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What motivates women to buy?

Research Brief:

Valuing, Understanding
and Targeting Women for
Improved Cookstove
Purchase

EAST ACHOLI, UGANDA

Author

The following is a short brief taken from a series of research studies compiled and written by Kim Beevers, Market Systems Advisor and GACC/WEF Program Director, Mercy Corps Uganda. The work stems from two years of research, program design and implementation, and evaluation done collaboratively with the improved cookstove sector and private partners in northern Uganda. She can be reached at kbeevers@ug.mercycorps.org

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Disclaimer

This study is made possible by the generous support of the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves Women's Empowerment Fund. The contents are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Alliance or Mercy Corps.

All research and documentation is available in full [HERE](#) at Mercy Corps' website.



Executive Summary

SINCE 2012, Mercy Corps has worked to improve availability and access to improved cookstoves technology across northern Uganda. We've provided technical advisory support coupled with targeted financial investment to private sector partners interested in growing the cookstove market in East Acholi. Our focus has always been on sustained sector growth that will evolve and expand to ever better meet the needs of the East Acholi population in our absence.

With the support of the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves Women's Empowerment Fund, Mercy Corps undertook an applied research project from March-January 2014, building on our earlier work and investment. The overall objective of the project was to identify scalable sales, marketing and financing strategies for increasing improved cookstove purchases among female consumers within the sub-region.

At the start of the research, women did not yet account for half of improved cookstove purchases in East Acholi. By and large, resellers could not articulate what motivated women to buy or what inhibited their ability to purchase improved cookstoves distinct from men. As a result, a product built for women wasn't getting to them.

To help to address this missed opportunity, Mercy Corps' led an applied research initiative that closely collaborated with improved cookstove suppliers, distributors and retailers on the following four pieces.

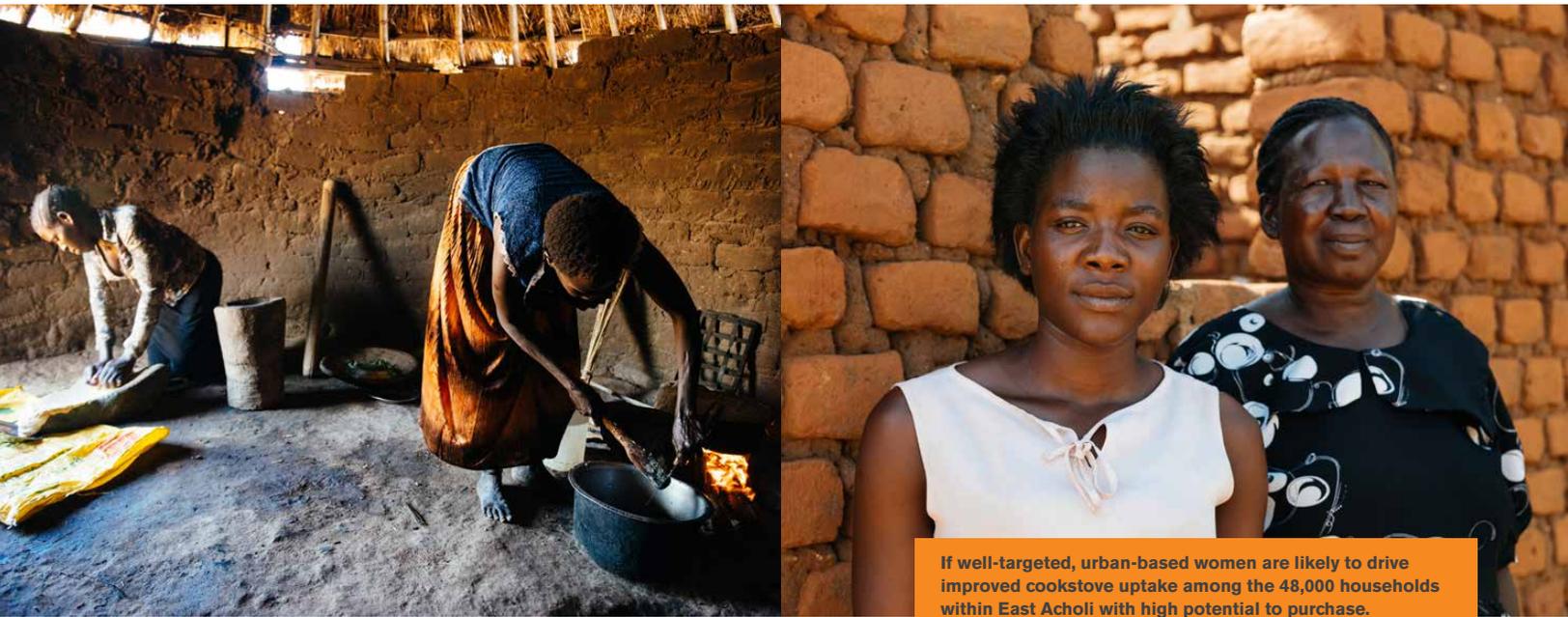
- 1 A business case for investing in female improved cookstove consumers.
- 2 Primary consumer research that identifies motivations, barriers and enabling factors that both contribute and inhibit female consumer improved cookstove purchase within East Acholi.
- 3 Sales, marketing and financing strategies designed to trigger and to enable targeted female consumer cookstove purchase, and
- 4 An evaluation of the effectiveness and scalability of best-fit strategies tested during an 11-week applied research period.

