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Debating cookstoves: Ensuring clarity, correctness and taking responsibility for the words we choose

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We would like to thank Dr. Abhishek Kar, Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, NYC for taking the time to read and comment on our recent paper, *“Do we need better behaved cooks? Reviewing behavioural change strategies for improving the sustainability and effectiveness of cookstove programs”* [1] and the ERSS editor in chief, Prof. Benjamin Sovacool, for providing us with the space to further advance dialogue regarding the title of the paper. We arguably all benefit as a research community from encouraging processes of critical reflection on, and appraisal of, our research, with a view to fostering positive societal change.

In reading Kar’s Perspective on our work, we acknowledge that our title - or more specifically the first sentence of the title: *“Do we need better behaved cooks?”* – has the likely potential to be misconstrued. We accept that the sentence does not accurately reflect the central arguments made in the article. We agree with Dr Kar when he says that the question *“Do we need better behaved cooks?”* could be taken to imply criticism of the users of cookstoves. This was not intended. As such, we would like to apologize for this ambiguity and for any offence that this has caused to anyone reading our paper.

A primary motivation for this study was based on observations that over the years, end-users of technologies - in this case cooks - are often blamed when the intended beneficial outcomes

of the interventions are not realised [2]. It is in this context that our paper echoes other findings in the field [3–7] and calls for a better understanding of household dynamics and the need to explore cookstove interventions from the perspective of women’s empowerment and inequalities prevalent within the structural context of culture [8–11]. However, we accept that our title’s first sentence obfuscates the essence of our position and argument and for this, we apologize.

Whilst we may not agree entirely with all the inferences made by Dr Kar in his Perspective, we acknowledge to a very significant degree the faults he has highlighted related to the ambiguous use of language. We strongly believe that it is important, as writers, to take responsibility for the words we choose, and it is not the responsibility of the reader to ensure they understand us. Rather, it is our responsibility to ensure the clarity and correctness of our communication and argument. We value how this interaction has prompted us to critically reflect on our own attitudes, perspectives and privileged positions, and how these influence the words we choose to construct our arguments.

We thank Dr Kar for bringing this to our attention and providing us with an opportunity to reflect.

Sincerely,

The authors.

Note: For readers who are only able to access to title and abstract, please do not hesitate in contacting the principal author of the study, Dr Dylan D. Furszyfer Del Rio (d.d.furszyfer-del-rio@sussex.ac.uk), for further engagement and positions regarding the contents of the study.

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