SCHOOLS' CLEAN COOKING COMPETITION

2025 REPORT

National Renewable Energy Platform

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Executive Summary

The inaugural Schools' Clean Cooking Competition, also known as the Renewable Energy Competition 2025 (REC25), held on the 11th of September, 2025 at Silver Springs Hotel, Bugolobi, Kampala, marked significant milestone in Uganda's national efforts to advance safe, efficient and sustainable cooking technologies through youth-led behavioural change. Convened under the leadership of the National Renewable Energy Platform (NREP) in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD) and StepUp Standard Ltd, with support the UK Government through the Modern Energy Cooking Services (MECS) Programme, the competition brought together over 300 participants, including secondary school students, university youth, teachers, government officials, development partners, energy-sector professionals and national media. This broad participation underscored the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration and the central role of youth as catalysts for Uganda's clean cooking transition.

The competition adopted a multi-format, experiential learning approach, combining essay writing, live cooking demonstrations using Electric Pressure Cookers (EPCs), drama and skit performances and extensive media engagement. These activities were designed to raise awareness, shift perceptions and build practical competencies around clean cooking solutions, including EPCs, LPG cookers and improved biomass stoves. Through hands-on participation and creative expression, students critically examined household cooking practices, explored health, environmental, cultural and economic barriers to clean cooking adoption and proposed locally relevant solutions for accelerating the uptake of modern cooking technologies.

A key strength of the competition was its role as a platform for policy-aligned and multi-stakeholder engagement. Collaboration among NREP, MEMD, UK Aid, STEPUP Standard, the Uganda National Alliance on Clean Cooking (UNAAC) and national media houses including NTV Uganda and Capital FM Uganda ensured strong technical guidance, operational support, national visibility and alignment with Uganda's clean cooking and energy transition priorities. Students, youth and teachers also benefited from direct interaction with energy experts, policymakers and practitioners, strengthening the relevance and credibility of the learning experience.

The competition revealed high levels of youth creativity, analytical thinking and problem-solving capacity. Essay submissions demonstrated strong understanding of environmental impacts, public health risks and policy dimensions of clean cooking, while drama and skit performances translated these issues into relatable community narratives that highlighted the dangers of traditional cooking fuels and the benefits of cleaner alternatives. Live cooking demonstrations provided first-hand exposure to EPCs, enabling students to experience their safety, efficiency, time-saving and environmental benefits and helping to demystify modern cooking technologies.

One of the most significant outcomes of the initiative was the identification and empowerment of student clean cooking champions. These students are now better equipped to act as early adopters, peer educators and advocates for clean cooking within their schools, households and communities. The combination of national media coverage and development partner engagement

further extended the reach of youth-led messages beyond the event itself, laying a foundation for scalable advocacy and sustained behavioural change.

While the competition faced operational challenges including; school mobilisation during holidays, coordination across multiple activity streams, procurement pressures and a brief electricity outage, these were effectively managed through adaptive planning and strong stakeholder collaboration. Importantly, the challenges generated valuable learning that informed clear recommendations for future programme design, including improved scheduling, enhanced preparation and mentorship, decentralised regional competitions, stronger contingency planning and sustained post-event engagement.

Overall, the Schools' Clean Cooking Competition made a meaningful contribution to Uganda's clean cooking transition by increasing awareness, shaping positive youth attitudes, strengthening practical skills and positioning young people as long-term champions for sustainable cooking solutions. The initiative demonstrated that schools are strategic platforms for clean cooking advocacy and that experiential, youth-led approaches supported by strong partnerships and media engagement can play a critical role in accelerating the adoption of clean, safe and efficient cooking technologies at household and community levels.

1. Mission Objectives

1.1 Primary Objectives

The Schools' Clean Cooking Competition was strategically designed to achieve multiple objectives that collectively contribute to Uganda's national clean cooking agenda. These are:

1. To promote behavioral change among youth towards the adoption of clean cooking technologies, with a particular focus on Electric Pressure Cookers (EPCs) and improved biomass stoves.
2. To establish schools as active ambassadors of clean cooking by leveraging students' creativity, communication skills and peer networks.
3. To strengthen partnerships with different stakeholders like the government, development partners private sectors and media outlets.
4. To encourage innovation in clean energy communication.

1.2 Expected Outputs

The Schools' Clean Cooking Competition was designed to produce a variety of clear and measurable outputs that would advance both youth engagement and Uganda's clean cooking agenda.
The event aimed at broadening the understanding among students and educators on the economic, environmental and health advantages of modern cooking methods, such as Electric Pressure Cookers (EPCs). By incorporating live demonstrations and leveraging media coverage, participants experienced firsthand the benefits of safer, more efficient and cost-effective cooking. Prominent media outlets, including NTV Uganda and Capital FM, amplified these lessons by broadcasting live segments, conducting interviews with participants and producing post-event features, thereby extending the reach of these educational messages nationwide.

The competition aimed to recognize and cultivate student leaders who could serve as champions for clean cooking within their schools and communities. These student champions are intended to act as influencers and mentors, promoting sustainable cooking practices among peers and family members. The exposure through national media further elevated their visibility, motivating them to continue advocacy efforts beyond the competition.

The initiative was intended to reinforce collaborations among educational institutions, government bodies, development organizations, private sectors and media partners. The competition further ensured technical guidance, operational support and widespread dissemination of clean cooking messages. The involvement of NTV and Capital FM enhanced public awareness and created a ripple effect, helping the messages resonate with audiences beyond the immediate participants.

The competition was designed to capture youth insights on clean cooking challenges and solutions. Through essays, skits and hands-on cooking sessions, students expressed perspectives on adoption barriers, practical opportunities and innovative approaches. This documentation provides critical input for shaping future programs, influencing policy and refining behavioral change strategies, ensuring that the perspectives of young people are integrated into Uganda's broader clean cooking initiatives.