Findings for the above are outlined in brief in this document. **All research and documentation is available in full [HERE](#) at Mercy Corps' website.**

Valuing Female Improved Cookstove Consumers

As cookstove consumers and users, women are a critical component of the sector's effort to reach scale. In East Acholi, women are most often responsible for cooking fuel collection and purchase as well as domestic cooking responsibilities. Women account for half of the potential cookstove market globally (estimated at 2.7 billion according to GACC) and stand to benefit from improved cookstove technology most. If female consumers are left behind, overall improved cookstove sales are too.

A clear opportunity to target urban and peri-urban market segments within East Acholi exists. Market penetration for improved cookstoves among these groups was very low (4 percent) while fuel expenditures were high (\$84/month) when research began. Urban female cookstove consumers are especially likely to purchase improved cookstoves if targeted appropriately and may drive sales in the sub-region --- enabling uptake among the 48,000 households that were untapped at the start of programming.



If well-targeted, urban-based women are likely to drive improved cookstove uptake among the 48,000 households within East Acholi with high potential to purchase.

Understanding Female Improved Cookstove Consumers

In order to develop sales, marketing and financing strategies that target and empower East Acholi women to purchase improved cookstoves within the sub-region, Mercy Corps first led a consumer research initiative to establish a deeper understanding of the motivations, barriers, and purchasing behaviors of women in East Acholi.

Throughout July and August 2014, Mercy Corps led qualitative research, interviewing 117 consumers and retailers within East Acholi. Research enabled the team to define consumer groups within the sub-region and then to identify those groups with the greatest likelihood of improved cookstove adoption. Finally, it also led to the creation of strategies for increasing this adoption, including marketing messages, marketing channels, product placement, promotions, pricing, and financing mechanisms. This research is outlined within the section that follows.

East Acholi Female Consumer Groups

In East Acholi, women usually belong to multiple consumer groups. For improved cookstoves, a woman's specific access profile will best be defined by the interplay of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the various segments to which she belongs. In some cases, disadvantages compound to make access to improved cookstoves unlikely and difficult. In most cases, however, advantages and disadvantages tend to partially cancel each other out. Moreover, while behavioral barriers highlighted generally affect each consumer segment similarly, other barriers outlined impact different consumer segments in unique ways.

Female Consumers with the Greatest Potential to Purchase

Throughout the research, nearly all participants expressed interest and motivation to purchase the improved cookstove. When benefits were articulated and the opportunity to purchase presented, most interviewees – particularly women – wanted the improved cookstove.

However, for some consumers, purchase is easier and more probable than for others. And, because they're motivated, with resources and closer to urban areas, these consumers are also easier and less costly to reach for improved cookstove suppliers, distributors, resellers and sales agents.

Urban-based, female charcoal users with some independent source of income are the low-hanging consumer fruit. This consumer group has also been overlooked or poorly targeted in East Acholi to date. The following shared or overlapping descriptions of different consumers that fall within this headline group help to better characterize consumers within this segment.

Urban-based, female charcoal users with some independent source of income are a high-potential and, to date, overlooked and poorly-targeted consumer group in East Acholi.

Current Charcoal Users

Early improved cookstove adopters are likely women who are already using charcoal for cooking at least part of the time. This includes as many as 45,000-50,000 households within East Acholi. These women are already purchasing fuel and would experience immediate benefits through cost-savings in fuel purchases. There are two main categories of current charcoal users that each has its own profile.



Current inefficient metal stove users: Inefficient metal stove users are one of the most promising segments to target for improved cookstove sales. This consumer group must replace their metal stove annually and stands to benefit considerably from charcoal savings. According to a 2012 East Acholi market assessment conducted by Mercy Corps,¹ approximately 11 percent of East Acholi households or roughly 16,000 households fall within this consumer group.

Current locally-built mud and clay stove users: Locally-built mud or mud and brick stove users are a more difficult sell. However, this is a large consumer segment from which a significant number of people have already purchased improved stoves. According to a 2012 East Acholi market assessment conducted by Mercy Corps, approximately 19-20 percent of homes (roughly 29,000 families) utilize mud or clay stoves as their primary cooking method. Many of these stoves were built by NGOs free of charge, were self-built by the users, or were built by local craftsmen for very low cost.

