

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: population growth

Human population is growing rapidly. One billion people are being added to the world every twelve years. This means that about 220,000 people are born per day. (WHO)

Malawi's population has grown rapidly from almost four million in 1966 to nearly 15 million in 2012.

Population growth affects a lot of things in the world – particularly natural resources – such as water, trees and land.

In this week's bulletin we look at how population growth encourages deforestation.

Most of the causes of deforestation, including logging, land conversion to agriculture, wildfires, cutting down trees for firewood, and conflict over land rights tend to be caused by increased population growth and a need for more land mostly for agricultural production (Johnson and Chenje, 2008).

Increased population growth is the primary cause of deforestation in Africa.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To increase knowledge of listeners on how population growth encourages deforestation
- To give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on population growth and the increase in deforestation rates
- To help journalists engage their communities in the search for solutions to population growth and the effects it has on trees

The Problem: Population Growth and Deforestation

As a result of a booming population and, hence, an increase in mouths to feed and the need to make more money, trees are one of the resources that is being strained by the ever growing population.

Trees are important to human life. They clean the air we breathe, combat the greenhouse effect and provide oxygen; among other important benefits.

When a country has too many people tremendous pressure is placed on natural resources. Growing populations mean an increased demand for food, and a corresponding need to convert forests to agricultural land.

With population growth, the demand for fuel wood increases.

Increased demand for fuel wood for household consumption is a primary driver of deforestation. People in Malawi traditionally rely on firewood and charcoal for fuel.

The cutting down of trees affects the soil and results in soil erosion. Soil erosion causes a drop in crop yields.

As cropland is depleted of nutrients through overuse, new land must be cleared to provide fertile farmland for the farmers to feed their families. It becomes an endless cycle with fewer and fewer trees.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand how population growth contributes to deforestation in the country.

Make the following points:

Trees are cut down for many reasons, but most of the reasons relate to money or to people's need to provide for their families.

Farmers cut down trees to provide more room for planting crops or grazing livestock. They will clear the land by cutting down trees and burning them in a process known as "slash and burn" agriculture.

Trees also play a critical role in absorbing the greenhouse gases that fuel global warming. Fewer trees mean larger amounts of greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere—and an increase in the speed and severity of climate change.

However, there are several ways to save the trees from the ever-growing human population.

Encourage your listeners to consider using family planning methods, since population growth is one of the major drivers of deforestation.

Another solution to reducing deforestation is to simply stop cutting down trees – and when trees are cut – to encourage your listeners to plant more trees.

It is important to ensure that the cutting down of trees should be balanced by the planting of enough young trees to replace the older ones.

Encourage your listeners to stop cutting down trees for charcoal or fire wood and to use stoves that do not require a lot of firewood, such as Chitetezo Mbaula. These stoves can use briquettes that are made from recycled materials – such as newspaper, sawdust and peanut shells.

Remind listeners that charcoal use is not just bad for our environment, but also our health. Burning charcoal in cook stoves emits carbon monoxide, which can have significant health and environmental consequences.

Do a Vox Pop with a number of people and talk about the importance of trees.

Have another Vox Pop on how population growth is encouraging deforestation in the country.

Interview a forestry official and discuss how people can go about getting tree seedlings. Ask him which trees are best to plant.

Work with a local NGO or government organization and take part in a tree planting in your community and discuss the many benefits.

Useful Contacts

- Sandra Mapemba; Population Reference Bureau (PRB); Phone: +265(0)999219789
- Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy; Tel: +265 (0) 212 700 104
- Clinton Foundation-(Trees of Hope project):265-1-277-222
- Coder, K. 1996. Identified Benefits of Community Trees and Forests .University of Georgia, Ga., USA.[8]. USDA Forest Service Pamphlet # R1-92-100.
- <http://www.unep.org/dewa/africa/AfricaAtlas/PDF/en/Africa Atlas Full en.pdf>.



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