2. Participation Summary

The Schools' Clean Cooking Competition, also referred to as the Renewable Energy Competition 2025 (REC25) brought together a diverse and vibrant group of participants, reflecting a broad cross-section of Uganda's youth, educators, government actors, development partners and civil society stakeholders. A total of over 300 individuals attended and participated in the event, encompassing students, teachers, judges, ministry officials, media personnel and representatives from partner organizations engaged in energy, climate and youth development initiatives.

From the education sector, the competition attracted students from more than twelve secondary and primary schools across multiple districts. Key participating schools included Namilyango Junior Boys, Namilyango College, Mengo Senior School, Makerere College School, Gayaza High School, Rwamwanja Secondary School, Mbarara High School, St. Henry's College Kitovu, Kasese Secondary School, Masaka Secondary School, Lubiri Secondary School, Nabbingo College, Luigi Giussani School and St. Mary's College Rushoroza. These schools were represented by students with a keen interest in renewable energy, environmental sustainability and community advocacy.

In addition to student participants, the competition engaged teachers and mentors who accompanied their schools. Their presence not only supported the students but also facilitated ongoing knowledge transfer and the integration of clean cooking advocacy within school programs. The event also featured a strong representation of national and international organizations working in energy, climate, youth development and humanitarian sectors. Invited partners included **CREEC, National Youth Council of Uganda, ICLEI, GGGI, Mercy Corps, FAO, PSFU, EU, FCDO, MEMD, UN Women, OPEN CAPITAL, UNHCR, IOM, CARE, Last Mile Climate, WWF, SNV, GIZ, Makerere University Business School, Makerere University, Uganda Christian University, Beyond the Grid Fund for Africa,** etc.

Attendees listening in to insights from the different partners at the Schools Clean Cooking Competition

These organizations provided technical guidance, shared best practices, offered mentorship and strengthened collaboration between schools and broader clean cooking initiatives. Their participation created opportunities for networking, cross-learning and the identification of potential partnerships to sustain the momentum generated by the competition. The geographical diversity of the participating schools ensured a rich mix of perspectives, reflecting regional variations in access to clean cooking technologies, cultural practices and energy-use behaviors. This allowed the organizers to capture a comprehensive understanding of youth perceptions of clean cooking, which will inform future program interventions at both district and national levels. Overall, the participation narrative underscores the multi-stakeholder nature of the competition, highlighting the convergence of young voices, educational institutions, government leadership and development partners working collaboratively to promote safe, efficient and sustainable cooking practices across Uganda.

Category	Details	Notes
Participating Schools & Districts	1. Namilyango Junior Boys 2. Namilyango College 3. Mengo Senior School 4. Makerere College School 5. Gayaza High School 6. Rwamwanja Secondary School 7. Mbarara High School 8. St. Henry's College Kitovu 9. Kasese Secondary School 10. Masaka Secondary School 11. Lubiri Secondary School 12. Nabbingo College 13. Luigi Giussani School 14. St. Mary's College Rushoroza	Schools sent teams of students to participate in essays, cooking demonstrations and drama/skits.
Student Participants	Over 250 students representing the 14 schools	Each school sent 10–20 students depending on category participation (essay, skit, cooking). Gender representation was approximately balanced with efforts to ensure both male and female students were equally represented.
Teacher / Mentor Participants	30 teachers/mentors	Teachers accompanied students to guide them during the competition and support follow-up initiatives, including the establishment of Clean Cooking Clubs.
Judges / Panelists	12 experts from education, energy and media sectors	Provided technical oversight and scoring across essay, cooking and drama competitions.
Invited Organizations / Partners	1. CREEC 2. National Youth Council of Uganda 3. ICLEI 4. GGGI 5. Mercy Corps 6. FAO 7. PSFU 8. EU 9. FCDO 10. MEMD 11. UN Women 12. OPEN CAPITAL 13. UNHCR 14. IOM 15. CARE International 16. Last Mile Climate 17. WWF 18. SNV 19. GIZ 20. BGFA	Representatives attended to provide mentorship, share knowledge and strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Media Coverage	NTV Uganda, Capital FM	Covered live events, interviews and post-event highlights to amplify youth-led advocacy messages and the overall clean cooking agenda.
Total Participation	300+ participants	Inclusive of students, teachers, judges, invited guests and media representatives.

3. Activity Summary

The Schools' Clean Cooking Competition 2025, held at Silver Springs Hotel in Bugolobi, Kampala, was a comprehensive national initiative aimed at engaging youth in clean cooking behavioral change campaign, renewable energy awareness and practical skills development. The competition brought together over 300 participants, including students, teachers, judges, ministry officials, media personnel and representatives from implementing partners. It consisted of three main activity sessions: Essay Writing, Cooking Demonstrations (Electric Pressure Cooker - EPC) and Drama/Skit Presentations, alongside media and partner engagement for national amplification of messages.

The sessions were designed to foster knowledge transfer, creativity, hands-on learning and behavioral change among youth. Through competitions, participants were able to explore issues surrounding household smoke reduction, climate change, sustainable energy and the social and economic benefits of clean cooking technologies.

3.1 Essay Writing Competition

Essay Writing Competition was coordinated by STEP UP Standard Limited and engaged students from primary, secondary, tertiary and out-of-school youth institutions across Uganda. The session began with an introduction to the competition objectives and a detailed explanation of the marking criteria. Participants were guided on how to approach their essays, focusing on youth perceptions of clean cooking, climate change and sustainable energy solutions.

The event aimed to create a platform where young people could critically analyze renewable energy challenges and propose practical, community-centered solutions. In total, 186 essays and poems were submitted and all were shortlisted for review, reflecting the high level of interest, creativity and engagement from students nationwide. The districts involved were Kampala, Masaka, Mbarara, Mubende, Wakiso, Kamwenge, Kabale among others.