Women with some independent income or access to financing

Female small business owners, salaried employees, and savings group members all have access to the cash necessary to purchase the improved

¹ David Nicholson and Kim Beevers, "Market Analysis for Fuel Efficient Cook Stoves in the Acholi Sub-region, Uganda," Mercy Corps, 2012. www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/market-analysis-fuel-efficient-cook-stoves-acholi-sub-region-Uganda.



Rural-based women that rely on firewood and are dependent on agriculture and/or on their husbands for income are among the least likely consumer groups to purchase improved cookstoves.

cookstoves, making easier for them to adopt the improved cookstove if they are properly motivated. If they are already using charcoal, the probability of adoption is higher, but firewood users that fall into these groups are also better positioned to buy than most other firewood users.

Female small business owners living in urban and peri-urban areas and smaller trading centers:

These women are a large and important market. Every town and most peri-urban communities have their own markets that are predominantly filled with female traders. In addition, there are significant numbers of female shopkeepers—though they may have less complete control over their income if their husband is involved in the business.

Salaried women working for NGOs, health centers, schools, and local government: Currently, this consumer group is one of the biggest buyers of the improved cookstove. Although all salaried women are good to target for their relatively higher purchasing power, salaried women working for these groups are especially good targets. They are mobile, educated, have reliable income, and a need to cook food quickly, efficiently and cleanly. They are also time-constrained.

Savings group members: Savings group members are drawn from virtually all consumer segments – the majority of residents within East Acholi belong to savings groups. Savings group members have ready access to a financing mechanism to assist with purchasing the stove.

Barriers and Motivations for Improved Cookstove Purchase among Consumer Groups

Though simplistic, the chart on the following page highlights those female consumer segments for which it will be easier to enable improved cookstove adoption as well as those for which it will be more challenging. For example, married women firewood users living in villages in households dependent on agriculture who are dependent on their husbands for income are among the least likely to buy improved cookstoves. This group has relatively high barriers to access across the board and very few offsetting motivating factors. On the other hand, female salaried or small business owners in urban areas or small towns who are heads of household or living separately from their husbands may be early adopters as they face few obstacles in terms of decision-making, have regular income, and confront high demands on their time – all factors that highly motivate a switch to improved cookstoves.

Summary of barriers and motivating factors for improved cookstove purchase by consumer group²

Primary living location size				Marital status			Income Type & Source					Cooking technology & fuel				
Urban	Peri-urban	Small town	Rural	Renter	Female head of household	Married, living with Husband	Married, living apart from husband	Salaried	Regular, Small Business Income	Occasional /Irregular Income	Seasonal Agricultural	Dependent	Inefficient Metal Stove Users	Mud/Clay Stove Users	Firewood Users	
Barriers that inhibit improved cookstove purchase																
Access to information	X	XX	XX	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	XX	XX	X	X	XX	
Limiting shopping		XX	XX		X	X			X	XX	XX	XX				
Cash constraints					XX					X	XX	XX				
Decision-making/control of resources						X	X			X	XX	XX				
Lack of reference		X	XX	XX		XX		X	X	X	XX	XX		X	XX	
Transportation		X	XX	XX	X		X	X	X	X	XX	XX				
Switching Costs/Fuel														X	XX	
Motivating factors that engender improved cookstove purchase																
Faster cooking time					++		+	++	++	+	+					
Reduced time feeding					++		+	++	++	+	+		+	+	++	
Less wasted charcoal	+	+			++	+	++		+	+			++	+		
Stretch resources/money	+	+			++	+	++		+	+		++	+	+		
Portability																
Cleanliness	+	+						+	+	+			+	++	++	++
Health																+
Durability/less repair time					+			+	+	+			++	++	++	++
Market Segment Size	Med	Med	Med	Med	Med	Lg	Lg	Sm	Med	Lg	Lg	Med	Sm	Med	Lg	Lg
Segment Potential Score	Very High	High	Very High	Moderate	High	High	Moderate	High	Very High	High	Very Low	Very Low	High	Moderate	Very Low	Low

² Barriers that come into play for a particular segment are noted with an "x". If the barrier has a particularly strong impact on the segment relative to other segments, it is noted with a double "x". Motivating, or enabling factors are noted with "+", "++" or a "+,++" to denote those that are likely to be a particularly strong motivator for a particular segment. Detailed descriptions of each of the segments can be found in the Annex 3. Links to each segment can be found in the table above.

Strategies for Growing Improved Cookstove Sales among Female Consumers in East Acholi

A number of barriers and biases inhibit improved cookstove uptake among consumers broadly, and the target female consumer groups discussed above specifically. These are listed below and discussed at length in the full paper.

Multiple strategies can and should be developed to address the barriers and biases confronting each consumer segment. Accordingly, in addition to the barriers and biases outlined below, the chart below also suggests how these barriers might be addressed or overcome, along with some specific tactics and practical examples for the East Acholi context.

