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The Politics of Humanitarian Energy Access

Evidencing the Importance of Energy in Refugee Camps

Differing Values and Governance Challenges

Understanding energy in refugee camps requires investigating multiple sites of enquiry, listening to many voices and perceptions, and recognising the multifaceted nature of both energy provision and use. It involves hearing many opinions about energy, while developing a critical analysis of the role it plays in camps and spaces where energy is missing. The voices of refugees, field staff and practitioners all need to be heard to understand the dynamics of humanitarian energy. From the evidence presented in the previous chapters it is clear that energy is an important resource, valued for its practical benefits as well as being seen as a symbol of social connection. Families, businesses, community facilities and operational users all need energy as a requirement to fulfil daily tasks, have productive jobs, use public spaces and live their lives. However, refugees and humanitarian practitioners valued energy in quite different ways. The chapters of this book have put forward a number of different arguments to support these ideas.

Firstly, the evidence presented in chapter 1 outlined how households valued energy, suggesting that perceptions on energy were considerable and varied. Energy clearly had a practical significance and was valued for reducing costs and for supporting economic development. But energy was also socially and culturally valued, with historical connections made by refugees that linked energy to their past and home countries. Energy represented more than access for many people; it was an important signifier of status and social standing. Refugees also spoke about the emotional significance of energy, especially in terms of feeling optimistic and for improving quality of life. In particular, it was noticeable that the importance of energy went beyond physical equipment and included social and emotional values. The issue was not just about accessing power for electricity or cooking; it was the results of this access that were important: being

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able to keep warm or cool, share time in the evening with friends and family, cook food and host social engagements, as well as meeting basic needs such as lighting in homes and fuel for cooking. In this way energy was 'non-technical' in its importance: value was not expressed in kilowatt hours but in terms of usefulness and happiness.

This supports the ideas of Elizabeth Shove and others (Hargreaves and Middlemiss 2020; Shove, Watson and Spurling 2015), as my research suggests that social patterns of life are fundamentally linked to energy and that the cultural and national dimensions of living are interwoven with energy use. I have argued that energy supply is often indirectly connected to the benefits of access. For example, when asked about energy many of the interviewees appeared to segue into discussions of family life, their business or other topics about relaxation or income generation. In doing so they wove the importance of energy throughout their descriptions of their lived experience. These non-linear connections were a vital part of the value of energy, and highlighted how energy lies 'underneath' many of the activities that we value every day. This suggests that in order to reveal the true value of energy we need to investigate access qualitatively and ethnographically, rather than just quantitatively, spending time with people and understanding the range of ways in which energy is useful in the material and social aspects of life. Critically, energy was valued in terms of improvements to quality of life for refugees. Higher levels of access, especially access to electricity, meant that families could use TVs, radios and power for social events. Quality of life, of course, is a moving scale, for which there is no universally accepted level or final benchmark. However, it became clear during my research that *improving* quality of life requires a higher level of energy access than is currently provided by humanitarian agencies. Particularly for electricity access, higher levels of energy became very important for the social and economic ambitions of households. Families commented that more energy would improve their lives, that having electricity would made them feel happier and that having access to more electricity would make life much easier. My research illuminates the connection between energy and quality of life in refugee settings, perhaps even suggesting that access to energy is one of the key determinants of improving quality of life (in the same way that education, access to social and healthcare services, and income levels are linked to improving living standards).

Chapter 2 identified refugee-owned energy enterprises as a core community of users and suppliers of energy. In almost all businesses I encountered there was some form of electricity access, and in many cases these businesses were providing energy services to the refugee community. The value of energy for enterprises was not just financial or economic but also lay in the way it offered opportunities for business development and

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specialisation. Business interviewees highlighted cultures of enterprise (in terms of the national and cultural value attached to having an energy business and being able to provide for their community). The views of both families and businesses within the camps demonstrated considerable engagement with energy, including knowledge about the services and products available, the costs of energy, and alternative methods of trade and informal exchange to gain access. Value was expressed not just as cost and the monetary value of energy but was inherent in the creation and existence of energy exchanges in the camps. As a result of this we can see how refugee enterprises are distinct constituents within the humanitarian energy system, users who are often missed in discussions about how to provide energy. This finding adds to the work of Ben Campbell, Jon Cloke and Ed Brown (2016), which suggests that energy communities can comprise many actors and that it is important to consider livelihood patterns within energy communities. Indeed, the views and perceptions of refugee businesses about energy are critically important in this context, as they are the main small-scale suppliers of energy in refugee camps in Kenya and Rwanda (as well as being one of the main user groups).