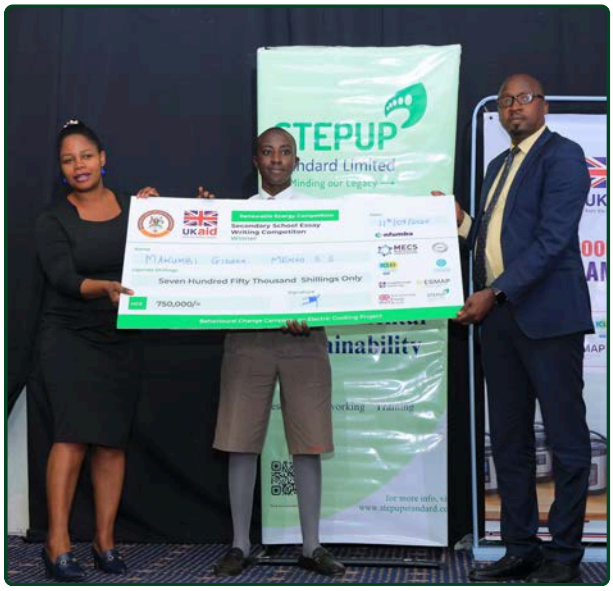
The primary objectives of the Essay Competition were to train youth on national and global renewable energy issues, create platforms for youth expression and idea-sharing, promote knowledge transfer on climate change and sustainable energy and foster networking among students and institutions. Through these objectives, the competition sought to enhance both individual skills and collective understanding of sustainable energy adoption among Uganda's youth.

A diverse range of schools and youth institutions participated in the competition;

- **Primary & Secondary Schools:** Namilyango Junior Boys, Namilyango College, Mengo Senior School, Makerere College School, Gayaza High School, Rwamwanja SS, Mbarara High School, St. Henry's College Kitovu, Kasese Secondary School, Masaka Secondary School, Lubiri SSS, Nabbingo College, Luigi Giussani School – Kamuli, St. Mary's College Rushoroza – Kabale.

- **Higher Institutions of Learning:** MUBS, Makerere University, MUST, Kyambogo University, Gulu University, Mountain of the Moon University, Liyazi Institute, Monac University.

- **Participants Highlighted:** Nakayenga Josephine (Namilyango Junior Boys), Kibuuka Moses (Namilyango Junior Boys), Ayebare Moses (St. Mary's College Rushoroza), Tukamushaba Selestine (Rwamwanja SS), Ssebwana Christopher (Namilyango JBS), Ssemaganda Vianney (Makerere College), Babirye Harriet (Masaka SS) and Ainembabazi Peace (Uganda Christian University).



Skits competition award by Ms. Lydia Nandawula & Dr. Brain Isabirye

The panel reviewers commended the quality, effort and authenticity reflected in the essays and other competition entries. Dr. Sarah Namirembe, Team Lead at STEPUP, noted that the essays were of high quality and carried lasting value, comparing their preservation to that of the Bible. She highlighted one essay on clean cooking that told the story of a mother who stayed up late to ensure food was ready, but in the process suffered health effects from smoke exposure. The story further drew attention to environmental impacts and policy solutions to support clean cooking, stressing that while the need to transition is clear, traditional cooking methods remain dominant and more sensitization is required. She said this was the very essence of the essays: authenticity and realism.

> ***Ms. Shifa Mulumba added that "the inclusion of cultural perspectives made some essays especially engaging. She explained that essays were reviewed more than twice to ensure fairness and accuracy in marking. She also advised those progressing to the next round to avoid plagiarism and refrain from exaggerating figures."***
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> ***Dr. Nasta Babirye expressed her appreciation for both the turnout and the quality of essays presented. She pointed out that while some referencing gaps were noticed, citations in the text did not appear in the reference list, but the overall attention to detail was impressive. She said she was looking forward to seeing the same quality and effort in future rounds and competitions.***

They provided detailed feedback, praising the authenticity, originality and practical solutions in the essays. Several essays illustrated real-life scenarios, such as mothers suffering from smoke exposure while cooking, environmental degradation and proposed policy solutions to encourage cleaner cooking practices. Judges also commended the inclusion of cultural perspectives, noting that it made the essays more engaging. Multiple rounds of review were conducted to ensure fairness and accuracy in scoring. The marking process included giving two different essay questions for students and youth participants, using a unified marking guide and selecting top essays in two rounds with final scores averaged across reviewers.

The impact of the Essay Writing Competition was significant. Students reported improved understanding of energy transition and environmental protection. Many schools implemented clean energy solutions following the competition: Gayaza High School adopted biogas for cooking and lighting, Makerere College School introduced Electric Pressure Cookers in their Food & Nutrition department for practical lessons and Lwigi Disani School fully relied on solar energy and LPG for their cooking needs. Also, participants enhanced their research, writing and advocacy skills, enabling them to promote clean cooking solutions in their schools and communities effectively.

Group photo of Essay Writing Participants

3.2 Clean Cooking Competition

The Renewable Energy Cooking Competition 2025 was officiated by Dr. Nicholas Mukisa, who welcomed participating schools with inspiring remarks that set a tone of enthusiasm, collaboration and healthy competition. In his address, Dr. Mukisa encouraged students to embrace teamwork, creativity and a spirit of learning throughout the event. The competition was designed to provide students with practical, hands-on exposure to modern, energy-efficient cooking technologies particularly Electric Pressure Cookers (EPCs) while reinforcing key principles of safety, efficiency and applied culinary skills. Participants were comprehensively briefed on the competition structure, rules, phases and evaluation criteria to ensure fairness, transparency and effective participation.

The competition was organized into multiple phases, each intended to assess participants' culinary skills, creativity and teamwork under real-time conditions. In the initial rounds, students prepared matooke (steamed green bananas) and beef, followed by a second round in which participants cooked posho and beans. These preliminary stages served both as a skills assessment and as a learning opportunity, allowing students to demonstrate their understanding of EPC use while engaging actively with judges and audience members. The interactive nature of the rounds enhanced learning outcomes and fostered greater appreciation of modern cooking technologies.