BARRIERS LISTED	ADDRESSING BARRIERS	SUGGESTED TACTICS
<p>1 Limited access to information about improved cookstoves and their benefits limits women's motivation to purchase them.</p>	<p>Many women are not aware of the improved cookstoves and do not have adequate information about their benefits.</p>	<p>Use multiple channels appropriate to the targeted segment to proactively disseminate messages about the value and benefits of the improved cookstove.</p>
<p>2 Improved cookstove sales points and placement do not reflect women's limited shopping radius and shopping preferences.</p>	<p>Women tend to shop close to home or work and rarely venture into shops without a specific purpose in mind.</p>	<p>Bring cookstoves to the places where women work and shop—primarily markets and the shops surrounding the markets in towns where there are already retailers.</p>
<p>3 Women have limited decision-making power and control over resources within the household, limiting their capacity to purchase an improved cookstove.</p>	<p>Most women have limited decision-making power and control over financial resources within shared households.</p>	<p>Provide talking points targeted at husbands and tailor financing arrangements to fit women's current scope of control over financial resources.</p>
<p>4 Nonexistent price references, when combined with women's limited capability and confidence to purchase larger goods, inhibits improved cookstove purchases.</p>	<p>No reference price undermines women's confidence to approach retailers and to purchase the improved cookstoves.</p>	<p>Include pricing information in advertising and promotions.</p>
<p>5 Limited access to cash may not inhibit women's improved cookstove purchase as much as first thought.</p>	<p>Women face cash-on-hand constraints.</p>	<p>Develop culturally appropriate financing mechanisms, such as savings schemes, installment payments or targeted savings group outreach.</p>

BARRIERS LISTED	ADDRESSING BARRIERS	SUGGESTED TACTICS
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6

Improved cookstoves are heavy and bulky and thus difficult for women to transport.

Improved cookstoves are heavy, bulky, difficult and expensive for women to transport.

Offer delivery to a more convenient pick-up point.

7

Though improved cookstoves offer large savings and other benefits over time, these can be intangible and challenging to plan for in the near term.

Improved cookstoves offer large potential, future benefits and savings that are challenging for East Acholi consumers to fully value in the near term, limiting interest in purchase.

Present bias leads women to prefer investments with short-term pay-outs.

Develop promotions that generate a sense of scarcity or time-limited opportunity to motivate people to act sooner rather than later.

Limited capacity to plan and to budget for medium-term goals may inhibit sales of improved cookstoves to consumer segments that do not have access to the cash required for purchase immediately.

Women prefer tangible and immediate benefits over more distant and less tangible benefits.

Use financing strategies to get the tangible product into consumer hands sooner rather than later and employ social pressure mechanisms to strengthen commitment.

Women do not have the habit of planning for medium and long-term goals.

Create mechanisms to encourage goal-setting and planning.

8

Women believe that the prices of improved cookstoves and charcoal fuel are much more expensive when compared to their current stoves and fuel, regardless of quality and value differences.

The lower prices of unimproved cookstoves led women to perceive that improved cookstoves are overly expensive.

Widely disseminate realistic prices, addressing quality and value differences with cheaper cookstoves and comparing the cookstoves with an even more expensive technology so that they appear like a relative bargain.

Current firewood users will see their out-of-pocket costs go up as they switch from firewood which they generally gather themselves to purchasing charcoal.

Emphasize benefits, attempt to monetize cost of time and health, show how to minimize fuel costs, and provide samples and free trials to demonstrate the quality of life improvement.

Best fit Strategies for Targeting Female Improved Cookstove Purchase

Building on the tactics described above to address common barriers and bias as well as to tap motivation for improved cookstove purchase, the following describes briefly the sales, marketing and financing strategies that may most impact female consumers' willingness and capacity to purchase improved cookstoves. The suggestions combine several strategies to address multiple practical and behavioral barriers at once, thus increasing purchases among several female consumer groups at the same time. They also encourage immediacy to help to translate intention into action by pushing the purchase process forward and building commitment.

1. EXPANDING POINTS OF SALE:

Placing Improved Cookstoves Where Women Frequent

Barriers addressed: Access to information, limited shopping radius, transportation challenges

Target consumers: This strategy specifically targets women who work and travel to markets, women who work or run small businesses, and women who work and live in peri-urban areas – creating the opportunity to learn and to purchase an improved cookstove to the places where these women live, work, and shop.

How it works:

Recruit: Satisfied customers make good salespeople; retailers should contact women who have purchased the stove and expressed exceptional satisfaction with their purchase who are also already selling in markets. Recruiting happy customers who are themselves positioned to sell is a great early entry point.

Consign: Consigning a small number of cookstoves to these women for them to sell is the easiest way to get sales started. The consignment price should allow for a small margin for the main retailer but allow the salesperson to sell the cookstoves at a competitive price and still make a profit. Retailers could take orders from the salespersons offering the cookstoves on credit.



