

Adoption and Disadoption: An Ethnographic Analysis of Improved Cookstove Use in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Uganda

P, a, t, i, e, n, c, e, A, k, e, l, l, o, ,, A, i, s, h, a, N, a, m, a, t, o, v, u, ,, J, u, l,
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| Abstract

The promotion of improved cookstoves is a common intervention for health and environmental objectives in humanitarian settings. Sustained adoption remains a significant challenge, with patterns of use and disuse in refugee camps poorly understood from a socio-cultural perspective. This ethnographic study aimed to understand the lived experiences, social practices, and decision-making processes influencing the adoption and subsequent disadoption of improved cookstoves within a protracted refugee context. The research employed a longitudinal ethnographic approach in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Uganda. Data were collected through participant observation, informal conversations, and in-depth interviews with refugee households, alongside focus group discussions with community members and aid workers. Initial adoption was high, driven by free distribution and perceived fuel efficiency. Disadoption was prevalent, with a majority of observed households reverting to traditional three-stone fires or modified stoves. A key theme was the incompatibility of the improved stove design with social customs and cooking practices, particularly for preparing large quantities of traditional foods. The study concludes that disadoption is a rational response to contextual mismatches, not a failure of user compliance. Sustained use is contingent on the stove's integration into complex social and culinary routines, which are often overlooked in technical interventions. Programme designs must

prioritise deep end-user engagement and co-design from the outset. Stove interventions should be adaptable to local foodways and social structures. Monitoring should extend beyond initial distribution to track longitudinal use patterns and reasons for disadoption. Improved cookstoves, adoption, disadoption, refugee settlement, ethnography, Uganda, humanitarian energy, cooking practices This study provides an in-depth, emic perspective on technology adoption failure in a humanitarian setting, contributing nuanced empirical evidence on the socio-cultural determinants of energy practice in displaced populations.