To ensure balanced assessment and diversity of perspectives, participants worked in teams comprising a maximum of six students each, representing a competing school per round. Round One featured Gayaza High School, Namilyango College, St. Mark's College Namagoma, St. Henry's College Kitovu and Mengo Senior School, while Round Two included Gayaza High School, Luigi Giussani High School, St. Mark's College Namagoma, Makerere College School, Kasese Secondary School and Mengo Senior School. Each team was evaluated against standardized criteria, with scores from each round averaged to determine the schools advancing to subsequent stages.

Following the first round, Mengo Secondary School and St. Henry's College Kitovu emerged as the top-performing schools, earning advancement to the next phase. In the second round, Mengo Secondary School and Gayaza High School qualified as finalists. The final challenge required participants to prepare pilau (brown rice) and chicken, which was presented to the judges for tasting and evaluation. Scores for each round were calculated by averaging the judges' assessments, ensuring a fair and transparent scoring process.

A student participates in the cooking competition

Throughout the competition, students displayed remarkable focus, enthusiasm and technical skill as they prepared ingredients, operated EPCs and adhered to safety and energy-efficiency standards under close observation by the judges. A brief ten-minute electricity outage posed a minor challenge; however, the situation was effectively managed through schedule adjustments, with the participants being encouraged to remain calm and motivated. Audience members actively followed the proceedings, offering reflections that praised the contestants' confidence, creativity and effective use of modern cooking technologies as the judges moved continuously between stations, providing guidance, monitoring techniques and ensuring consistent application of evaluation standards.

In the second phase of the competition, schools were grouped into two category rounds. In the first category round, Mengo Secondary School competed against St. Henry's College Kitovu, with Mengo emerging as the winner. In the second category round, Mengo Secondary School faced Gayaza High School, where Gayaza secured the win. Feedback sessions and interactive Q&A discussions allowed teachers, mentors and audience members to engage directly with participants, providing encouragement and reinforcing best practices in clean and efficient cooking. This participatory approach strengthened students' confidence and deepened their understanding of sustainable cooking principles.

At the closure of the competition, winners were formally announced and awarded monetary prizes generously supported by UK Aid in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development. These awards recognized not only culinary excellence, but also teamwork, resilience and commitment to promoting clean cooking solutions. Participants were congratulated and encouraged to continue championing energy-efficient cooking practices within their schools and wider communities.

POSITION	SCHOOL	PRIZE (UGX.)	AWARD PROVIDED BY	REMARKS
1ST	Mengo Secondary School	1,000,000	UK Aid & MEMD	Recognized for culinary excellence, teamwork and advocacy
2ND	St. Henry's College Kitovu	750,000	UK Aid & MEMD	Commended for skill, resilience and engagement
3RD	Gayaza High School	300,000	UK Aid & MEMD	Acknowledged for creativity, efficiency and clean cooking promotion

Students participate in the cooking competition

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3RD	Gayaza High School	300,000	UK Aid & MEMD	Acknowledged for creativity, efficiency and clean cooking promotion

3.3 Drama and Skit Presentations

The Renewable Energy Skits and Drama Competition provided a dynamic and engaging platform through which secondary school students explored and communicated the realities of clean cooking in everyday Ugandan households. Students from a wide range of schools including Luigi Giussani High School, Gayaza High School, St. Henry's College Kitovu, Masaka Secondary School, Mbarara High School, Makerere College School, Mengo Senior School, St. Mark's College Namagoma and Kasese Secondary School delivered short dramatic performances that blended creativity, humour and social commentary.

The programme opened with remarks from sector leaders who commended the students' creativity and encouraged continued engagement in clean-cooking advocacy. Each school was allocated a five-minute performance slot, within which they were challenged to balance entertainment with realism and clear messaging. Judges assessed performances based on clarity of message, teamwork, stage management, creativity and the accuracy of clean-cooking concepts presented.

Each skit centred on the theme of clean cooking and vividly portrayed the lived experiences of families dependent on firewood and charcoal. Through role play and storytelling, students illustrated the physical and social burdens associated with traditional cooking methods, including persistent coughing, respiratory discomfort, watery eyes and the long hours spent collecting firewood. These scenes were deliberately contrasted with depictions of cleaner cooking alternatives such as liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), electric pressure cookers and energy-efficient stoves, highlighting their potential to improve health, save time and reduce environmental pressure.

Beyond entertainment, the performances engaged with the deeper, structural challenges affecting the adoption of clean cooking solutions. Several skits addressed issues of affordability, safety concerns around electricity and the perceived convenience of charcoal. Importantly, these challenges were presented alongside practical and locally grounded solutions, including flexible payment arrangements, school-led sensitisation initiatives, community-based maintenance models and partnerships with public and private stakeholders to expand access to clean energy technologies. By weaving factual messaging into creative expression, the skits functioned as a powerful public-awareness tool and stimulated dialogue on youth-led advocacy for sustainable energy transitions.

In closing, the competition was praised as a well-executed and impactful initiative that successfully combined arts-based engagement with energy education. The organisers and partners were acknowledged for creating a space where young people could meaningfully contribute to national conversations on clean cooking. The skits and drama competition not only celebrated student creativity and collaboration, but also demonstrated the critical role of youth-led advocacy in advancing Uganda's transition toward safer, cleaner and more sustainable cooking solutions.

Students participate in the skit category (Makerere College, Gayaza High School and Namilyango College)

POSITION	SCHOOL	AWARD/ PRIZE	AWARD PROVIDED BY	REMARKS
1ST	Masaka Secondary School	Certificate and Money	UK Aid & MEMD	Recognized for creativity, clarity of message and teamwork
2ND	St. Henry's College Kitovu	Certificate and Money	UK Aid & MEMD	Commended for practical messaging and performance skills
3RD	Gayaza High School	Certificate and Money	UK Aid & MEMD	Acknowledged for innovation, engagement and clean cooking advocacy

3.4 Media and Partner Engagement

The National Renewable Energy Platform (NREP), working closely with the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD), provided strategic oversight and policy guidance, ensuring alignment with national energy transition goals and clean cooking priorities. Their leadership positioned the competition as a meaningful youth engagement initiative contributing to Uganda's broader clean cooking agenda.