2. EXPANDING POINTS OF SALE:

“Auction Days”

Barriers addressed: Lack of information, limited shopping radius, and transportation; if combined with saving boxes or savings groups, then also present-bias, self-control, and lack of planning.

Target consumers: Women in small towns and villages where the cookstove is not currently available, small business women who sell at auction days, dependent women who have saved for auction day, metal stove users who may have come to the market to buy a replacement cookstove.

How it works:

Retailers should take a small number of cookstoves to “auction” or market days in communities where the cookstoves are not currently being sold. Auction days typically transpire once in a week and attract large crowds from surrounding areas.

Product placement: The retailer should secure a highly-trafficked location, preferably where other higher-priced, cooking items are sold and look for opportunities to attract attention.

Building the market: The retailer should expect that the first couple of trips will mainly serve to build awareness of the product. Auction Day participants are usually more rural, lower in income and need more time to prepare savings. At the same time, they’ll look for consistency of presence as a measure of quality. Other vendors in the market may be the first customers.

Securing commitments: One way that retailers could help encourage active saving for the cookstoves at the same time as getting valuable information about how many cookstoves to bring the next time would be to employ the saving box and commitment card. The retailer can also use his or her trips on auction days to build relationships with local savings groups that then could finance and take delivery of the cookstoves; this may be the best opportunity to reach the lowest income consumer groups.

3. FINANCING:

Retailer-led individual savings box or “piggy bank” promotions

Barriers addressed: Information, cash constraints, reference price/confidence, present bias, self-control, lack of planning.

Target Consumers: Women living in urban, peri-urban, small towns where cookstoves are currently being sold. As transportation and limited shopping radius remain barriers, this will not likely attract many women outside the current areas being serviced. However, these areas are not yet saturated. The boxes are likely to be especially popular with those women who have some small but fairly regular income.

How it works: Retailers give out free savings boxes to people coming in to place an order for a cookstove. At the time of placing the order, the customer makes a pledge to complete her savings by a particular date. The customer is given a card to schedule and track her deposits. The retailer notes down the pledge date and places the cookstove on hold for the customer until that date. If the customer returns with her box by the pledged date, she is given the cookstove and a reward. If she doesn’t return, the cookstove is released back into inventory.

4. FINANCING:

Targeting Savings Groups

Barriers addressed: Cash constraints, transportation, access to information and awareness, limited shopping radius, confidence/reference price, limited decision-making power/control over resources, self-control/preference for tangible, lack of planning and goal setting.

Target Consumers: Small business women, occasional laborers, female heads of households, dependent women, and those living in peri-urban areas, small towns where the stove is not currently offered, and villages. These women tend to face more cash constraints than salaried women.

How it works:

Identify and connect with savings groups. Savings groups are extremely common and easy to find.

Meet with and provide information to groups. Once groups have been identified, the retailer, community leader or a current stove user speaks with the savings group to explain the benefits of the improved cookstove. They should be given use and care instructions at the same time.

Agree on a financing and delivery strategy with the group. After the presentation of the benefits, women should be given one week to decide whether or not they want to begin saving for the cookstove. This will allow them time to consult with their husbands, if they need to do so.

5. GETTING THE WORD OUT: Referral Coupon and Incentivizing Person-to-Person Recommendations

Barriers addressed: Lack of information, lack of reference price, present bias, price anchoring.

Target consumers: This strategy will reach a broad spectrum of female consumer segments, but will be particularly effective at reaching women who lack the confidence to approach a retailer without knowing how much they should pay.

How it works:

Process: Retailers pre-print referral coupons to hand out to customers who buy the stove. When the referee is ready to buy the cookstove, s/he brings the coupon into the retailer and receives the guaranteed price. The retailer offers the person who made the referral some kind of bonus or incentive the next time that s/he comes into the shop.

Coupon appearance: Coupons should feature a picture of the improved cookstove, list the prices and sizes available, and mention that it is hotter, cooks faster, and burns less charcoal than a regular stove – written in local language (Luo). A referral price should be listed. The coupon should be time-limited to create a sense of urgency. The back of the coupon should have a place for the customer who is making the referral to include his or her name and contact details.

6. GETTING THE WORD OUT: Radio Advertisements

Barriers Addressed: Lack of information, lack of a reference price, price anchoring, limited shopping radius

Target Consumers: Everyone, but it can be especially helpful for dependent women and women in villages who are less mobile and less likely to come to town, see the cookstove in a shop, and inquire about it.

How it should work: Retailers should contract with local radio stations to broadcast talk shows and advertisements for the cookstoves. Both the talk shows and the advertisements should feature testimonials from users. Additionally, dramatizations of dialogues or stories told by users can be used in the advertisements. These dialogues could be pre-recorded and played as advertisements. Radio spots are most likely to reach women when they are cooking.

