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POLICY BRIEF

Re-igniting change: policy pathways to accelerate access to clean cooking

List of Acronyms

CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DFIs	Development Finance Institutions
ESMAP	Energy Sector Management Assistance Program
IEA	International Energy Agency
MECS	Modern Energy Cooking Services
MDBs	Multilateral Development Banks
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

The total number of people lacking access to clean cooking has remained relatively stagnant for decades, with gains outpaced by population growth. The progress on reaching SDG 7 is far-fetched and in some situations going into reverse.¹ Approximately 2.3 billion people, or nearly one-third of the global population, still prepare their meals using open fires or rudimentary stoves, exposing themselves to dangerous smoke from burning coal, firewood, charcoal, animal dung, and agricultural waste.²

Clean cooking is a topic that rarely hits the headlines or makes it onto the political agenda in many countries.³ Despite its importance, the issue of clean cooking has been largely overlooked in both policy discussions and media coverage. For decades, the total number of people without access to clean cooking solutions has stubbornly remained high, with population growth often outpacing progress. As a result, achieving universal access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all by 2030 as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 now seems increasingly unattainable, with some regions even regressing.

Clean cooking is not just about energy; it lies at the intersection of health, gender equality, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. Addressing this challenge is vital to advancing human dignity and alleviating poverty. Although the technology and policies needed to expand clean cooking access are available, insufficient political commitment, inadequate funding, and limited capacity continue to hinder progress on this critical issue.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy brief is to communicate the urgent need to accelerate access to clean cooking as a critical part of a just energy transition

given the significant negative socio-economic and environmental impacts of continued reliance on polluting cooking solutions.

Context

The world is far off track from achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 target for universal access to clean cooking by 2030 owing to a lack of prioritization. Worldwide, 2.1 billion people are without access to clean cooking out of which 900 million are in Africa,⁴ while 3.2 million deaths are attributable to household air pollution created through the use of polluting fuels and technologies for cooking. Furthermore, 600,000 African women and children die annually from the hazards of cooking with wooden biomass or fossil fuels.⁵ Closing the household energy access gap is now a priority on the global sustainable development agenda. Having access to reliable, clean, modern cooking energy enables people to live to their full potential. In addition, advancing access to clean cooking and achieving the objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement are deeply interconnected. The pressing need for swift and decisive action towards universal clean cooking access cannot be overstated.⁶

Main Issues

As a result of widespread harmful effects of using polluting fuels for cooking, providing universal

1 <https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/data/files/download-documents/sdg7-report2024-0611-v9-highresforweb.pdf>

2 IEA 2023. A Vision for Clean Cooking Access for All. <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/180b8bee-3d30-4436-abe0-9e93ca56b0bd/AVisionforCleanCookingAccessforAll.pdf>

3 <https://www.iea.org/news/low-cost-solutions-can-give-billions-access-to-modern-cooking-by-2030-but-the-world-is-failing-to-deliver>

4 IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank, WHO. 2023. Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report

5 McKinsey, 2023. A Call for Action: Universal Clean Cooking Access in Africa (COP 28).

6 https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/UN-Energy%20Policy%20Brief%20-%20Clean%20Cooking%20Netzero%20pathway-%207-12-23%20clean%20with%20cover%20page2_0.pdf

access to clean cooking solutions is a key target within the Sustainable Development Goals. According to ESMAP,⁷ uplifting the world's poor from cooking poverty is an urgent development issue with huge potential benefits for public health, advancement of gender equality, and the global climate. If prompt measures aren't implemented, 2.1 billion people will continue to experience cooking poverty by 2030. The staggering costs to human health, women's productivity, and the environment amount to a conservative estimate of \$2.4 trillion each year.⁸ Furthermore, nearly 4 billion people still lack adequate cooking facilities, meaning they do not have access to clean cooking solutions that are clean, efficient, convenient, safe, reliable, and affordable.⁹

Access to clean cooking is important for achieving countries Sustainable Development Goal 7 and hence requires integration into the energy planning process and development policies. The potential societal benefits are enormous, particularly for public health, women's productivity and empowerment, and the environment. Along with electrification, clean cooking is an essential component to achieving SDG 7.1 of ensuring universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services.

According to the World Bank (2023), To facilitate a country's transition to clean cooking methods, stakeholders must thoroughly evaluate the overall enabling environment, including the nation's institutional capacity to implement transformative solutions.¹⁰ Expanding access requires a fundamental change on how the policy makers and stakeholders approach the issue prioritizing on both public and private sector. This means embracing a wide range of effective

solutions and leveraging rapidly developing technologies.

