



The impact of improved clay firesides on our household in Bamenda town, North West Province.

It has been interesting to see how simple ideas can bring such positive change. When we were first told about these improved stoves, we just couldn't believe it. We wondered how clay, lying around our plains and valleys, could suddenly be the solution to our people's cooking problems.

We received the first version of our improved fireside from local potters who copied what they saw in photographs from the north of the country. The first attempt was not very good. Soon after, an improved model was made. It was almost smokeless and we were cooking faster than ever, using less wood.

My wife and I soon discovered the stoves had changed everything for the better. The cooking of fufu corn, gari and water fufu- staple foods, that on an open fire normally needed two people to prepare them, one to hold the cooking pot firmly in place while the other stirs and 'turns,' now needed just one person! No one was burning fingers holding a hot pot. This was magical to us. Next we noticed that the scalding heat that came from the iron stove we had used before simply didn't exist with this new one. The clay stoves were great. After five days the previous kitchen arrangement of our old saw dust fuelled iron stove, along with her three-stone (open fireplace) sister were abandoned. We even gave away a big bag of our left over saw dust to a neighbour.



Meanwhile our friends, neighbours and relatives who visited, and those we talked to, caught the clay-stove fever almost immediately. We gave stoves to them to try. Their response was unanimous – that the stoves were a wonderful solution to their cooking problems. More and more people were calling or visiting just to know about the clay stoves. We had been made famous by this great idea.



There's the case of a family friend who came visiting while we were out. When she saw the stoves, she decided with her husband to suspend their journey to Kumba (400 miles away) that morning. Reason? To wait for us to return so that they can get a stove. We gave her one. On their arrival the following morning, she called and told my wife that she'd carried the heavy stove on her lap all night like a baby, from Bamenda to Kumba! Results? Of course, she said that she'd cooked her family breakfast on her arrival and that everyone was pleasantly surprised at the short time she took to cook.

Now we have a refined new model that is ideal. It is heavier, so stable when we are 'turning' fufu and gari, properly fired, so doesn't crack and holds the bigger pots most households use. It's height makes it easier to cook on, and it is a lot more beautiful to behold. Some are big enough to take the very largest cooking pots, good for occasions, women who cook and sell, and big households, others have been designed for frying garri. They are so tough that when talking to interested people, I knock it with a little stick and it sounds like a heavy bell!



A visitor enjoyed 'turning' fufu corn on one stove, while a wire mesh put over another, to the left, grilled chicken brilliantly.



Other advantages of these stoves

- Less wood is used (half the quantity of a three stone fireplace), reducing a major household expense in urban households, and the heavy work that normally falls on women and children, of collecting and carrying wood in rural homes.
- The stove holds enough heat to heat water or cook sauce even after the fire has been removed.
- During cooking it is not necessary to fix or blow the fire frequently, using hard wood the pot can be placed, and the fire will take care of itself for 15 or 20 minutes.