Applied Research: Evaluating Best Fit Strategies in Practice

From September 8-November 21, 2014, Mercy Corps led an 11-week investigation into the capacity of targeted sales and marketing strategies to increase improved cookstove purchases among female consumers in East Acholi.

In total, 290 improved cookstoves were sold during the research period. On average, 26.4 improved cookstoves sold each week, equaling a 49.2 percent increase in weekly sales volumes over the previous year. Among resellers that participated fully in both market and shop-based sales, 78 percent of sales were to women and 22 percent of sales were to men, amounting to a 33.3 percent increase in the percentage of female purchases over the previous year.³

Throughout the applied research period and with targeted marketing and sales strategies in place, weekly sales volumes shot up by almost 50 percent when compared to the previous year's sales rates. Moreover, women accounted for a full 33 percent more of all purchases.

Testing was carried out in partnership with five East Acholi-based improved cookstove resellers and distributors. Throughout the applied research, customer information was collected at time of purchase in addition to post-purchase follow-up. Mercy Corps closely monitored all testing, data collection and research.

Strategies chosen for testing were guided by two main boundaries:

First, our research indicated that urban-based, female charcoal users with some independent source of income were a high-potential and, to date, overlooked and poorly-targeted consumer group in East Acholi. It also indicated that though willing to pay and capable of purchase, low income, rural, and agriculturally-dependent women as well as women with limited decision-making power within their household would need some time to prepare for cookstove purchase. The short applied research period limited targeted consumers to the first group and thus sales and marketing strategies tested to those that were designed to trigger purchase among these consumers.

Second, Mercy Corps' improved cookstove programming in northern Uganda is facilitative in nature. We offer targeted support to local and national private sector cookstove players to address gaps that limit the emergence of a highly functional market system, rather than intervening directly. Sales and marketing strategies tested were strategies that could be led by our private sector partners throughout the research and, if successful, carried forward by them after the close of our programming. Strategies were designed to be simple and straightforward accordingly.

³ In October 2013-January 2014, Mercy Corps supported an 18-week sales campaign in partnership with Impact Carbon for the same Energy Uganda Foundation cookstove promoted here. Detailed sales records from this campaign enable us to compare data with that of the applied research period. During this time, improved cookstove sales averaged 17.7 per week. Moreover, females accounted for 58.5 percent of sales while males accounted for 41.5 percent of sales.

Strategies Evaluated: What Worked and What Did Not

The following section details the sales, marketing, and financing strategies tested throughout the applied research period. For each of the four major strategies, the details of the tactics tested are first outlined, followed by quantitative and qualitative information that together help to account for which strategies may have led to increased sales and female purchasers. Importantly, while data does offer insight into the effectiveness of each individual tactic and strategy tested, no single tactic or strategy can be evaluated without weighing the others. Tactics were applied in tandem to maximize overall effectiveness.

Limited understanding and awareness of improved cookstove benefits, availability and costs emerged as the biggest barrier to improved cookstove purchase among East Acholi female consumers during our consumer level research. Accordingly, Mercy Corps tested three sales and marketing tactics designed to overcome information gaps that most inhibited female improved cookstove purchase: messaging oriented to female interests, price references, and customer testimonials.



MESSAGING ORIENTED TO FEMALE INTERESTS

Overview: Consumer research indicated that women and men appreciate different benefits associated with improved cookstove use. Men expressed the greatest appreciation for the cost savings associated with reduced charcoal use while women expressed most appreciation for time-saving benefits. Accordingly, all marketing material, including signs, coupons, radio testimonials, sales agent and reseller messaging, was directed to focus first on benefits that appealed most to women and, second, on benefits that appealed to men. Signs listed seven total benefits in the following order: heats and cooks fast, saves time, saves money, uses less charcoal, durable, clean, and portable.

Results: *Messaging that speaks to time-savings interests appears to have motivated a wider spectrum of purchasers than in previous campaigns that did not feature time-savings messages.*

PRICE REFERENCES

Overview: Nonexistent price references, when combined with women's limited capability and confidence to purchase larger goods, emerged as an important barrier for women's improved cookstove purchase. East Acholi female consumers are afraid of overpaying for goods and can be so intimidated by products that appear to be expensive, like improved cookstoves, that they will not even initiate a conversation with sales staff when interested.

The program hypothesized that posting price range information widely would boost women's confidence in their capability to purchase, translating to higher sales overall. To test this, all marketing material offered a price range of UGX 18,000 – 28,000 for cookstoves.

