have to leave their children unattended or at the care of their eldest girls, who in turn are not able to attend school regularly.

Currently, energy provision is insignificant, with limited alternative energy provision for lighting (solar lanterns, lamps, street lights at only 32%), while interventions to address household energy needs currently being implemented lack scale. This include pilots on charcoal briquette production, environmental protection campaigns, woodlot rehabilitation and the provision of targeted fuel sources.

The response

Safe access to fuel and energy is key to contribute to the wellbeing of refugee women and girls. Moreover, while it is fundamental to prevent SGBV, a safe access to energy sources for cooking further contributes to preserve their nutrition and health, while ensuring children stay in school. For humanitarian partners, working together with a broad range of actors, including the refugee community; considering cultural acceptance, affordability, sustainability, and self-reliance. Interim solutions are being defined, together with a longer-term approaches to ensure the regeneration and sustainable use of natural resources.

Interim solutions	Long-term approach
<p>1. Bio-fuels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Crops are available to produce charcoal briquettes- Briquettes can be made manually or with machines- Supports peaceful coexistence <p>2. Biogas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Done with manure from cattle owned by refugees or the host community <p>3. Bio-ethanol</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Locally produced from sugar factories	<p>1. Woodlot development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reforestation- Tree planting for domestic fuel- Equitable natural resource management <p>2. Connecting camps to electricity grids:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Integrating sustainable energy systems- Providing household connections at low cost

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