As outlined in chapter 3, many humanitarians did not seem to view energy access in public spaces as an important part of refugee life. However, for their own operations and lives energy was clearly essential. This suggested an inherent inequality in who had higher levels of access to energy – perceptions that were directly linked to value judgements about quality of life, suggesting that refugees do not deserve energy and therefore do not deserve as high a quality of life as others. These types of judgements are often the result of political choices about energy (Brown and Cloke 2017; Fassin 2007; Feldman 2012). In the view of many humanitarians energy was not a basic need – because they thought that either energy did not play an important role within refugee life or that it was not the role of humanitarian organisations to provide it. It is important to critically challenge these statements, as energy was clearly a vital part of refugee life and many communities were underserved. The views of humanitarian practitioners evidence the stark difference between the values of staff and those of refugee households and businesses. Overwhelmingly, energy was undervalued by operational users, and many interviewees were unaware of the energy they used or who paid for access to it. Humanitarians demonstrated a considerable lack of awareness about energy sources and some were even hostile to the topic in light of what they viewed as more pressing needs. Remits and responsibilities for providing energy varied greatly, and some humanitarians held negative opinions about how much energy refugees really needed. In particular, humanitarian views on energy seemed to be ill informed and detached from the everyday value of electricity.

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Chapter 4 suggested that governance of energy in the camps largely appeared to be sporadic or ad hoc, with many different agencies and organisations playing different roles in different spaces. While I spoke to many NGOs and development actors who were keen to become more involved in the provision of energy services, they felt that only UNHCR and other humanitarian organisations had the authority to authorise and coordinate such work. The reality of energy provision in humanitarian settings, however, is that UN agencies do not seem to have the capacity to take on such provision or even to coordinate energy interventions. These gaps seemed to result in a disconnection, with refugee communities and partners feeling that they could not take action and UN agencies unable to provide energy due to resourcing and system constraints. When humanitarian action on energy did take place it often seemed to be implemented with limited planning or engagement with communities. Institutional darkness, in this way, can be seen to be creating literal darkness: a lack of knowledge and capacity within institutions has left refugees with limited access to electricity.

During fieldwork I was sometimes able to question the opinions of humanitarians, but it became clear that energy was not a priority issue within humanitarian response despite recent strategic and policy commitments. In fact, at an operational level it often seemed as if decisions about energy had already been made and there was little room for discussion. In these cases, I found that refugees' views on energy were not reflected in decision-making on how much energy should be provided for families and households. As a result there was a divide between humanitarians and refugees on the issue of energy. This resulted in higher levels of energy provision for humanitarian staff and lower levels for refugees. Such findings suggest that there is a politics of living underpinning the operations of humanitarianism in these sites.

The issue of institutional intermittency hung over the provision of energy in refugee camps. Often humanitarian agencies and implementing partners provided a short-term solution, but they were sporadic in their engagement and knowledge. This intermittency led to an absence of ownership, both for providing the energy needed and for understanding the importance of energy in the daily lives of refugees and humanitarian workers. Within this context the humanitarian politics of life (Fassin 2007) becomes a politics of provision. Although my work does not explicitly focus on food, John Bohstedt's work on food provision (2013) is relevant here as the politics of provision of energy access still contains many elements of physical struggle and political contestation, and represents collective and individual actions to access resources that are not being supplied by the governing political body – in this case, humanitarian agencies and their partners. Political choices are being made about the types of

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energy that should be provided for refugees (for example, limited cooking facilities rather than electricity; only some households; and not refugee enterprises). This demonstrates a selective approach to energy provision, which prioritises some types of need over others. This decision-making is encased within the 'black box' of humanitarian action (Brabant 1999). While my research was not able to delve deeply into the mechanisms behind these choices, the impacts were clear: humanitarian agencies do not currently meet the energy needs of refugees in camps in Kenya and Rwanda. I found a harsh narrative on who was involved in the development of refugee energy programmes: many humanitarians were not willing to engage refugees in the design or development of programmes, and considered refugees only as beneficiaries. Independent access by refugee communities brings to light that energy access is always political: there is a selective element to who deserves energy and how much energy certain communities are allowed. These choices were often made by humanitarian organisations and have considerable consequences for the long-term quality of life for refugees.

