

Efficient charcoal stoves to the aid of Virunga park

'Jiko Nguvu Nyeusi,' which uses half as much charcoal as the traditional stove, will spare the park loss of trees

By SOPHIE MBUGUA
Special Correspondent

In 2008, Janet Kahindo and her eight children fled civil war in Masisi to Goma. Her husband was paralysed in the war, leaving Kahindo as the sole breadwinner.

"I would hawk fruits on the streets and carry charcoal and goods from the market for less than \$1 a day," she says

That was until Network of Producers of Improved Homes (Reprofa) came about, bringing together people like Kahindo who had escaped war in Masisi and Rutshuru.

Now led by Françoise Masika, the group started by selling charcoal, making beads and baskets to cater for the refugee families.

With time, the group started producing ceramic casing for a charcoal stove known as Jiko Nguvu Nyeusi (black strong stoves), which uses half the charcoal the traditional stove consumed.

Kahindo, like other members, receives \$5 per month as a member and is paid \$0.45 per ceramic casing.

"I make about five ceramics a day earning \$2.2 daily. I'm now able to pay school fees, provide for my family and attend to my husband's medical needs" she says.

Sold for between \$5 and \$15, the stove has now become a show of prestige among the Congolese women.

"It has empowered women, majority of whom were once refugees. The customers include schools, non-governmental organisations, vendors in Kinshasa and other parts of Congo," said Ms Masika.

It is not just the women who are benefitting from Jiko Nguvu Nyeusi. Virunga National Park.

The refugees escaping conflict were joined by people from the rural areas. Before long, Goma was choking with unprecedented number of people.

In a couple of months, the surrounding forests started feeling the pressure from the population and soon enough, Virunga National Park was losing its trees to charcoal burners.

"It was very hard to get charcoal and firewood to cook so they invaded the Virunga National Park for the same," said Console'e Kavira, head of Better Forests, a project of the World Wide Fund for Nature Central Africa region.

North Kivu has more than eight million people living near the Virun-



Use of the Jiko Nguvu Nyeusi stove has contributed to a decrease in charcoal consumption, reduced deforestation at the park."

DEVELOPMENT



Reprofa boss Françoise Masika paints a charcoal-efficient stove at her shop. The stoves have eased the pressure on Virunga National Park.

Picture: Sophie Mbugua

ga National Park in Lubero, Masisi, Beni, Rutshuru, Nyiragongo and Walikale territories.

A way to help reduce the level of deforestation at the park had to be found. Eco-Makala (DRC Swahili for charcoal), a project fronted by WWF was born and introduced Jiko Nguvu Nyeusi, the efficient wood stoves.

"This has contributed to a decrease in charcoal consumption, reduced deforestation at the park and saved households money for households. It's also creating jobs through production and sales of the stoves," says Kavira.

According to a member of the project, one sack in 2008 was \$35 but it is now going for \$30 for the charcoal sourced at the Virunga na-

tional park as its perceived as more strong since its made of indigenous trees.

The project, involving 20 groups with 304 members — 57 men and 247 women — has produced over 73,000 fuel-efficient cook stoves and sold over 58,000.

Kavira says, the use of the improved stoves has reduced in-house pollution. The stoves do not emit too much smoke compared with the previous stoves. According to the World Health Organisation, exposure to smoke from traditional cook stoves and open fires causes four million premature deaths annually, with women and young children the most affected. This will not be the case in