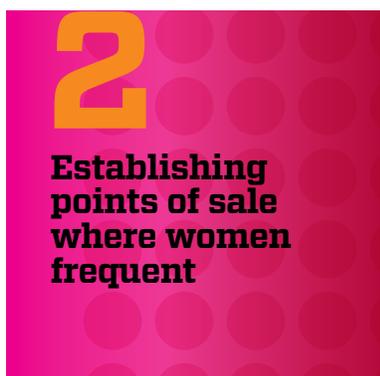
Results: *Qualitative feedback indicates that price references boosted consumer confidence while still allowing space for price negotiation that is important to both resellers and consumers in East Acholi.*



TESTIMONIALS AND RADIO

Overview: Research indicated that East Acholi consumers appreciate communication most in the forms of testimonials, dramatizations and dialogues. Further, use of these modes of communication is effective over radio and reaches a large swath of the population, across sexes. During the applied research period, two, 30-minute radio “talk shows” were undertaken at each of the two major radio stations in East Acholi. Both played at peak listening hours in the evening and featured a semi-structured dialogue between a radio announcer, female cookstove purchaser/user, and a local cookstove reseller. The female cookstove user was asked to discuss her experience with the stove, highlighting benefits that would appeal to other women, as well as price references for each of the three cookstove sizes.

Results: *A small percentage of purchasers suggested that the radio was the means through which they first learned of improved cookstoves and does not appear to have motivated consumers significantly. However, testimonials themselves were likely very effective.*



Overview: The team hypothesized that establishing cookstove sales points in places where women visit often and do so comfortably would help to overcome limited information, shopping radius and transportation challenges, enabling women’s increased purchase. Prior to the research, cookstoves could only be found in shops located in town centers. However, most women visited shops only to make a specific purchase. Women also indicated that they were intimidated by shops. However, most women typically visit main markets at least once in a week.

With this in mind, the team targeted market-based resellers to test the impact of expanded points of sale in places frequented by women on women’s improved cookstove purchase. Sales points were established with female vegetable and commodity resellers in major markets in each of the four town centers. Sales points were all equipped with signs as well as several cookstoves to sell on consignment. Resellers were each given a cookstove to use at the market to familiarize themselves with the product. They were also trained to discuss cookstove benefits that motivate women, specifically.

Results: *Multiple sales points located in areas regularly frequented by women, particularly main markets in town centers, reached high numbers of people and boosted overall sales significantly, especially to women.*



Overview: Our consumer research indicated that personal referrals are a primary source of information about products and often strongly motivate consumers to purchase. Referral coupons designed to encourage the spread of information about improved cookstoves and to prompt purchase were selected for investigation accordingly.

Local language “coupons” (small fliers) were designed with pictures and messages about improved cookstoves that appeal to women as well as price ranges. Coupons were left with sales agents, resellers and owners in market and shop points of sale. Each was carefully instructed to give five coupons to improved cookstove purchasers after writing the purchaser’s name on the coupon. They were also instructed to tell purchasers that if they were to give the coupons to people who purchased, then they would be given a packet of salt for each sale. The reward was intentionally small, designed to be undertaken by local cookstove resellers at the close of GACC/WEF research if the strategy was successful.

Results: *Referral coupons were widely misused and ineffective as a result. This may be due to mixed understanding, value and motivations of sales agents and resellers tasked with employing them. Informal referrals, on the other hand, appear to play an important role in sales and more so for women than men. Customers spoke to an average of four people each about their improved cookstove, with just under half of these committing to a purchase themselves.*

4

Leveraging savings groups

Overview: Earlier consumer research indicated that access to capital for consumers was not as big of a challenge as earlier hypothesized. We found that nearly all consumers were capable of saving for purchase; rather, other barriers proved more inhibiting. Still, access to ready cash is a challenge for some women, particularly those in rural settings and with seasonal agriculture as a main source of income. Though our applied research phase did not explicitly test savings group targeting, it did try to incorporate this strategy where possible. Specifically, sales agents were instructed to target women's savings groups and to encourage them to save together toward the purchase of an improved cookstove.

Results: *Financial capability was not a major hurdle for improved cookstove purchases. Almost all of the purchases made were completed with a single cash payment. With respect to finances, behavioral challenges proved more inhibiting. Those that purchased improved cookstoves seem to have done so with relative financial ease. Savings discipline and spending restraint, according to interviewees, were bigger challenges to their improved cookstove purchase. Savings groups that were self-organized around cookstove purchase did help some women to manage their savings and to achieve the improved cookstove purchase.*

Sales Agents

Sales agents were a potent force, pushing information, offering testimonials, and providing referrals that resulted in significant sales – especially to women. Though hired to work in close partnership with each of the five participating retail collaborators, sales agents were not an explicit component of our testing. Rather they were planned as a mechanism through which to share information, to coordinate purchase and delivery, and to collect accurate sales data. Though unplanned, sales agents reinforced many of the strategies tested.