Global Pathways to Reach the 2030 and 2050 Goals

Considering the contexts and approaches of local and national stakeholders, broad transition pathways have been developed. Figure 1 illustrates a critical path for the clean cooking transition towards net-zero emissions by 2050. Achieving this net-zero target requires a concerted multi-stakeholder approach aimed at accelerating efforts for an equitable and just energy transition, with a priority on renewable energy sources.

Why is Access to Clean Cooking Lagging?

Unfortunately, the rapid deployment of clean cooking fuels and technologies has not received adequate attention from policy makers, and it lags behind the rate of electrification. The opportunity for leapfrogging to electric cooking in electrification programs have been limited. Hence there is opportunity to maximize the adoption of electric cooking in countries with robust grids. To seize the opportunity, it is crucial to prioritize grid reliability and enable policies that ensures electricity affordability, enhanced renewable energy capacity and accessibility of affordable modern electric cooking appliances.¹¹

Several factors intensify the challenges of adopting clean cooking solutions. Firstly, high upfront costs make these technologies unaffordable for many low-income households, limiting widespread adoption. Secondly, a significant lack of consumer awareness about the health and environmental benefits reduces demand and slows market growth. Thirdly,

7 The World Bank 2023. Unlocking Clean Cooking Pathways: A Practitioner's Keys to Progress. Washington, DC: World Bank

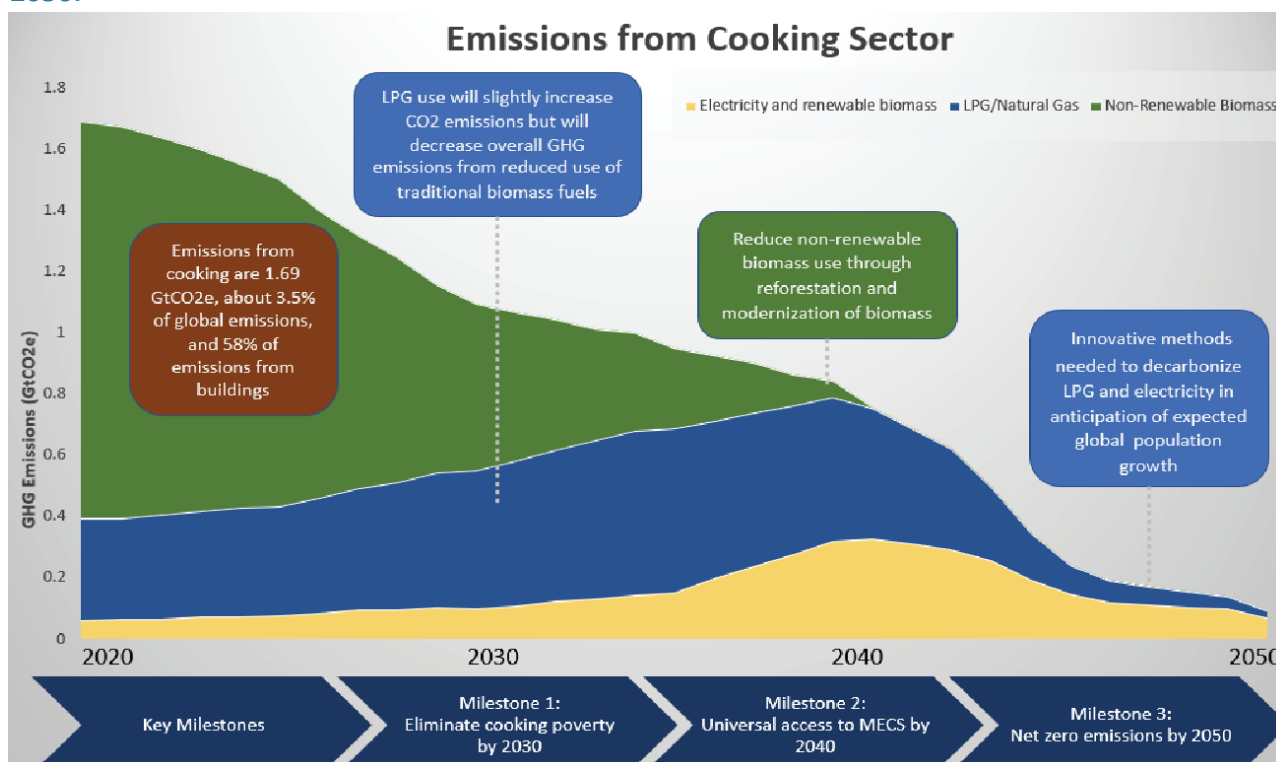
8 <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/energy/from-cooking-poverty-to-cooking-decency>

