

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: Climate Change and the Economy

As we've discussed in previous bulletins, Malawi is vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change including droughts and flooding. Both threaten food security, water and natural resources.

Climate change is already having an impact on Malawi's economy – and the situation is likely to get worse because the country relies heavily on its natural resources.

Already, the number of fish being caught in Lake Malawi and in rivers and other streams is declining. The cause is rising temperatures – and many fish species, including the popular Chambo, often don't easily adapt.

Droughts cost the Malawian economy a lot of money in agricultural losses. According to 2010 statistics from the International Food Policy Research, Malawi loses more than one percent of its Gross Domestic Product every year due to floods and droughts. This is equivalent to about ninety-two million Kwacha a year. The GDP is the total value of goods and services produced by Malawi in one year.

When crops are lost from droughts and other disasters, farmers aren't able to harvest enough food and that means they lose money and the country may experience food shortages

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To discuss how climate change affects the economic development of the country
- To discuss how communities can work together to minimize the effects climate change has on the development of the economy
- To give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on climate change and the effects it has on the economy

The Problem: Climate Change has on the economy

In recent years, Malawi has experienced extreme climatic events, ranging from drought and floods. In the early 90's there was a severe drought – followed by heavy floods in the late 1990's.

During severe weather, Malawi's economy is hard hit by crop losses.

Malawi's economy takes such a huge hit because of its dependence on rain-fed agricultural production. Even if crops survive severe weather, farmers may not be able to get those crops to market if roads and bridges are washed out or flooded.

Since about 80 percent of people depend on farming for their livelihoods, unreliable weather patterns and severe weather can cause heavy losses.

While the agriculture sector is directly affected by drought and flooding, other sectors of the economy are also affected.

For example, the ability to generate hydro-electricity is affected. For the past two months Malawi has been experiencing severe power outages. This affects manufacturing companies and other companies that contribute to the development of this country.

Not only are these companies affected by power cuts, if there is a lack of water, some sectors of the manufacturing industry may have to shut down if they rely on water to manufacture their goods.

As you can see, droughts and floods, brought on by climate change, can cause ripple effects throughout Malawi's economy.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand how climate change affects economic development in this country.

In general, the effects of climate change, and specifically drought, are felt across the whole economy – particularly when the agriculture sector accounts for 35 percent of Malawi's economy each year. Mining makes up ten percent of the country's economy. In addition, the farming sector represents 80 percent of all exports in the country. (FAO)

Agro-industries, such as NASFAM, are also affected. If farmers lose their crops, they aren't going to be buying farm products.

So what can be done to minimize some of these effects of climate change? In the past, one of our bulletins looked at how irrigation could help farmers reduce their losses during a drought.

Irrigation will help the farmers to harvest twice or three times a year, since they are not relying on rainfall for crop growth.

There is also need to stop cutting down trees so that the manufacturing companies are not affected by water shortages and power outages.

When trees are cut down there is an increase in sedimentation and silt in rivers and dams – which, in turn, causes a drop in water levels. This causes erratic water supply and power outages.

By keeping the manufacturing plants working, Malawi's exports remain high – bringing in foreign currency to the country.

Interview some farmers from your community and ask them how climate change has affected their livelihoods.

Talk to a local agricultural extension worker to find out what can be done to minimize the effects of climate change.

Are any NGOs working in your community on climate change issues? If so, what are they doing to help mitigate the effects of climate change?

Working with a local NGO or the local forestry department, take part in a tree-planting program in your community – and promote it as a way to help rivers and streams remain healthy so that people are healthy, too.

Useful Contacts

- Minister of Agriculture, Alan Chiyembekeza +265 1 789 033
- Minister of Natural resources and Energy Atupele Muluze +265 1 789 488
- <http://www.africapetal.org/dspace/articles/climate-change-and-economic-development-subsaharan-africa>
- <http://www.fao.org/docrep/011/i0670e03/i0670e03.htm>



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