Energy often appeared at the end of a long list of other needs in the humanitarian system, needs that were viewed as more essential. Agencies were overwhelmed and under-resourced, and NGOs and implementing partners often did not have the remit to provide solutions. Importantly, humanitarian institutions were not set up to manage or implement energy within camps. This opens up a set of challenging issues on who, then, should be responsible for the provision of energy, and how energy can be provided within a system that has other priorities. Compared with refugees' own knowledge of and engagement with energy (as presented in chapters 1 and 2), humanitarian organisations demonstrated limited responsibility for energy in camps in Rwanda and Kenya (as evidenced in chapters 3 and 4). The recognition that many refugees secure energy through independent access enables us to critically question how energy is provided within camps. We can also question who knows about energy, who makes decisions on energy, who is able to access energy and who decides on energy projects or the types of technologies and services that will be made available.

Several contradictions on energy provision emerged during my research. Many interviewees would mention that refugee communities did not have access while simultaneously providing it. Similarly, refugees would comment that humanitarian agencies did provide them with some firewood and had distributed lamps to some members of the community. In many cases solar streetlighting was present but the camps were still viewed as 'dark and dangerous' (refugee living in Uganda). These contradictions stem from a number of places, but overall reflect differing views on the levels of access provided. Those who felt 'enough' energy had been

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provided focused on the existing solutions and supply of firewood, for example, whereas people who felt more energy was needed highlighted a lack of provision.

The politics of representation is also important here: many practitioners would make the argument that no energy was available in the camps in order to draw attention to the importance of the topic. As reflected on in the introduction, slightly more nuanced statements might have noted that there is not access to enough energy, or modern energy, or energy from sustainable sources, rather than re-creating the binary narrative that there is no energy at all in refugee camps. The blurred line here between perception and reality is critical in understanding such contradictions.

In summary, although both independent access and (to a lesser extent) humanitarian delivery mechanisms enable access to energy in refugee camps, governance and implementation are still insubstantial in meeting energy needs. The context surrounding these findings is changing and the humanitarian energy sector is evolving rapidly, with global initiatives and innovative programming emerging (UNHCR 2019a; UNITAR 2019). However, these changes have been slow to be realised at the local and camp levels. There is an incongruity at the heart of humanitarian energy: energy for humanitarians is not the same as energy for refugees. Neither views and values nor provision of services are equal. A number of constraints within the humanitarian system contribute to this, such as the way funding flows from donors, the restrictions in the remits and resources of agencies, a lack of technical expertise and knowledge within institutions, and the focus on short-term projects and providing limited interventions. Such constraints mean that the humanitarian system is seemingly at odds with the provision of energy in refugee settings. Despite good intentions from many individuals involved, and newly emerging programmes to provide sustainable energy solutions in camps, few successful initiatives have yet delivered substantive change on the ground. Systematic failures within the humanitarian system have led to a failure of provision of energy for refugees, especially compared with the supply of energy for humanitarian operations. In conclusion, energy provision by humanitarian agencies can be said to be intermittent whereas independent access to energy by refugee communities is considerable.

Areas for Future Research

There are a significant number of areas of further research that could build on the analysis produced by my research. A couple of notable areas for exploration are outlined below – although as the humanitarian energy sector is still emerging, considerable in-depth analysis is needed on a whole range of topics (Rosenberg-Jansen 2022a). Overwhelmingly, there is much

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more to be done on researching the social life of energy in refugee camps. Using qualitative and lived-experience methods would enable a new set of data to be produced on this topic and evidence some of the arguments outlined here further. For example, research on humanitarian systems of energy provision in refugee camps could be conducted by undertaking a critical analysis of narratives in humanitarian energy and an investigation into who is making decisions on energy and how. The examples and qualitative findings of this study may be relevant to other sub-Saharan African countries, and are likely to be applicable in the Middle East and South Asia. However, further research would be needed to establish whether this is the case. Future research could adapt the engaged energy ethnography methodology I have used to other contexts to understand the range of nationally and locally specific energy needs in other spaces of displacement, such as self-settled communities, urban refugees or internally displaced people.