9 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/09/24/nearly-half-the-worlds-population-still-lacks-access-to-modern-energy-cooking-services>

10 The World Bank 2023. Unlocking Clean Cooking Pathways. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099095503072317708/pdf/P1742320fcb6a8051083c008061576a2156.pdf>

11 <https://mecs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Global-Market-Assessment-for-Electric-Cooking-2023.pdf>

Figure 1: Envisioned just and inclusive clean-cooking transition pathway toward net zero, 2020–2050.



Source: World Bank 2022. ESMAP.

financing gaps hinder producers from entering the clean fuel and stove markets, restricting the availability of diverse and affordable options. There is also limited access to consumer financing prevents households and institutions from investing in higher-tier clean cooking solutions. The slow progress in developing efficient cookstove models and sustainable fuel production methods further exacerbates these challenges. As a result, the adoption of clean cooking solutions remains insufficient to meet global targets, particularly affecting marginalized communities that continue to rely on polluting cooking practices.

Making the Case for clean cooking

In emphasizing the historical neglect of clean cooking in policy and budgeting, Chih-Jung Lee

et al. (2021) states: “Historically, clean cooking or cooking is not a subject matter that has featured high on budgeting. It does not feature on economic indicators. It has been relegated to households. If there is a shortfall in cooking fuels, nobody reports. This is unlike if there is a shortage of fossil fuels or electricity, which make headline.”¹²

To support a country’s transition to clean cooking, it is essential to assess its cooking poverty status, commit to achieving universal access, and take concrete actions to address the issue. Without accelerated action, an estimated 2.4 billion people will remain without clean cooking services in 2030.¹³ The situation is especially critical in sub-Saharan Africa, where advancements in access to clean cooking have lagged behind the region’s population growth.

¹² Chih-Jung Lee, Rebekah Shirley, Maureen Otieno and Hope Nyambura (2021). Powering jobs: the employment footprint of clean cooking solutions in Kenya

¹³ IRENA 2023. Tracking SDG 7; The Energy Progress Report. https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2023/Jun/Tracking_SDG7_energy_progress_2023.pdf

Achieving universal access to clean cooking by 2030 requires innovative, inclusive, and transformative solutions centered on political commitment, financing, planning, and innovation. Governments must prioritize clean cooking as a key political, economic, and environmental agenda. This initiative demands strong policies, targeted investments, and collaboration across sectors. The active participation of governments, development agencies, donors, Civil Society Organizations, and coordinating bodies is crucial to fostering synergies and tackling the clean cooking challenge effectively.

Strengthening Policy, Advocacy, and Coordination for Sustainable Clean Cooking Solutions

A comprehensive approach to clean cooking has yet to take priority on government agendas. There remains a widespread perception that clean cooking is a secondary issue, even among those within energy ministries (Ibid, 2021). Despite increasing recognition of the scale of the clean cooking challenge, the sector has failed to translate this awareness into large-scale national transformations. Generating the political will for large-scale national transformation will require politicizing the issue with heads of government and voters to spur multi-ministerial action.

To accelerate progress, it's crucial for national governments to adopt a more proactive approach in steering national clean cooking transitions, incorporating a range of ambitious solutions tailored to local needs. Although industry associations have traditionally been less involved in the cooking sector, they are becoming increasingly significant and can be more effectively leveraged as a bridge between clean cooking initiatives and the commercial fuels industry.

Elevating the clean cooking agenda within governments requires the active involvement of strategic champions at all levels. Global advocates are essential to influencing heads of state to prioritize clean cooking as a national policy. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and advocacy groups must play a key role in making compelling cases across various sectors and decision-making levels. This effort demands meaningful engagement across the board, including media involvement and strong community outreach, to ensure widespread support and action.

