

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

Focus: Deforestation and Water Supplies

Malawi's population has grown from six million in 1966 to about 15 million in the last four decades. (Malawi DHS).

With an annual growth rate of nearly three percent, the National Statistical Office (NSO) projects the population could more than triple to 50 million by 2050.

This means there will be increasing pressure on water, land and other natural resources.

Malawi has always experienced power outages and water supplies have been erratic for most parts of the country. The situation is likely to get worse as population grows.

The Blantyre and Lilongwe Water Boards have attributed the continued erratic water supply to deforestation.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on how deforestation is contributing to short supply of water in the main cities of the country and other districts.
- To help journalists discuss with their listeners the effects of deforestation on portable water supply
- To help journalists engage their communities in the search for solutions that could enable them work with the water boards in ensuring consistency in availability of portable water in the country.

The Problem: Deforestation Causing Erratic Water Supply

As we have discussed in our previous bulletins, deforestation contributes to climate change.

As the earth's temperature continues to rise, this has a significant impact on our fresh water supplies.

Blantyre (BWB) and Lilongwe (LWB) water boards, both use the Shire River to provide water to most parts of the country, but there are times when a build-up of silt affects water pressure from the river. To maintain the supply of water, BWB and LWB takes water from the Mudi and Malingunde dams.

Lilongwe water board has often raised concerns with how deforestation at Dzalanyama

forest affects the water supply to the city of Lilongwe and surrounding districts.

Blantyre water board has also indicated that if people do not stop cutting down trees for charcoal and agricultural activities in the area surrounding Mudi dam, Blantyre and other surrounding districts will continue to have an erratic water supply.

According to the water board, 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 in rivers and dams.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand how deforestation has contributed to the irregular water supplies to most parts of the country.

Make the following points to the listeners:

Trees play an important role in the conservation of water resources in dams and rivers. If deforestation around Mudi and Malingunde dams and other water sources used by the water authorities to supply drinking water to the people in the country goes unchecked, then these water sources will continue to shrink in the years to come. It'll mean these sources will be incapable of producing enough water for the people of Malawi.

For example, the Blantyre Water Board says Mudi dam produces only 8000 cubic meters of water against the original design capacity of 45,000 cubic meters. The reason: deforestation is taking place around the Mudi dam.

If we stop deforestation and plant more trees, be it in our own backyard or across a large area, it will help to replenish water supplies.

When trees are cut near water, sediment and silt flow into the waterways. Silt causes fine mineral particles to show up in the water. This affects water pressure and as a result, most districts are left without water for several days.

According to the water authorities, deforestation is

also forcing the board to spend more money for chemicals to treat the water to make it drinkable. This leads to higher water bills as the water authorities pass this extra expense on to customers.

Have a panel discussion with community members and discuss why they think Malawi is still experiencing irregular water supplies. Discuss how deforestation is contributing to this water shortage.

Interview a water official and discuss with them why there are water shortages.

Interview listeners and find out how they are affected by water shortages? Do they have to carry water long distances when there are shortages? Who carries the water? Women? Children?

What can the community do to help reduce water shortages?

Do you use charcoal for your fires? If so, would you consider using a more efficient fuel that doesn't require so many trees? What other fuel sources are available in your community? Are they expensive?

Would you use something other than charcoal if it was cheaper?

Useful Contacts

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- <http://cdn.intechopen.com/pdfs-wm/35539.pdf>



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