Additionally there is more work to be done to detail cultures of refugee energy enterprise. The cultures of service-based entrepreneurship are not widely recognised within academic or policy circles. This research did not set out to specifically analyse the dynamics of energy use in enterprises, but fieldwork immediately revealed that this was a core area of energy use in camp settings. Further research is needed to fully understand cultures of energy enterprise in different displacement and refugee settings, and chapter 2 only provides an initial sketch of the types of evidence it may be possible to collect on this topic. The role of energy as a mechanism for developing a tertiary economy, one that is focused on serving customers rather than producing physical goods, has so far received little attention. Energy provision in refugee camps could be analysed as a service economy (for example, by building on the work of Buera and Kaboski 2012). Future analysis addressing this issue could critically examine the role that energy plays within refugee economies, rather than seeking a quick technological fix or focusing on new, 'innovative' ideas such as refugee enterprise zones (Crawley 2017). Linked to this, a key area for new primary research could be to understand energy-cash dynamics further – seeking to analyse the role that cash from humanitarian sources, livelihoods and informal businesses has within energy exchanges in refugee settings.

Finally, further analysis should also evaluate the role of humanitarian energy projects and programmes in providing access to energy and services. Currently, relatively little research has been conducted to evaluate new and ongoing energy projects. Refugee participation and inclusion in humanitarian programming must be considered in more detail, and much more evidence is needed to understand the participation of refugees in humanitarian energy programming. Are refugee needs being listened to? Where is decision-making happening and how? And who is involved in

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making these choices? My research was able to suggest some answers to these questions, but further work would be needed to empirically analyse humanitarian systems in a range of displacement contexts.

The Politics of Living: Energy and Humanitarianism

The Politics of Energy and Quality of Life

Energy is often portrayed as a non-political, technical subject focused on technologies that only require correct installation, optimised systems, regular maintenance and good financial management to be effective. Within refugee camps this is far from the case. Who is provided with energy, the amount and type of energy supplied and whose values on energy are represented within humanitarian system are political choices. It seems that only some voices are important in these discussions. Value judgements and biases within humanitarian energy programmes play into the politics of living that surrounds refugee life. There is a politics of energy in refugee camps: power produces power. Forms of inequality raise questions about who is allowed to speak about energy, benefit from energy access and be involved with the provision of energy. There is also a politics involved in the wider decisions involved in the provision of energy. Which populations and camps are supported by humanitarian agencies? And how does energy access differ across refugee spaces?

There are different dimensions to the politics of living in refugee camps. Chapter 1 demonstrated there is a politics involved in levels of access, focusing on *what* technologies and resources are available for households. Chapter 2, on the other hand, revealed *where* access is important, with enterprises supplying their own energy just as humanitarian organisations neglected these spaces. Chapter 3 evidenced the politics of absence of energy, and highlighted *who* energy is supplied for in humanitarian operations, community facilities and public spaces. Finally, chapter 4 started to illuminate the *choices* being made about the politics of living and energy in refugee camps. Provision of energy for humanitarian services seems to be seen as critical whereas households and enterprises are not. There are many implications of the politics of living for humanitarian energy access, including how energy and living standards are connected in refugee camps as well as discussing the politics of provision and how the humanitarian supply of energy is shaped by political decisions.

Within refugee camps, some communities have more access to energy than others. Richer households use more energy than poorer ones; enterprises use more energy than homes; and, overall, operational spaces use more energy than households. While initially this may seem to be a neutral function of demand (some users need more energy than others), once

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we start to examine the problem in more detail it is possible to see that levels of access are determined by the *ability* to access energy rather than the demand of the end user. For example, on average households can access and afford less energy, so they use less of it (proportionally) than enterprises or operations. Yet this does not mean that they need or want less energy. Restrictions in use are created by the limited (or expensive) supply of energy products and services in refugee camps. These limitations are both economic (determined by people's income levels and ability to afford energy) and political (as neither humanitarian nor national government structures systematically support refugee access to energy). To some extent in the camps in Rwanda and Kenya, the economic barrier to accessing energy was addressed by refugee enterprises who were supplying services that at least some refugees could afford. However, political barriers to energy access remain.

As suggested by the discussion in chapter 4 on the UNHCR's energy strategy, the level of energy available for refugees has been predetermined by political decisions (as 200 Wh per household per day). In this way levels of energy access reveal the politics of life. This amount of energy has been determined to be enough to meet household needs. However – as chapters 1, 2 and 3 clearly show – this is not enough; refugee communities continue to pay for additional resources. Moreover, for users of community facilities (such as WASH stations, playgrounds and public spaces), a lack of ability to access energy resulted in very few examples of working or reliable electricity in community spaces in the camps – and this created literal darkness and an absence of energy use in these spaces. For humanitarian users a lack of access meant having to use energy resources elsewhere (in their homes or regional offices). These different users of energy are viewed and valued differently. Energy for refugees was important because it improved their quality of living – and they know what it is like to live without. For humanitarians, however, energy is not valued because they do not have to live without it for very long, and as a result cannot see the direct link between energy and living standards.