Mobilizing Financing for Universal Clean Cooking Access

Achieving universal access to clean cooking by 2030 will demand a substantial acceleration in the pace of progress. As noted by Marcel Raats, prioritizing public funding in clean cooking is essential to ensure no one is left behind. This requires enhanced collaboration to better coordinate the interactions between various sources of finance, particularly in the early stages of service provision within emerging or fragile markets, in strengthening local or new market actors, and in the introduction of new technologies.¹⁴ According to IEA, 2023, achieving universal access to clean cooking by 2030 would require an annual investment of approximately USD 8 billion, alongside a range of initiatives designed to encourage the use of clean fuels and stoves.¹⁵

Despite the significant potential of modern energy-efficient electric cooking appliances, their adoption remains underutilized. The findings highlight an increasing opportunity to integrate clean cooking initiatives with broader energy programs led by multilateral development banks (MDBs) and development finance institutions (DFIs). Aligning these efforts with the integrated

14 Clean Cooking Alliance 2023, 2023 Clean Cooking Industry Snapshot- <https://cleancooking.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/CCA-2023-Clean-Cooking-Industry-Snapshot.pdf>

15 IEA, 2023: World Energy Outlook, <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/86ede39e-4436-42d7-ba2a-edf61467e070/WorldEnergyOutlook2023.pdf>

energy plans of national governments can drive more cohesive and sustainable progress in expanding clean energy access, ultimately helping to close the gap in clean cooking access globally.¹⁶

Conclusion

This analysis underscores the myriad barriers that continue to impede universal access to clean cooking. These challenges include limited prioritization in policymaking, chronic underfunding with global investment levels accounting for less than required estimates.

Urgent action is needed to address insufficient supply chain infrastructure and inadequate policy environments that exacerbate the challenges of achieving universal access to clean cooking. While the necessary investments seem substantial, the cost of inaction on health, gender equality, and the environment could be over 500 times higher. Clean cooking is a complex issue requiring inclusive and targeted efforts globally and locally; ground-level experience shows that a technology-centric approach alone is insufficient to resolve all challenges.

Energy access is critically linked to gender equality. Women and children disproportionately bear the burden of energy poverty, spending significant time and labor on basic needs like collecting biomass for cooking and manually processing food without machinery. This not only affects their productivity and wellbeing but also has broader implications for gender equality and intersects with many other Sustainable Development Goals.

Recommendations

1. Integrate and prioritize a multi fuel clean cooking approach at the global, regional and national level towards addressing energy and

climate policies and regulatory frameworks challenges. Governments should set and implement need-based planning and set comprehensive data driven clean cooking targets to create policies and a regulatory environment that is conducive to the development of a self-sustaining clean cooking market. By creating policies and regulatory environments conducive to the development of self-sustaining clean cooking markets, governments can realize extensive benefits for public health, gender empowerment, and environmental sustainability.

2. Strengthen political commitment and coordination at global, regional, national, and local levels by actively engaging stakeholders across multiple sectors. This concerted effort is crucial to mobilize the required resources and expedite the achievement of clean cooking targets through comprehensive policy and programmatic initiatives
3. Prioritize and scale up targeted financing to address energy poverty, focusing on marginalized and vulnerable communities. Stimulate both public and private sector investments in clean cooking solutions by utilizing innovative financial tools, such as subsidies, blended finance, and de-risking mechanisms, to make these solutions affordable and accessible to all. Governments, development agencies, and the private sector must collaborate to ensure financial resources are effectively allocated to bridge the investment gap and reduce the economic and health costs associated with unclean cooking practices in underserved regions.
4. Accelerate and scale efforts to promote electric cooking in countries with reliable power grids, enabling a faster transition to

¹⁶ MeCS & Energy4Impact, 2022, Modern Energy Cooking: Review of the Funding landscape <https://mecs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Modern-Energy-Cooking-Review-of-the-Funding-Landscape.pdf>

clean and sustainable cooking solutions. This approach should prioritize large scale adoption, leveraging existing infrastructure to leapfrog electric cooking methods and drive widespread access to modern energy solutions.

End notes

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ACCESS COALITION

The Alliance of Civil Society Organizations for Clean Energy Access (ACCESS Coalition) is a global coalition of over 100 civil society organizations and practitioners delivering energy services to poor and marginal communities. We work with our members to advocate for access to safe, reliable, and affordable energy and for environmentally sustainable and efficient energy systems globally.

KCCWG

Kenya Climate Change Working Group (KCCWG) is a leading national membership network, uniting voices and actions on climate change. The organization's mandate is to empower, coordinate, and represent civil society organizations in collaborative advocacy actions on climate change matters in Kenya and beyond.