

Voices of MECS

Victoria Komuhangi
Electric Cooking Trainer and Specialist

Interview by Mani Thompson
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Figure 1: showing Victoria Komuhangi (second from left) delivering training on using an Electric Pressure Cooker during an episode of Shamba Shape Up TV programme. Image courtesy of Shamba Shape Up Uganda.



MECS: Please introduce yourself, and tell us what inspired you to become an eCooking advocate?

VK: I am Victoria Komuhangi, an eCooking specialist and advocate and I live in Kampala, Uganda. During my MBA studies I was introduced to subjects such as carbon emissions and carbon sinks, global warming, climate change, sustainability and renewable energy which inspired me on my clean cooking journey.

In Uganda, the biggest contributor to climate change is deforestation, fuelled mostly by charcoal burning. Charcoal is the most common form of cooking energy in urban households. I wanted to find an alternative to charcoal, which was cheaper and easily accessible. This led me to research *electric cooking* and energy saving appliances. I bought an Electric Pressure Cooker and started cooking with it which proved to be very energy efficient, and time saving. My mission as a clean cooking advocate is to increase awareness that there is a cheaper, cleaner, and more convenient alternative to charcoal.

MECS: What cooking fuel did you use before you adopted clean/electric cooking? What impact did it have?

VK: Before cooking with electricity, I used to cook with charcoal and gas. I used charcoal for boiling drinking water, and gas for everything else. Using charcoal creates a smoky atmosphere that is just uncomfortable. It is also not convenient at all, as you have to keep checking to see if the charcoal is still sufficient.

I had a *stove top* pressure cooker for boiling beans, but I had to watch it closely, keep reducing the heat and keep the pressure under control. One time I got distracted and forgot to reduce the heat, next thing I heard was a loud explosion! It was horrible! So, I always had some sort of anxiety while I was using my stove top pressure cooker. In contrast Electric Pressure Cookers regulate the heat and pressure automatically, and they don't need to be monitored closely.



Figure 2: Victoria speaking at the Uganda-UK Clean Cooking Programme Launch in August 2024. Screen shot courtesy of National Renewable Energy Platform (NREP), 2024.

MECS: Tell us more about how you started your business.

VK: I started as an eCooking specialist and trainer in 2020. After giving training sessions, many people would come up to me and ask, "So which *electric cooking appliances* are you selling?", I didn't take it seriously back then and simply directed them to supermarkets where they could purchase the appliances. But there were people who would say they didn't trust themselves to choose the right appliance, and they would feel more comfortable buying from someone they knew.

So, in 2023 I started my online business. I now sell electric pressure cookers, induction cooktops (single zone), electric food steamers, rice cookers and electric kettles, etc. My stock is not that big, but I'm sure it will grow with time. Currently, I buy the appliances from local importers, but in future I would like to become an importer. I am pleased to announce that I now provide free appliance training for those who purchase energy saving appliances from us.

MECS: What type of Ugandan foods do you cook on the Electric Pressure Cooker? Do you have a favourite dish that you cook using EPC?

VK: More than 80% of Ugandan cuisine can be cooked in an EPC, so I cook all sorts of recipes on EPC really; those that need frying, stewing, boiling, or steaming. My favourite dish to make on electric pressure cooker is rice with fried carrots and onions, I just love it, and it's just so tasty when cooked on EPC.

MECS: What's the biggest challenge in urban areas when it comes to clean cooking? And what can be done?

VK: The biggest challenge in urban areas in Uganda is that despite having access to electricity, people still use charcoal for cooking. There is a misconception that electric cooking is expensive and costs far more than charcoal. A lot of people are not aware of energy saving electric cooking appliances. In Uganda, the most common electric cooking appliances are hotplates, but they consume a lot of electricity and are not energy efficient.

We need continuous education and more awareness campaigns on energy saving electric cooking appliances such as EPCs. Regular and interactive shows on national TVs and Radios with eCooking professionals can make a significant impact. The audience should be given the opportunity to voice their fears and concerns about electric cooking, so they can be addressed.

MECS: How affordable is electric Cooking (both for the appliance & their running costs), and how do you address misconceptions about eCooking?

VK: If energy saving appliances are used, electric cooking is the cheapest way to cook when compared with other forms of energy like charcoal. Anyone who can afford a smart phone can also afford electric cooking appliances. In fact, many smart phones are more expensive than Electric Pressure Cookers. People buy smartphones because they know the value that will be added to their lives. So, we need to keep spreading awareness and educating the public about electric cooking using energy saving electric appliances. It's great that we have prepaid electric meters in our homes where actual electricity consumption of the appliances can be monitored and measured. This helps in verifying the units used and dispelling misconceptions about electric cooking being too expensive!



Figure 2: Various settings on an Electric Pressure Cooker. Image courtesy of Shamba Shape Up Uganda.

MECS: Where do you see the future of electric cooking in Uganda? And what can be done to scale up eCooking?

VK: Electric cooking is gaining momentum. In future more households will embrace it, as awareness about energy saving electric appliances spreads. The alternative, i.e., charcoal, has become too expensive and is simply not sustainable. With increased awareness more families will switch to electric cooking. Awareness campaigns through radio, TV and other common forms of mass media will go a long way in reaching more people. MECS Programme is already supporting exhibitions on clean cooking, including the use of electric pressure cookers in different parts of the country. The cooking demos with EPCs at these exhibitions are a great initiative to reach as many people as possible.

MECS: What tips or advice would you give to women who are just starting to transition to electric cooking?

VK: They must ensure that their house is properly wired. The general safety rules regarding the use of electricity have to be observed when using eCooking appliances. It's best to start with one appliance, like an electric pressure cooker and then save for an induction stove if they decide to opt for multiple appliances. EPCs and Induction stoves can cook nearly all Ugandan dishes, except those that need roasting or grilling. I recommend consulting with eCooking professionals before buying, so they can get advice on the right appliance as not all electric cooking appliances are energy saving.

MECS: It's been a great pleasure talking to you Victoria, thank you for your time and all the best with your advocacy work in clean cooking projects.



Figure 3: Victoria Komuhangi, Electric Cooking Trainer and Specialist, Uganda. Image courtesy of Victoria Komuhangi.