In this book I have argued that one of the key factors influencing quality of life is access to energy, especially access to electricity. For refugee users a lack of access has resulted in a lower quality of life. Energy is needed for many social and cultural functions in the camps. Without it refugees could not practise social norms such as inviting family members over to their home in the evening, having leisure time at night or keeping their business open past sunset. Similarly, many refugees were unable to use public spaces or community facilities at night due to a lack of electricity. Quality of life was impacted on by a lack of energy access.

This lack of access is political, as refugees were constrained in terms of which activities they could undertake to secure the level of energy

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required to improve their quality of life. This issue is not just economic as, regardless of the level of income, only a certain set of energy activities are possible. Informal energy activities can and do happen, but formal, long-term provision of electricity is not developed by humanitarian agencies or national host-country governments. This is proved by the fact that it is not possible for refugees in either Rwanda or Kenya to currently connect to the national grid. In some cases this is because a political decision has been made that the national grid does not reach the camp (as is the case in Kakuma, Gihembe and Nyabiheke). In others it is because a political decision was taken that refugee households and businesses are not allowed to connect to the grid, even when the camp is connected (the case for Kigeme and Mahama). Formal access to electricity (through connection to the national grid or by the provision of a mini-grid) was discussed with a number of humanitarians who suggested a variety of explanations, but the underlying reason is essentially the same: it has been decided that refugees do not need or deserve the same level of energy access as host communities or humanitarians. Formal, grid-level access to energy is not currently possible for refugees.

While my research provided many examples of refugee businesses supplying energy services and products, all these activities were informal and not supported by the formal processes of humanitarianism or national governments. Similarly, formal national government policies on the right to work and move freely impacted on refugees' ability to change their living situation and access to energy. Previous policies of encampment in both Rwanda and Kenya have restricted refugee economies (although this is changing), and by extension have also restricted the ability of energy suppliers (both small and large) to formally provide energy access. Therefore, we can see how refugee energy access is constrained by both national policy and the political system of humanitarianism. This also limits refugees' quality of life.

These decisions on types of access are political because grid-level access would enable refugees to access energy in a similar way to host communities, suggesting that refugees have similar political or civil rights to national citizens. Didier Fassin (2007) suggests that the humanitarian provision of aid separates human rights (for humanitarian subjects like refugees) from civil rights (for national and international citizens). This political separation is present for energy in camps. The provision of basic firewood and some lanterns meets the notion of energy as a basic human right, but refugees are not allowed to formally access higher levels of power as this may provide a form of civil rights and raise expectations about living standards. Quality of life is limited by access to resources, and energy is just one example. Indeed, similar arguments could be made for access to education, health services or shelter. However, national governments are more

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likely to relegate energy for refugees to the sphere of emergency aid, and in so doing they enable humanitarian systems to constrain refugee life. In this way humanitarianism 'enacts a politics of living and shapes life experience over time and across space' (Feldman 2012: 165). For energy this is largely about access to resources, which institutions can (or cannot) provide. There is considerably more work to be done on the 'the bureaucratic categories that give differential access to services, the material artifacts of assistance that shape daily life' (Ibid.). However, the political choice that refugees have limited access to higher levels of energy, and that access will need to be informal, has been made.

The Politics of Provision and Energy Inequalities

As well as political decisions on how refugees are allowed to access higher levels of energy, choices have also been made about the ways in which the humanitarian system provides energy for refugees. Indeed, the politics of energy provision has three core dimensions. There are the choices made within humanitarian systems, which demonstrate elements of institutional darkness on the issue of energy provision; there is the inequality in provision that these systems produce and create; and, finally, there are the impacts of these systems and inequalities in terms of the power of power.