UK Aid supported the competition through financial and technical inputs that enabled effective delivery, including materials, coordination and prizes. This support strengthened behavioral change efforts and amplified youth-led advocacy for sustainable cooking solutions.

STEP UP led coordination, technical facilitation and documentation, ensuring all activities aligned with the NREP Behaviour Change Communication framework. The organisation also supported logistics, judging processes and knowledge capture to inform sustained youth engagement.

Media partners expanded national visibility, with NTV Uganda providing live and feature coverage and Capital FM Uganda facilitating interactive radio discussions that reinforced clean cooking messages and community dialogue.

The Uganda National Alliance on Clean Cooking (UNACC) provided technical assistance during the cooking competition, offering expertise on the Electric Pressure Cookers, safety standards and best practices to support accurate demonstration and assessment of modern cooking methods.


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4. Key Findings

The Schools' Clean Cooking Competition demonstrated strong youth engagement with modern cooking technologies, particularly Electric Pressure Cookers (EPCs). Through essays, hands-on cooking demonstrations and drama/skit performances, students showed a clear understanding of the health, environmental and economic benefits of clean cooking, as well as the ability to communicate these benefits effectively to peers and communities. The competition revealed both the opportunities for youth-led advocacy driven by experiential learning, creativity and media amplification and the persistent barriers to adoption, including cost, safety perceptions, reliability concerns and entrenched cultural practices. Overall, the findings highlight schools as strategic platforms for clean cooking awareness and underscore the value of coordinated multi-stakeholder engagement in advancing behavioral change.

THEME	KEY FINDINGS / OBSERVATIONS	OPPORTUNITIES / RECOMMENDATIONS
YOUTH AWARENESS & PERCEPTIONS	High enthusiasm for EPCs and improved biomass stoves; strong understanding of health, environmental and financial benefits; effective communication through essays, skits and cooking demonstrations.	Leverage youth as clean cooking ambassadors; expand experiential and creative learning platforms in schools and communities.
BARRIERS TO ADOPTION	High upfront costs for EPCs or LPG stoves; safety concerns around electrical appliances; intermittent electricity supply; durability concerns in rural areas; habitual reliance on firewood and charcoal.	Introduce financing or subsidy mechanisms; provide safety training; conduct sustained awareness campaigns addressing cultural norms.
PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATIONS	Hands-on cooking sessions enabled students to connect theory with practice; skits illustrated real household challenges and practical solutions.	Scale school-based demonstrations and peer-to-peer learning models.
MEDIA & VISIBILITY	National amplification of youth messages through NTV Uganda and Capital FM Uganda.	Strengthen media partnerships; expand digital dissemination of youth-led clean cooking messages.
YOUTH CREATIVITY & PROBLEM SOLVING	Drama and skits highlighted innovative solutions such as school awareness drives, peer mentorship and community initiatives.	Encourage continuous youth participation in creative advocacy platforms; integrate youth-led solutions into community clean cooking programmes.
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION	Collaboration among National Renewable Energy Platform, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, UK Aid, Uganda National Alliance on Clean Cooking, STEP UP Standard and media partners strengthened technical guidance, visibility and outreach.	Institutionalise collaboration for long-term clean cooking advocacy and sustainability.
FOLLOW-UP & SUSTAINABILITY	Strong interest in continued engagement; enhanced research, advocacy and practical skills among students.	Implement post-event EPC training, mentorship for student champions, digital dissemination of outputs and future awareness campaigns.

5. Challenges and Mitigation Measures

The Schools' Clean Cooking Competition, held at Silver Springs, successfully brought together schools from across the country to promote youth engagement in clean cooking technologies and advocacy. While the event achieved its learning and participation objectives, a number of operational, logistical and capacity-related challenges emerged during planning and implementation. These challenges ranging from school mobilization during holidays to first-time exposure to modern cooking technologies, provided valuable learning opportunities. Timely mitigation measures, including adaptive scheduling, targeted communication, technical support and participant orientation, were applied to ensure smooth execution of the competition while preserving safety, inclusivity and educational value. The Table below summarizes the key challenges encountered and the mitigation measures applied or recommended for future iterations.

CHALLENGE	DESCRIPTION	MITIGATION MEASURES
MOBILISATION DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS	School closures limited availability of teachers and students; some schools withdrew after initial confirmation.	Schedule events during school term; notify schools at least one month in advance; assign focal teachers; facilitate transport where holiday participation is unavoidable.
MOTIVATION AND PARTICIPATION MINDSET	Some students focused primarily on winning rather than learning and teamwork.	Integrate motivational sessions and ice-breakers; emphasise certificates and non-monetary recognition; introduce mentorship from past participants; highlight all teams in media coverage.
APPLYING FEEDBACK FOR IMPROVEMENT	Students were unfamiliar with formal competition feedback and struggled to apply it effectively.	Conduct follow-up training on feedback use; establish school mentorship clubs; provide simplified feedback guides; integrate clean energy topics into debate and literacy programmes.
LIMITED EXPOSURE TO WIDER ESSAY OPPORTUNITIES	Students lacked awareness of national and international energy and climate competitions.	Share information on upcoming competitions; partner with education and energy institutions to publicise opportunities; create digital update channels; train teachers to support participation.
ELECTRICITY OUTAGE DURING EPC DEMONSTRATIONS	A brief power outage interrupted cooking demonstration and caused delays.	Provide generator backup; discuss energy resilience during sessions; prepare contingency plans; demonstrate alternative power options where possible.
FIRST-TIME USE OF EPCS AND MODERN APPLIANCES	Many students were unfamiliar with EPC operation, leading to hesitation and minor errors.	Conduct pre-event EPC orientations; share simplified user guides; organise post-event EPC training in schools; establish practice "clean cooking corners."

