



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

Cooking with the sun

Black carbon – the soot produced by cooking stoves and ovens – is often overlooked, when compared to the fumes from industrial plants and automobiles in carbon emissions discussions.

However, the sum of black carbon produced by households every day is drawing interest as a significant source of emissions that requires mitigation action.

Across the Southwest region and other parts of Cameroon where cocoa and coffee production is intensive, wood-fired drying processes can be a major source of black carbon.

The challenge for policy-makers, climate advocates and households is often how to reduce such black carbon production in a way that is not costly or disruptive yet healthy to the environment. The answer may lie in the use of solar stoves and ovens.

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

The Problem: Charcoal Production

Cocoa farmers throughout the Southwest have harnessed the sun's energy to dry their harvest for decades. However, sun drying – using the direct heat from the sun – is often limited by space, since large surfaces are often needed to spread out a large amount of cocoa beans at a time.

As a result, wood-powered ovens or barns have continued to be the main method of drying cocoa, especially during the rainy seasons. The problem with this method is that it produces beans of low quality because smoke often leaves tar in the beans and may affect taste. Secondly, it contributes to the overall emission of black carbon -- especially if the scope and frequency is considered and fuel

related deforestation.

Along with households, agriculture is one of the principal sources of black carbon in Cameroon. Farmers use wood-intensive barns to dry almost any crop. Wood is cheap, readily available but environmentally unsustainable as a source of energy, especially when used on a large scale.

Can solar stoves be the solution then? Many people think so. Solar stoves or cookers work by converting sunlight into heat. Because it requires no fuel and is often very inexpensive, many initiatives are propagating their use across the developing world. Unlike sun drying, they can be designed to serve purposes from small cooking needs to large scale drying.

Activities for Journalists

As part of their academic work, students at the Catholic University in Buea are encouraged to develop innovative solutions to everyday problems.

One area that students there are working in is the production of solar ovens and other alternative energy sources adapted to local reality.

A radio program or series of reports can promote the use of solar stoves and ovens by highlighting work like that conducted by the students of the university. You might also consider inviting experts to talk about the advantages of such methods and how communities can adopt them.

Create several programs to keep each report in sharp focus so as to generate the most interest and better public understanding of the subject.

Each report or program could then be aired every week or depending on how regularly your program airs.

Here are some questions you may ask yourself to find a focus for your individual productions:

- What are solar cookers and how are they transforming the way people cook while mitigating climate change?
- How do solar cookers work? How are they produced? Can local handicraft workers produce these new stoves?
- What is the experience of people already using solar cookers? What benefits do they draw in economic, environmental and culinary terms?
- Is this an opportunity for investment, invention, self-employment, job creation?

The questions you can ask yourselves are limitless but the purpose is to find an interesting angle that can allow you reach more people and generate public interest.

One technique in producing these kinds of stories, especially if the concept is new is to make comparisons with how it is done elsewhere. A link below will introduce you, if that is the case, to the growing concept of “solutions journalism”. It is only one of many ways of conceiving and telling these kinds of stories.

You can also invite students and faculty working on the solar stoves project at the Catholic University to the radio station to discuss the project.

That would be a great opportunity to have listeners ask questions, especially how the technology can be used to solve specific problems they face in their locality.

The idea is to generate interest in the technology by showing how it can be used to solve an actual problem that farmers face while mitigating climate change. For some, it will be an idea to make money by producing solar stoves and building other projects around it.

Useful Links

Solutions Journalism: <http://solutionsjournalism.org/>

More about solar cookers:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_cooker

How solar stoves work and how they are different from sun drying: <http://www.solarcooker-at-cantinawest.com/solarcooking-howitworks.html>

An example of solar cookers in use:
<http://www.borgenmagazine.com/solar-stove-uses-salt-to-stay-hot-after-dark/>

A feature that discusses other energy related innovations as a climate change adaptation process in Cameroon:
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2014/jan/28/cameroon-vulnerable-tackles-climate-change>

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