In the case of energy it appears that humanitarian systems are not institutionally able to provide dedicated resources to deliver energy access in a systematic way to refugee populations. The humanitarian energy sector seems to be creating top-down, imposed processes where the needs and wants of refugees are decided by international organisations rather than direct users. This is not primarily a normative criticism but, rather, a practical one: Is it working? Are refugees being supported by the humanitarian system to access electricity? Much of the evidence presented in this book points towards the answer no. Refugees are to some extent improving their own access to energy, but this is largely done though their own financing and decisions rather than through an institutional aid system designed to protect them. Here, a politics of self-reliance is visible that centres on the idea that humanitarian systems are not providing energy access for refugee communities, who are instead independently accessing energy. This is an intensely political issue as it challenges the accepted orthodoxy that humanitarians must be the ones to provide aid, and that communities are largely reliant on them. Humanitarianism is based on the idea that well-meaning aid workers can support the lives of more vulnerable populations; however, if refugees are self-reliant in terms of access to energy (and perhaps other things) then this starts to call into question the role of humanitarian actors entirely. Ilana Feldman's work on the politics of living is particularly salient here as she considers the 'dynamics of being

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(surviving claiming, acting)' within areas of humanitarian intervention (Feldman 2012: 157):

> Each decision about how to live (in displacement, in community) is an articulation of the value of certain ways of living, and often the devaluation of others. Such contestations clearly occur not simply as considered judgements about strategy or identity but also as responses to institutional, material and discursive opportunities and constraints. (Ibid.: 169)

Inequality in energy provision is one of the consequences of humanitarian inaction and institutional ignorance. Some refugee communities in the camps in Kenya and Rwanda have more access to energy than others, with certain households receiving free solar products and others not. Inequalities also exist between camps within countries. For example, more energy programmes have taken place in Kigeme camp than Gihembe and Nyabiheke, and many more programmes have happened in Kakuma than in Dadaab (in eastern Kenya). While it is sometimes claimed by agencies that these choices are based on the needs of beneficiaries or logistical challenges, often this does not seem to be the case and energy projects address needs in an intermittent way. This thinking builds on that of Fassin and the concept of the politics of life, under which humanitarianism assigns different values to some lives over others (Fassin 2009, 2007). In the case of energy, these values are often demonstrated through material support. In short, some communities receive energy products while others do not.

Within refugee settings this means that there is a horizontal politics of aid, in the sense that 'humanitarian agencies create inequalities within a recipient population' generating 'winners and losers by deciding whom to assist' (Scott-Smith 2019: 516). In my research this was quite visible in terms of the beneficiaries who were able to access additional material support or sometimes cash resources due to their status – for example, single-female-headed households with young children, who were often identified by energy programmes as highly vulnerable. The politics of energy is problematic within these contexts because some refugees have more access to energy than others, even within the same camps. Within countries this pattern is also present: as an example, refugees in Kigeme and Mahama seem to have higher levels of energy access than those in Gihembe and Nyabiheke camps (also in Rwanda). As Tom Scott-Smith has suggested, such inequality in access does not sit easily alongside basic humanitarian principles:

> The horizontal politics of life, which is about inequality between recipient groups, is particularly fraught for humanitarians. Hierarchies up and down the aid chain can be justified on grounds of efficiency or bracketed off as a structural feature of global politics that aid agencies cannot resolve,

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> but inequity between recipient groups, in contract, violates the most basic humanitarian principle of all: impartiality. (Ibid.: 517)

While sometimes political choices are made on the basis of need – for example, energy support for single-female-headed households and the elderly – often decisions about beneficiaries seem to be biased and do not apply the principle of impartiality. Nowhere is a horizontal politics of life for energy more starkly visible than in the different levels of energy access present between different relief responses. For example, Zaatari and Azraq camps in Jordan have levels of power almost comparable with towns in the global north and have received hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in electricity services from international development donors and the private sector (UNHCR 2017b). In contrast, as my research has shown, many people in the camps in Kenya and Rwanda receive minimal assistance to access electricity and are forced to independently secure energy. Does this suggest the humanitarian system values the quality of life of Syrian refugees in Jordan more highly than Congolese and Sudanese lives in Rwanda and Kenya? The structural racism of humanitarianism has often been criticised for valuing White lives over Brown, Black and African ones (Benton 2016; Turner 2019).

There is clearly inequality present on energy access that has a geographical bias, and the 'functional ignorance' of humanitarianism is visible (Duffield 1996: 173). As Mark Duffield, Joanna Macrae and Devon Curtis suggest, 'humanitarian assistance has always been a highly political activity, but the relationship between humanitarian aid and politics is changing' (2001: 269). There is a drive for coherence to align humanitarian action with cohesive political strategy and international development aims, often driven by national governments or donors, 'by subordinating humanitarian objectives to political and strategic ones, some victims are seen as more deserving than others, and impartiality is forgone' (Ibid.: 273). In the case of energy examining the horizontal politics of life suggests that some refugee communities are seen as deserving more energy than others, and that as a result the humanitarian provision of energy differs across field locations and operational responses.

