

Barriers to the Adoption of Efficient Energy Strategies Among Refugees in Northern Ghana

Research Brief

Key words: Refugees, Rural energy, Sustainable Livelihoods, Theory of Reasoned Action, Participatory Rural Appraisal

Refugees tend to use sources of energy for cooking, heating and lighting that are already familiar to them and readily available in the areas where they are temporarily settled. In most situations, particularly in developing countries, this means firewood and charcoal. High demand for these two fuels can be bad news for the environment as supplies of dead wood are progressively exhausted and more and more live trees are cut down.

Introduction

Cutting trees for fuel is a very prominent aspect of the environmental impacts associated with refugee camps and can be a source of conflict with host governments and local communities.

It may also mean that refugees themselves have to spend significant amounts of time, money and labour securing sufficient fuel to meet their needs. In some instances even putting themselves in danger. Use of energy by refugees is therefore an important issue to consider from several perspectives – not only environmental, but also social, economic and protection-related.

While many agencies have endeavoured to address this problem over the last 20 years, adoption of new energy strategies and technologies has generally been minimal and slow. To address these problems the UK Department for International Development commissioned Gamos to carry out a study looking at the barriers to adoption of efficient energy strategies in northern Ghana (DFID project R6849).

“early targeted environmental awareness campaigns are valuable in setting the parameters for sound environmental behaviour.”

UNHCR 1998 Environmental Guidelines: Domestic Energy in Refugee Situations

New Method

As part of this research, Gamos pioneered the use of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TORA) technique as a survey method for gaining a better understanding of livelihood strategies.

The TORA tool explains the relationship of the different expressed attitudes on the decision to adopt improved practices. It therefore helps isolate the key issues that may be acting as drivers or barriers to positive behaviour. The added value of the TORA rapid assessment tool is its use of a second more formal survey after an open interview, to give statistically validated findings. (this is its main advantage over traditional Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques which only describe the “what, where, when, who and how” of livelihood strategies, but not the why) Furthermore TORA has a predictive element to provide guidance for appropriate environmental awareness campaigns.



Key Findings

- The displaced were more likely to adapt sustainable fuel wood management than stable communities due to – increased awareness of the limitations of resources, greater value placed on resources after having their own removed.
- The need to fit in (in terms of energy practices) is more influential among the displaced above their own reasoned attitude. This insecurity is due to their status as refugees.
- The displaced are less open to external input into matters concerning the way their home is run (e.g. which stove to use). They are though, more open to advice regarding woodlot planting. This also can be attributed to security fears.

Implications of research

Both the content and the channel need to differ for energy education messages depending on whether the community is stable or unstable. Targeted messages prevent extension agents from doing this.

From data to results

The TORA technique proved itself valid in that it uncovered the majority of items that are usually discovered for displaced persons (and then added quantifiable statistics as the strength of the belief).

The validity was further proved in the demonstration phase of the project (DFID R7483), This project took the recommendations of R6849 and worked with extension services across Northern Ghana to apply them. The new messages addressed the barriers to the adoption of three generalized behaviours:

- *Improved stove adoption*
- *Firewood collection*
- *Wood lot planting*

The messages and methodologies of this focused extension were further developed by local extension agencies, both GO and NGO, involved in the promotion of sustainable natural resource management, during a workshop conducted in Tamale in January 2000.

Does it work?

The final research activity was to repeat the TORA survey in order to explore the changes that had occurred among extension clients. 230 sample households were surveyed in the districts exposed to the focused extension. The project determined if the focused intervention had changed these barriers and whether there was a related improvement in the three behaviours.

Improved Stoves - The focused messages have led to an increase in the use of improved stoves (51% increase) and a stronger intention to continue this practice.

Firewood collection - While there had been a general deterioration in sustainable collection behaviour during the previous 3 years, the focused extension programme does appear to have halted this negative trend and has led to more sustainable behaviour.

Woodlots - Generally tree planting and wood lot management behaviour have weakened over the past 3 years. Those communities exposed to the focused extension initiative, and particularly those who have attended demonstrations have registered a significant positive change in both their current practice and future intentions.

These findings serve to support the methods used and the main implication of the research. Namely that both the content and the channel of need to differ for energy extension messages depending on whether the community is stable or unstable.

The full report is available to read at:
www.fuelwood.info

For more information on Gamos and its activities please visit:

www.gamos.org



This document is an output from a project funded by the UK Department for International Development for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID



Crown House
231 Kings Rd
Reading
RG1 4LS
UK
44 (0)1189297039
info@gamos.org