Quantitative data makes clear the high level of influence sales agents had toward cookstove purchases. At some time surrounding their improved cookstove purchase, 79 percent of all purchasers interacted with a sales agent. When asked to describe the level of influence that a sales agent had over the purchaser's decision to buy an improved cookstove, 98 percent of those that interacted with a sales agent at any time surrounding their purchase indicated that the sales agent was moderately to highly influential – with 54 percent selecting “very influential.” Moreover, qualitative discussions with resellers, sales points and sales agents themselves also indicated that sales agents played a huge role in sharing information and in managing end user recruitment and sales.

Purchaser Profile

In addition to the relative effectiveness of each tactic and strategy employed, we investigated the role of all tried concurrently toward increasing female improved cookstove purchase broadly and that among our target consumer groups specifically.

The profile of the average improved cookstove purchaser indicates that the strategies tested throughout our applied research phase successfully reached targeted consumers. Most improved cookstove purchasers were female, urban-based, charcoal users with an independent source of income and a high degree of control over the use of that income. Specifically:

- **Women purchased 70 percent of improved cookstoves.**
- **Over 90 percent of all purchasers lived in urban or peri-urban locales.**
- **Purchasers overwhelmingly utilized charcoal fuel prior to purchase.**
- **Most purchasers are independent income earners and contribute most to their household's income.**

- **A full 85 percent of purchasers indicated that they exercise total control over the use of household income.**
- **Most purchasers are married or with a partner, and living together.**

Other consumer groups are not represented among those who purchased improved cookstoves during the applied research phase. These include low income, rural and agriculturally-dependent consumer groups as well as women with limited decision-making power within their household. The program did not test strategies that targeted these consumers.



Beatrice Layet (pictured above) was the first stall owner within Kitgum Main Market to purchase an improved cookstove. After demonstrating the stove's merits for fellow stall owners, she sparked a purchase spree among businesswomen and customers within the market.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Impactful Strategies for Scale-Up

Throughout the applied research period and with targeted marketing and sales strategies in place, weekly sales volumes shot up by almost 50 percent when compared to the previous year's sales rates. Moreover, women accounted for a full 33 percent more of all purchases. Some sales and marketing strategies tested seem to have contributed to these increases more so than others:

Establishing multiple sales points in major markets. Establishing sales points where women most frequent, coupled with information about improved cookstove benefits that appeal to women as well as reference pricing, resulted in many of the sales during our trial.

Pushing information about time-savings benefits associated with improved cookstove use. Women care more about time-saving benefits than monetary benefits. Awareness efforts to increase sales, particularly among women, should capitalize on testimonials surrounding time-savings such as, "cooking beans requires only one cup of charcoal."

Posting price range references. Price references boosted consumer confidence while enabling retailers to negotiate as they would otherwise.

Building a local, female, commission-based salesforce. Sales agents reinforced many of the strategies tested, highly influencing most purchasers and resulting in increased sales broadly.

Learning

A number of lessons emerged from the research period and evaluation that offer insight into the improved cookstove market and considerations for scaling strategies.

Women are powerful consumers worthy of investment. Female purchasers indicated that they earn independent income, contribute majorly to total household income, and exercise a high degree of control over the use of resources – whether they are the main income earner in their household or not. This raises an important question: are businesses undervaluing female consumers? And, what implication does this have for business growth – especially in the improved cookstove sector.

Keep strategies and messaging simple. The more complex a strategy or tactic, the more likely the meaning will be lost. Establishing sales points in major markets combined with posted information is simple and highly effective toward increasing improved cookstove purchase among female consumers and sales overall. It need not be more complicated than this and, indeed, shouldn't be.

Non-financial barriers impact purchase more so than financial barriers. Though the project originally hypothesized that financial barriers significantly inhibit improved cookstove uptake among female consumers in East Acholi, in-depth consumer research and later strategy testing indicate that other barriers, namely ready access to the right information, are more inhibiting.

Markets are price conscious and particularly susceptible to price spoilage. Price consciousness isn't necessarily an expression of the price of the product as much as it is the perception of value when weighed against previous product pricing. In markets where the improved cookstove was sold for the first time and there was no price reference, no one complained about pricing. In markets where other improved cookstoves had been sold previously and a reference price existed, people complained a lot about the burden of higher prices. This offers an important lesson for market entry: establish a higher first price and discount where possible rather than establish a lower first price and need to raise it later on.

Future Research: Missed Consumer Groups

Finally, many of the strategies tested helped to increase improved cookstove purchases among our target segment and are worthy of scale-up. But, what about other consumer groups identified in our research and not targeted during the applied research phase? The boundaries of our study forced us to focus in on consumer groups with the greatest potential to purchase in a shorter period of time. A number of consumer groups, especially low income and rural populations, did not meet this criteria and were not targeted. These groups are more challenging, expensive, and time-consuming to reach, but they also account for most of the population in East Acholi. Follow-on research will be required to test strategies targeted to these groups and their impact on sales among these consumers as well as their viability as private sector-led tactics.

All research and documentation is available in full [HERE](#) at Mercy Corps' website.

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