

Conclusion

The title of this book, *Voices in the Dark*, lends itself to several meanings. Firstly, the more literal: many refugees living within the camps struggle without lighting or power in the night, and they have their lives limited by the darkness this brings. As we have seen, refugees have to slowly improve their own quality of life by securing access to energy themselves. Their voices and opinions are vitally important within their communities, and individual action by families and businesses is the key determinant as to whether refugees live in darkness or not. Indeed – some views and values on energy matter more in refugee settings than others, and organisational modes of governance and the role of institutions are critical in determining energy access.

Secondly, in the figurative sense, institutions and global policy-makers often have limited knowledge and experience of energy within the camps. For them, darkness comes in the form of not seeing the realities of energy. Political choices about energy are unrecognised and value judgements are made, perhaps unconsciously or unintentionally, within humanitarian systems. This too is a form of darkness, created by the often-impenetrable maze of humanitarian action. Institutional darkness often creates literal darkness, restricting the ability of refugees to act formally within the humanitarian system. Refugees are not supported by formal political mechanisms within aid agencies or national governments. The governance of humanitarian energy programming is political, and power (in both senses) has a real impact in refugee settings.

Refugee voices, meanwhile, speak into darkness, which is demonstrated through a lack of knowledge on the part of humanitarians about how refugees use electricity, why it matters to them and how they came to access it. Refugees' voices exist in isolation and, despite their knowledge and existing experience in supplying energy, they are not involved in humanitarian responses on energy except simplistically as beneficiaries. The role of refugee families in organising their own energy is rarely acknowledged, and refugee enterprises are not considered as part of the system providing energy in camps. The contribution of refugees therefore sits in darkness, unacknowledged and undervalued by the humanitarian system. The importance of refugee actions is invisible to humanitarian

providers, and the success of their endeavours dissipates into the darkness and impenetrability of the humanitarian system.

One could argue about which of these forms of darkness matters more: people being without energy or humanitarian interventions that are not informed by the needs of refugees. However, it is likely they are two aspects of the same problem. Humanitarian systems and actors are not yet equipped to hear, or meet, the energy needs of refugees; policy-makers and practitioners have limited experience and knowledge on energy, and do not have systems that can support them to deliver. Households are not involved in these systems or the design of energy programmes, which leaves refugees in the dark or in a position where they have to find their own solutions. When refugee homes and businesses do have access to energy it is often because they have been able to secure and pay for it themselves. Darkness in a refugee energy context has a political dimension: value judgements are embedded within the humanitarian system that creates and prolongs a lack of access to power.

Throughout this book I have made many claims about the importance of energy, including suggesting that energy access is inherently linked to quality of life. In refugee camps energy and the politics of living are as interwoven as a complex tapestry, framed by both humanitarianism and the lived experiences of refugees. I believe that, without considerably more access to energy than is currently available in refugee camps, many improvements in standards of living will not be possible. As a result refugee communities will continue to struggle with the physical and emotional demands created by a life without access to electricity, modern cooking and energy appliances. I hope the material presented throughout this book provides a compelling argument as to why this might be the case, as well as underlining the importance of energy in all our lives.