LIMITED PREPARATION TIME FOR SCHOOLS	Late communication reduced rehearsal and preparation time for essays, skits and cooking.	Share guidelines 4–6 weeks in advance; provide sample essays and skit guidance; conduct virtual pre-orientation sessions; integrate events into school calendars.
TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICAL CONSTRAINTS	Schools from distant districts faced transport delays and limited teacher accompaniment.	Coordinate transport with district offices and CSOs; allow flexible arrival times; consider rotating or central venues; require responsible adult accompaniment.
UNEVEN ACCESS TO RESOURCES	Some schools had prior exposure to EPCs, while others encountered them for the first time.	Provide standardised training for all participants; offer practice sessions before judging; share instructional videos and manuals; consider category-based judging.
VARIATIONS IN ENGLISH AND WRITING SKILLS	Differences between rural and urban schools affected essay quality.	Provide writing guides; encourage internal coaching; host feedback clinics; balance content and writing quality in scoring.
PRESSURE FROM MEDIA PRESENCE	Camera coverage caused nervousness and affected performance quality.	Brief students on media expectations; offer basic media etiquette training; conduct practice interviews; position cameras less intrusively.
LIMITED COOKING SPACE AND EQUIPMENT	Congestion around cooking stations affected safety and judging efficiency.	Increase spacing between stations; limit schools per cook-off round; add safety marshals; use multiple cooking tents.
TIME PRESSURE FROM MULTI-ACTIVITY SCHEDULING	Running essays, skits and cooking in one day led to rushed sessions.	Use a strict agenda; assign timekeepers; consider splitting activities across two days; prepare shortened backup formats.
TEAM COORDINATION AND LEADERSHIP GAPS	Some teams struggled with internal organisation and role clarity.	Encourage pre-event team-building; appoint team leaders; provide teamwork orientation; introduce a "Best Teamwork" recognition.
NOISE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISTRACTIONS	Background noise affected audibility during drama and speeches.	Use directional microphones; create buffer zones; schedule performances during quieter periods; separate drama and cooking areas.
MISINTERPRETATION OF CLEAN COOKING CONCEPTS	Varying understanding of emissions, efficiency and appliance use was observed.	Provide clean cooking fact sheets; conduct technical briefings; display key-message posters; guide judges to correct misconceptions.
LIMITED TEACHER SUPPORT	Some teams lacked adequate teacher supervision, affecting coordination.	Require at least one accompanying teacher; involve teachers in pre-event briefings; define clear teacher roles; promote clean cooking club patrons.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS VS. COMPETITION RESULTS	Some teams expressed disappointment after not winning.	Share transparent judging criteria early; emphasise learning outcomes; provide constructive feedback; award participation certificates.
WEATHER-RELATED CHALLENGES	Heat, wind, or changing weather disrupted outdoor activities.	Use tents and shade; secure equipment; prepare indoor backup spaces; provide hydration and rest breaks.
BALANCING CREATIVITY AND MESSAGING	Some skits prioritised entertainment over clean cooking accuracy.	Provide clear messaging guidelines; review scripts in advance; assess content accuracy separately; conduct pre-event message briefings.

6. Lessons Learned

6.1. Timing and Institutional Coordination Are Critical for Effective School Engagement

One of the most significant lessons emerged from the challenge of mobilising schools during the holiday period. Conducting the competition when schools were closed limited access to students and teachers, delayed confirmations and reduced preparedness, particularly for schools with fewer resources. This demonstrated that youth-focused clean cooking programmes are most effective when embedded within the formal school calendar, where supervision structures, communication channels and student availability are assured. Activities conducted during holidays tend to rely on ad hoc arrangements, which undermines equity and predictability. Future competitions should therefore be scheduled strictly within school terms, aligned with academic calendars and supported by early (4–6 weeks) communication with designated focal teachers to enable adequate planning and inclusive participation across districts.

6.2 Experiential and Creative Learning Drives Deeper Understanding and Behaviour Change

The competition confirmed that interactive learning approaches are far more effective than purely instructional methods. Challenges related to misunderstanding clean cooking concepts, uneven writing skills and difficulty applying judges' feedback were significantly mitigated through hands-on cooking demonstrations, drama/skits and practical engagement with technologies such as Electric Pressure Cookers (EPCs). These formats enabled students to internalise technical concepts, translate them into relatable household experiences and communicate them creatively. This underscores the importance of designing clean cooking programmes that prioritise experiential, participatory and multi-format learning rather than lecture-based sensitisation. Future initiatives should institutionalise practical demonstrations, storytelling and peer learning as core behavioral change tools.

6.3 Motivation and Inclusive Recognition Reduce Anxiety and Improve Participation Quality

Performance anxiety, disappointment among non-winning teams and pressure from media presence highlighted the risks of framing youth programmes too narrowly around competition outcomes. The experience demonstrated that shifting emphasis from "winning" to "learning, participation and improvement" significantly improves confidence, teamwork and overall engagement especially for first-time participants and schools from rural or under-resourced settings. Recognition mechanisms such as certificates, constructive feedback and public acknowledgement proved effective in sustaining motivation. Clean cooking programmes targeting youth should therefore embed inclusive recognition, non-monetary incentives and positive reinforcement to encourage broad participation and reduce performance-related stress.

6.4 Hands-On Exposure Is Essential for Building Confidence in Clean Cooking Technologies

The challenge of first-time EPC use revealed that unfamiliarity with modern cooking appliances remains a major barrier to adoption. Practical exposure during the competition helped demystify EPCs, address safety concerns and correct misconceptions related to electricity use. Students who actively engaged with the technology demonstrated increased confidence and were better able to explain its benefits to others. This highlights the importance of early, guided exposure to clean cooking technologies as a precursor to advocacy and adoption. Going forward, structured EPC orientation sessions, simplified user guides and the establishment of school-based "Clean Cooking Corners" would strengthen familiarity and long-term confidence.