Inequality in access to energy also has a vertical dimension. Vertical inequality, focusing on 'the differential in value between the lives of recipients and aid workers' (Scott-Smith 2019: 516), is visible in the different energy-access levels for refugee communities and humanitarian operational users. In short, my research found that humanitarians had considerably more access to energy than refugees. While one could argue that these differences were the result of global structural inequalities, the lived realities of such inequality were extremely visible within the camps. Those with access to higher levels of power, particularly the humanitarian

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staff living in or near to the camps, had a higher quality of life than those without.

The politics of energy provision, in this way, has a number of aspects. Primarily, the supply of energy products and services is not impartial but selective. Such selectiveness challenges humanitarian principles such as neutrality and impartiality. Why would some communities require more access to energy, or be perceived as having higher levels of need? Why would some communities receive more support than others? Is it individuals or institutions making such decisions? How do such inequalities develop? And what systems are supporting selective choices? What is clear from my research is that some refugee communities receive higher levels of support than others, some institutions have a more comprehensive approach to energy than others and energy responses between humanitarian operations differ. But considerable further research would be needed to unpack and evidence the choices made within humanitarian energy.

These findings challenge the nature of humanitarian action on energy in refugee camps. If whole groups of users have been excluded or unintentionally omitted, what does this say about the role of humanitarian organisations in the provision of energy? It could suggest that, in future, agencies may have less to do with the energy provision in refugee camps, or that radical humanitarian reform is needed to reshape energy responses for refugees. The 'protect and provide' mentality of many humanitarian organisations often ignores independent action by communities, such as market access to energy. Entrepreneurial independence, and the independent access of energy by communities, can challenge this mentality and enable us to ask whether the motto of humanitarian agencies should be 'supply and serve' instead. A new humanitarianism, which places refugees truly at the heart of response, could use bottom-up and inclusive approaches to change the way that resources are provided in and to refugee communities. In the case of energy this should reflect the existing energy supply-and-exchange dynamics within camps. These political dimensions have a number of severe impacts on life in refugee camps: progress is stalling, communities are stagnating for decades without access to resources or support and whole generations are wasting away waiting for a better life to come along.

The Power of Power and Living versus Surviving

Chief among the problems of humanitarian energy is the gap between the needs, desires and values of people living in the camps and the humanitarian systems that are there to support them. Having power, control of resources and access to energy in these spaces is not equitable. There are perception and value inequalities when it comes to energy; there are also

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differences in knowledge and participation, misinformation about ownership and responsibility, and unequal power relations between community members and staff. Certain value judgements are embedded within humanitarian responses. In the case of energy those values are constructed around how much energy refugees 'deserve' and how it should be provided for them. This is political because it relates to the way that power is achieved and used within a society, how resources are shared.

The power of power has two dimensions. First, there is the physical dimension of power, which largely appears in the way that refugee communities secure and pay for the majority of their own energy access. Overwhelmingly, I found that the energy life of refugee businesses was characterised by seriousness and independence – with many refugees willing to talk for hours about the energy uses in their homes and businesses, describing how they secured electricity themselves. In unpicking these power dynamics we can understand the different roles of actors. Humanitarians are not undertaking the majority of activities on energy access and, as a result, they are not making decisions for or within this community and are not intimately involved in the governance of energy for refugee businesses. This seems to imply that refugee communities hold a significant amount of political power within the humanitarian system, as they are supplying their own energy and humanitarian agencies seem to have little to do with it. However, this could not be further from the truth. In fact, it is humanitarian organisations who wield the vast majority of political power, demonstrating a disconnect between actual power (in this case physical access to electricity) and political power (the perceived remit of humanitarian agencies to provide energy access).

Second, there is the issue of who has institutional and political power and who does not. Refugees repeatedly demonstrated considerable knowledge about energy and valued it as a way of improving their quality of life, yet many practitioners did not recognise either the existence or value of energy in these spaces. Unfortunately, it is largely humanitarian practitioners whose views and values on energy matter in institutional decisions about levels of access to services: the voices of refugees are not considered to be valuable in determining energy needs. In many cases refugees are not even able to participate in decision-making or access the global systems that support energy access.

