

Clean cooking push at risk as charcoal use persists - EPRC report

Smart energy.

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Uganda's ambitious transition to clean cooking energy could stall unless the country adopts a more coordinated, inclusive strategy, a new report by the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) at Makerere University warns.

The report highlights a growing disconnect between government policy commitments and the realities on the ground, particularly the continued expansion of the illegal charcoal trade.

This warning comes at a time when

government has intensified efforts to make clean cooking energy accessible nationwide.

Key frameworks such as the Uganda Energy Policy 2023, the Fourth National Development Plan (2025-30), and the Uganda Energy Transition Plan (2023-50) all prioritize a shift toward sustainable cooking solutions.

To reduce dependence on charcoal, government has introduced several consumer-friendly measures, including subsidies to lower the cost of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), reduced electricity tariffs to promote electric cooking, and support for clean technologies

like improved cookstoves and pressure cookers.

A major policy step was Executive Order No. 3 of 2023, which banned commercial charcoal production and trade in northern and north-eastern Uganda, covering regions such as Karamoja, Teso, Lango, Acholi, and West Nile.

However, despite these efforts, progress remains limited.

EPRC Executive Director Sarah Ssewanyana noted that despite the effort, only 15 percent of Ugandans currently have access to clean cooking energy.

"Progress is hindered by persistent challenges such as high cost of alterna-

tive fuels, insufficient electricity and LPG infrastructure, weak enforcement of regulations, and low cultural acceptance of new technologies," she said.

The report also underscores the environmental cost of continued charcoal reliance, which EPRC research fellow Linda Nakato noted costs Uganda approximately 72,000 hectares of forest cover annually.

Between 2000 and 2022, Uganda's forest cover declined from three million hectares to just under 2.5 million hectares, while charcoal consumption surged more than fourfold, from 21,000 terajoules to over 94,000 terajoules.

Urban demand remains the key driver, with most charcoal consumed in rapidly growing cities such as the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area, Gulu, Jinja, and Mbale.

Nakato warned that this trajectory threatens Uganda's ability to meet Sustainable Development Goal 7, which seeks to ensure universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy, including clean cooking, by 2030.

Without stronger coordination and practical implementation, the report concludes, Uganda risks undermining both its energy transition goals and its environmental sustainability.