6.4. Partnerships Enhance Credibility, Technical Quality and Outreach

The complexity of coordinating logistics, technical demonstrations, media engagement and judging highlighted the necessity of strong multi-stakeholder collaboration. Partnerships with development partners, technical institutions, government agencies and media significantly strengthened the competition's quality, credibility and visibility, while reducing operational strain on individual actors. This experience reinforces the value of a coordinated ecosystem approach to youth programming, where roles are complementary and expertise is shared. Future initiatives should formalise partnership frameworks early in the planning process and strengthen linkages with education sector stakeholders to embed clean cooking awareness within school systems more sustainably.

6.5 Sustained Post-Event Engagement Is Necessary to Convert Momentum into Impact

Finally, the competition demonstrated that while one-off events can generate enthusiasm and awareness, they are insufficient to drive long-term behavioral change on their own. Without follow-up, challenges such as limited practice opportunities, fading motivation and weak application of learning may persist. Sustainable impact requires continuity through mentorship, structured learning pathways and repeat engagement. Establishing school-based clean energy clubs, mentorship programmes for student champions, digital learning platforms and annual interschool competitions would help transform short-term enthusiasm into a sustained youth-led clean cooking movement.

LESSON LEARNED	IMPLICATION FOR PROGRAMME DESIGN	FUTURE PROGRAMME DESIGN ACTIONS
TIMING AND INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION ARE CRITICAL FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT	School-based programmes are most effective when embedded within formal academic systems and calendars. Ad hoc scheduling undermines equity and preparedness.	· Schedule all competitions and trainings strictly within school terms · Integrate national and district academic calendars into annual planning · Issue invitations and guidelines 4–6 weeks in advance · Establish a standing network of focal teachers per school and district
EXPERIENTIAL AND CREATIVE LEARNING DRIVES DEEPER UNDERSTANDING AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE	Youth internalise clean cooking concepts more effectively through practice, storytelling and participation than through lectures alone.	· Institutionalise multi-format engagement (essays, skits, cooking demos) · Prioritise hands-on EPC use and practical energy demonstrations · Embed student-led storytelling and peer learning as core BCC tools
MOTIVATION AND INCLUSIVE RECOGNITION REDUCE ANXIETY AND IMPROVE PARTICIPATION QUALITY	Overly competitive framing discourages participation and increases anxiety, especially among first-time and rural schools.	· Shift programme framing from "winning" to "learning and participation" · Expand non-monetary recognition (certificates, media features) · Introduce categories such as "Most Improved" or "Best Teamwork" · Share judging criteria clearly and early

HANDS-ON EXPOSURE IS ESSENTIAL FORBUILDING CONFIDENCE IN CLEAN COOKING TECHNOLOGIES	First-time exposure to EPCs and modern appliances significantly reduces fear, safety concerns and misconceptions.	· Conduct pre-event EPC orientation sessions · Develop and distribute simplified EPC user guides · Establish school-based "Clean Cooking Corners" for continued practice · Schedule post-event EPC refresher trainings
PARTNERSHIPS ENHANCE CREDIBILITY, TECHNICAL QUALITY AND OUTREACH	Multi-stakeholder collaboration strengthens legitimacy, technical accuracy and public visibility while reducing operational strain.	· Formalise partnership roles early through MOUs or coordination frameworks · Integrate technical partners into programme design, not just delivery · Engage media partners early to align messaging and coverage · Strengthen collaboration with education-sector institutions
SUSTAINED POST-EVENT ENGAGEMENT NECESSARY TO CONVERT MOMENTUM INTO IMPACT	One-off events generate awareness but are insufficient for long-term behavioral change without continuity and mentorship.	· Establish a "Clean Cooking School Champions Network" · Support formation of school-based clean energy clubs · Develop annual or recurring interschool competitions · Create digital learning platforms and follow-up mentorship pathways

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

The Schools' Clean Cooking Competition demonstrated the transformative potential of youth engagement in accelerating the adoption of clean energy solutions in Uganda. Through a combination of hands-on cooking demonstrations using Electric Pressure Cookers (EPCs), reflective essay writing and creative drama and skit performances, students were able to engage with clean cooking concepts in a practical, interactive and memorable manner. These approaches enabled participants to move beyond theoretical understanding and develop confidence, skills and advocacy capacity around modern, energy-efficient cooking technologies.

While the event encountered several implementation challenges including; delayed school confirmations, coordination across multiple activity components, procurement pressures and a brief electricity blackout interruption, it was successfully executed due to strong collaboration among the various stakeholders and the NREP Secretariat which was the organizing team. This collective effort ensured that the competition met its educational, participatory and advocacy objectives.

Key insights from the competition indicate that school participation is significantly higher when activities are aligned with the academic calendar; youth engagement is strengthened when learning is interactive and complemented by recognition and creativity; and multimedia partnerships greatly enhance visibility, credibility and message reach. The event further demonstrated that hands-on demonstrations are critical for building understanding and trust in energy-efficient appliances such as EPCs and that competitions are most effective when supported by structured preparation and post-event follow-up.

Overall, the competition made a meaningful contribution to Uganda's clean cooking transition by increasing awareness, shaping positive youth attitudes and positioning students as early adopters and ambassadors of clean energy solutions within their households and communities.

7.2 Recommendations

To strengthen future Clean Cooking Schools Competitions and scale their impact, the following recommendations are proposed, organised across key programme design and implementation areas:

7.2.1. Programme Planning and Scheduling

Future clean cooking activities should be planned and implemented strictly within the school academic calendar. Aligning competitions with school terms will improve student availability, strengthen teacher supervision and enhance institutional coordination with school administrations. Early planning and timely communication will also enable schools to integrate competition activities into their internal schedules.

7.2.2. School Preparation, Capacity Building and Mentorship

Structured preparation should be introduced for participating schools to improve confidence, performance quality and learning outcomes. This should include pre-competition orientation clinics, hands-on EPC practice sessions and clear guidance on essay writing and drama/skit development.

Establishing mentorship arrangements; linking experienced participants, teachers and technical partners will further strengthen skill development and sustained engagement.