The value judgements that matter in terms of the humanitarian provision of energy are therefore almost exclusively those of humanitarians rather than refugees. Repeated biases within humanitarian programmes about the types of energy that could be provided were present in the interviews conducted for this research, and there was very little space for refugees to express their energy needs or desires as part of programming. In this context refugees were not able to inform programming design on

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energy or become directly involved with the provision of energy. Despite the fact that they already undertook many energy activities and demonstrating considerable knowledge on energy products and services, this knowledge seemed to be irrelevant to the humanitarian system. This is important because certain forms of knowledge lead to certain decisions being made about how much energy should be provided. If perceptions on energy are not accurate or do not reflect the lived reality of energy, then decisions are not likely to be the right ones for refugee communities.

In this way institutional power is limiting physical access to power, which opens up questions of whose voices and perceptions matter in refugee contexts. I argue that in refugee camps institutional action on energy is restricting energy activities to the realm of the informal. The impact of formal political structures on energy governance is limited, but also restrictive. Refugees can only access energy informally, often through private means, and do so without the knowledge or permission of humanitarian systems. This limits refugee-led action on energy and excludes it from formal political and humanitarian engagement channels. It should be noted that these findings are slightly more relevant for electricity than for cooking (as humanitarian organisations do provide some firewood and fuel access within the camps); however, in general all energy access is limited by the political and institutional structures surrounding camp life. As we can see, power and energy access is part of a political calculation and understanding this can help us to understand the political economy of energy communities (Brown and Cloke 2017).

Energy runs through every aspect of our lives and can be framed as a basic human right, similar to access to water, shelter, food and protection (UNITAR 2019). However, within current humanitarian systems this is not commonly the view. Is energy really essential in humanitarian settings? It can easily be argued that some elements of energy access are indispensable for survival and basic needs: fuel to cook with, energy to pump water, electricity for health centres, fuel for trucks to transport people and shelters, power to enable humanitarian offices and registration centres to function. Other aspects of energy access are still vital for camp life but their absence does not usually result in a direct risk to life: energy for schools, public lighting and basic electricity for households, for example, are needed for subsistence levels of living. A further category of energy access could be considered aspirational: higher levels of power for homes, businesses and community spaces within the camps. To be clear, these are not my opinions or classifications: I would categorise all such energy needs as essential in refugee camps (just as they are essential in my own life). However, during data collection for this research it became clear than a division of energy needs was central to the views held by most humanitarian actors.

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The differences between these levels of access may be the difference between surviving and living. Basic energy provision is about survival: ensuring power at health clinics so that people do not die from lack of treatment, or providing firewood to cook on so that refugees do not starve. Subsistence levels enable life just above survival: they are about making ends meet and having just beyond the essentials, such as energy to light your home, power for basic appliances, the ability to see in the street or to study at night and the presence of heating or cooling in schools. Higher levels of energy enable productive lives of refugees, as well as energy for economic and cultural growth and a high-energy future for refugee homes and businesses. As many interviewees in chapter 1 highlighted, higher levels of energy access suggest the promise of a better life. Indeed, as one of the interviewees, a refugee living in Rwanda, stated, 'when we talk about energy, we talk about life'.

However, the position of humanitarian agencies seems to be that they will provide only enough energy for survival, not for life beyond that. The 200 Wh a day figure acts as a signifier of this opinion: enough to survive, but not to thrive. Within the camps in Rwanda and Kenya many refugee families face subsistence levels of energy access. Humanitarian organisations provide the very basics needed for survival, and families are reliant on their own resources to supplement energy needed beyond this.

When it comes to energy for refugees a politics of subsistence is emerging, whereby humanitarian agencies provide limited energy resources and individuals are responsible for the rest. Perhaps this is the true nature of the self-reliance agenda that we see emerging within UNHCR and other agencies (UNHCR 2005), as it means that agencies will only be responsible for so much and refugees must be reliant on themselves for the rest. This politics of subsistence may well be about persisting, enduring and the continuing drive of refugee communities to slowly develop independent resources in long-term, protracted situations. Subsistence-level existence is often all that is possible for those who remain in camps for many years, always struggling to access the level of energy they need for their quality of life to be bearable. A subtle politics of life therefore operates in the humanitarian energy sphere. It is clear that humanitarian organisations are 'apportioning sympathy according to social markers and offering different levels of assistance' to communities (Scott-Smith 2019: 516). In evaluating the differences between the energy services provided in countries such as Jordan, for example, and energy-access levels in camps in Rwanda and Kenya, it is clear political choices on who deserves more are being made.

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