

Cooking, Dancing and Leaving a Legacy, with Rocky Dawuni

Rocky Dawuni is clearly one of Ghana's favorite sons. The passionate musician and performer is also a father and an activist. We were able to spend time with him at the recent [Cookstoves Future Summit](#) in New York, where he tried to teach us a few dance steps and share why he cares about how the world cooks.

"I remember growing up, what it was like for my mum and my aunties to cook and all the cooking smoke on our traditional kitchens." That smoke and related problems (cutting down local trees for firewood, girls spending their days fetching wood instead of going to school, breathing problems and a variety of respiratory diseases) were a wake-up call. "Once I realized the solution lay in having a cleaner version of what they were cooking on, and saw the entrepreneurial possibilities for women's empowerment through local stove industries being established, I was sold."

"I love to cook. My father was a traditional chief in my home community, but he also spent time in the army as a chef. So cooking and good food resonates in my universe. All the boys in my family learned to cook." Rocky's appreciation for the process meant that when he learned about the issues of household air pollution from cooking smoke, he got it right away. "When I saw the numbers – that 4.3 million people die from indoor cooking every year, and 3 billion people still cook by open fire – it would have been criminal to sit on the sidelines."

"A lot of my audience and fans when I started talking about this, they'd ask, what is this cookstoves thing you're working on? I've always championed important issues, anything I feel impacts the health and livelihood of people, I want to shed light on that. As a musician my legacy is how I impact others."

It's not easy to change how we do things. Rocky shared his mom's reaction to shifting the way she cooks – she now uses mostly liquid petroleum gas, and he's been able to explain to her the impact on the environment open fire cooking has. It wasn't an easy process! "But once I convinced my mother, she convinced her friends. It spurred her into action. Gradually the information seeps through society." The younger generation will be more rapid acceptors of change.

"My daughter's generation are sponges for idea exposure. She is part of a culture of awareness that you live your life for the benefit of others. I want to set a good example and create the right environment for her to grow up in. At the same time, she is contributing to my education. We are exchanging ideas and opinions."

Rocky's desire for contribution inspires his music too. His latest song, African Thriller, is a cultural fusion of reggae, soul, African beats. "It's a cultural gumbo!" The song represents conflict and disagreements being worked out by communicating through music and dance. It's a central language to allow people to come together. Above all, it's a celebration of all that is passionate, vibrant and wonderful about the African continent.

"Africa is the mother of all nations and creation. You don't need to go to Africa, you just need to find Africa within you."