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7.2.3. Youth Leadership and Sustained Engagement

A Clean Cooking School Champions Network should be established to sustain momentum beyond single-day events. This network would support peer-to-peer learning, continuous advocacy and experience sharing among participating schools. Complementary school-based clean energy clubs and annual interschool engagements would further institutionalise youth leadership in clean cooking advocacy.

7.2.4. Coordination, Logistics and Risk Management

Future competitions should be supported by a strengthened event management framework with clearly defined roles, workstreams and accountability structures. Earlier procurement timelines, improved logistics planning and built-in buffer periods will reduce implementation pressure. In addition, robust contingency planning including backup power solutions should be standard practice to manage unforeseen disruptions.

7.2.5. Media Engagement and Public Visibility

Media partnerships should be expanded and integrated earlier into programme design to maximise visibility and message reach. Continued collaboration with national television, radio and digital platforms will amplify youth voices, reinforce Behaviour Change Communication objectives and position clean cooking as a positive and aspirational choice for households and communities.

7.2.6. Decentralisation and Regional Inclusion

Introducing district-level and regional competitions prior to national finals will widen participation, promote inclusivity and strengthen grassroots awareness. This approach will enable early identification of talent, reduce travel barriers for distant schools and deepen community-level engagement with clean cooking technologies.

7.2.7. Integration into School Systems and Curriculum

Partnerships with the Ministry of Education and Sports should be strengthened to integrate clean cooking concepts into existing school structures. Clean cooking can be embedded within science clubs environmental clubs, home economics and ICT-based learning platforms, ensuring continuity and reinforcing formal learning pathways.

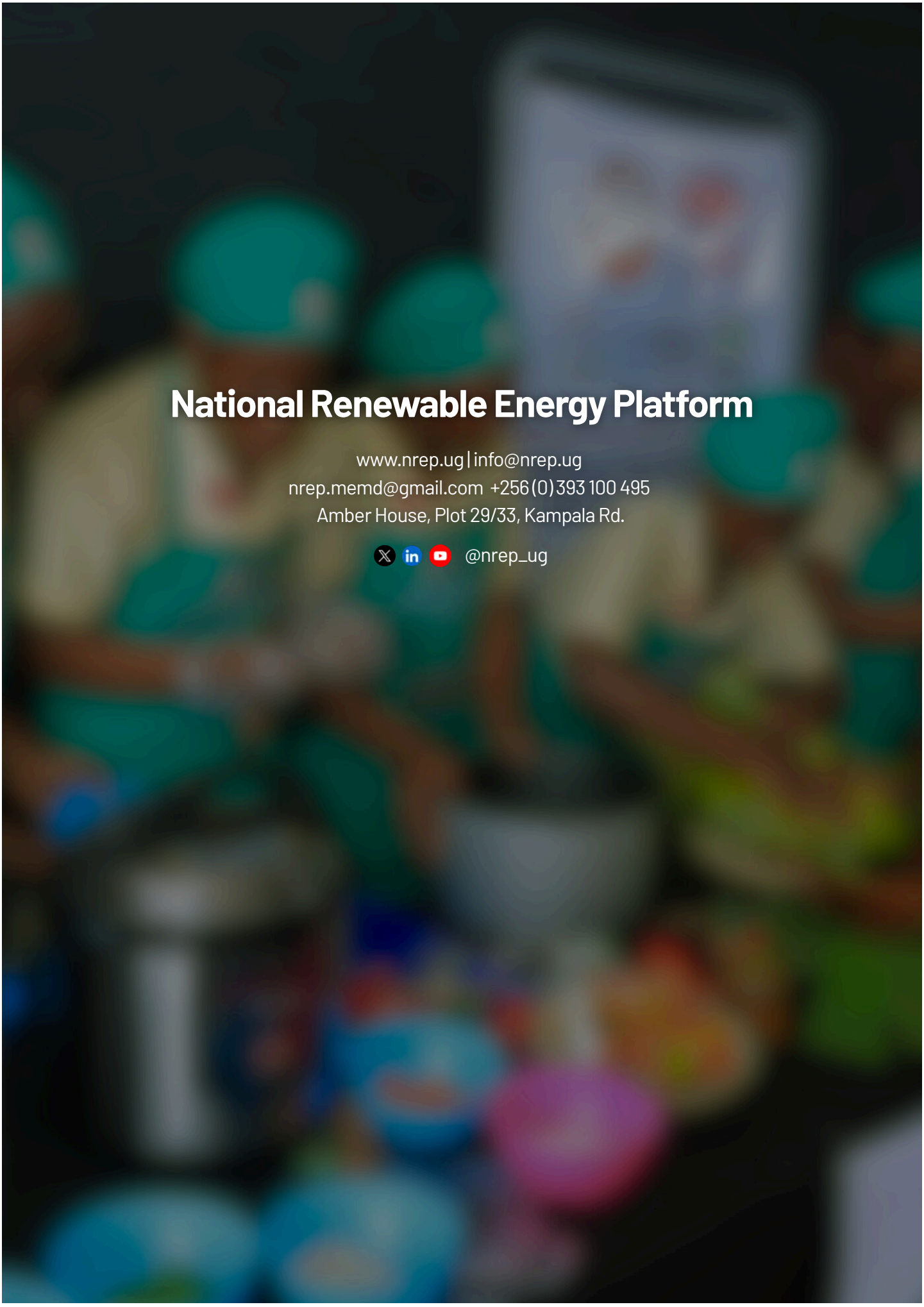
7.2.8. Resource Provision and Practice Opportunities

Participating schools should receive EPCs, ingredients and learning materials well in advance of competitions to allow adequate practice and familiarisation. Establishing designated "Clean Cooking Corners" within schools would provide safe, structured spaces for ongoing practice and learning, reinforcing confidence and long-term adoption of modern cooking technologies.

8. Appendices

8.1 Event Media Reports

- Renewable Energy Competition 2025 Social Media Report
- NREP Cooking Competition Report
- Renewable Energy Competition (E-Cooking)



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