



SNAPSHOT

Eco-friendly Stoves Save Trees, Improve Health

With the installation of eco-friendly stoves, more than 9,000 trees have been saved in rural project-assisted communities.



Photos by Fintrac Inc.

Above, a traditional kitchen stove in rural Honduras.

Below, María Benitez is happy with her new eco-friendly stove that saves trees and improves household living conditions.



“I used to use a load (around 200 pounds of wood) every two or three days, now the same load lasts almost two weeks.”

María Benitez, mother

Rural Hondurans have used traditional wood-burning stoves for centuries to cook their meals. These stoves have large openings and require a lot of wood to maintain heat. In order to promote forest conservation and improve household living conditions, USAID-ACCESO renewable energy specialists are helping families install eco-friendly stoves, which burn significantly less wood.

Traditional stoves are made of sandy soil and covered in a lime mixture. They are generally quite large and do not heat efficiently, requiring regular restocking of wood. They also have an indoor chimney, which does not allow for proper ventilation and results in thick smoke and soot accumulation inside homes.

In June 2011, USAID-ACCESO began introducing eco-friendly stoves to client households. These stoves, though also made of sandy soil, have a brick-base that holds heat for longer periods of time, making them much more efficient.

These improved stoves only use approximately 100 pounds of wood per week compared to the 460 pounds most families were going through every week with the traditional stoves, cutting wood use by an average of 80 percent. The improved chimney directs smoke outside and helps drastically reduce the incidence of respiratory diseases.

“Our patients showed fewer cases of respiratory diseases this year thanks to the implementation of eco-stoves,” said Gladys Diaz, a nurse in La Laguna.

Angela Vasquez, a mother and health volunteer from La Laguna, La Paz, is extremely happy with her new stove. “I feel really good; I don’t have to cook outside anymore,” she said, referring to her old stove that was so big it could not fit in her kitchen.

María Benitez, another La Laguna mother, is also very thankful for the eco-stove she has been using for a year now. “I used to use a load (200 pounds) every two or three days, now the same load lasts almost two weeks,” she said.

Studies from the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center in Copán show that 8.64 trees are saved for every eco-stove installed. To date, the project has installed 1,335 stoves, saving approximately 11,500 trees.

Beyond the environmental benefits, more efficient stoves save families’ time and energy formerly spent collecting wood, freeing them up for income-generating activities such as better crop management and value-added processing techniques.

The improved stoves, together with other household improvements, clean drinking water, sanitation, nutrition education, and diet diversity are helping improve family health and nutrition, particularly children under two years old.

The implementation of eco-friendly technologies is rapidly expanding in western Honduras, where beneficiary households are actively requesting assistance with installing eco-stoves, bio-digesters, and solar dryers.