

# A New Alternative Cooking Fuel from Food Residue in Urban Uganda

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Place of fieldwork: Republic of Uganda

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## Research Background

In Uganda, cooking fuels made from food residue have become common in urban areas since around 2000 (Photo 1). Referred to as briquettes, they are produced by local residents, community groups, and companies, and are used by local households and restaurants as an alternative to wood fuels such as charcoal and firewood. The use of briquettes is spreading in Kampala, the capital of Uganda; this movement will promote solutions for the problem of waste in urban areas and deforestation in rural Uganda.

## Research Purpose

The purpose of this research project is to determine and discuss the process by which briquettes have become accepted into the daily lives of local residents of urban Uganda. Briquettes will be evaluated and discussed in light of municipal concerns (such as regarding waste management), their use as an energy source, their use in cooking methods that originated in central Uganda, and the international movement for environment protection. Although briquettes have been promoted as a solution to address poor sanitation and deforestation, the diffusion and popularization of briquettes have exerted a multifaceted influence that can be observed in daily life in Kampala. This research aims to show the many causes of the popularization of briquettes—from environmental issues to local and traditional customs.

## Results and Achievements of This Fieldwork

One major result of this fieldwork is that it was proven that wood fuel is suitable for cooking Ugandan food. We cooked *matooke* (mashed plantains) by using wood fuel and gas and compared the taste (Photos 2 and 3). *Matooke* cooked with gas was harder, less yellow, and less fragrant compared with *matooke* cooked with firewood. Furthermore, it was hard to see when the *matooke* was fully cooked because the leaf color did not change from green to brown, which is the standard by which it is determined that *matooke* is ready.

In Luganda, a local language commonly used in central Uganda, *oku-boobeza* refers to cooking food on low heat after it has been mashed for an extended period of time (2–3 hours or even more). People in central Uganda believe that wood fuel is optimal for *oku-boobeza*; although the economy of Uganda is growing rapidly, it can be assumed that the demand for wood fuel will remain high.



**Photo 1** Charcoal briquette usage  
(Taken on March 2014, Kampala)

### **Implications and Impacts for Future Research**

Up to now, I have conducted research on how briquettes are produced and sold, how people cook in Kampala, and how briquettes can be an alternative to charcoal. Next, I would like to conduct a survey of how briquettes are consumed through participant observation and interviews.

In addition, I must assess the distribution system and economic relationships pertaining to charcoal in urban and rural areas; large quantities of charcoal must be transported from rural forested areas to urban areas in Uganda. I would like to conduct a survey in rural area to observe how people rely on charcoal production economically and environmentally.



**Photo 2** *Matooke* cooked with firewood  
(Taken on February 2014, Kampala)



**Photo 3** *Matooke* cooked with gas;  
the leaf color did not change to yellow.  
(Taken on March 2014, Kampala)