

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS

Deforestation

Rapid population growth is one of the factors leading to climate change today.

A growing population creates enormous strain on a country's natural resources – including forests.

According to Oxfam International, Malawi has one of the highest rates of deforestation in southern Africa, mainly due to the rising population. Trees are cut for fuel because citizens have almost no access to any other form of fuel except for charcoal and firewood -- for cooking and heating.

When trees are cut in Malawi, more often than not, new trees are not planted to replace them.

Hence, there is a strong need for a tree replacement strategy in the country.

Tree planting will help people cope with some of the effects of climate change in a number of ways: by acting as wind breaks, cutting soil erosion and slowing water flows thereby reducing sudden flooding. (Oxfam International)

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To help journalists discuss with their listeners how population growth has contributed to deforestation
- To help journalists discuss with their listeners the importance of tree planting
- To help journalists encourage their listeners to plant trees

The Problem: Deforestation

Deforestation is caused by the growing demand for forest products and the conversion of forests to farm lands as the human population continues to expand.

The rapid increase in population has resulted in an increasingly rapid demand on forestry products. In fact, Malawi's forests are dwindling at an alarming rate – the pressure being exerted on the nation's forests is not sustainable.

Malawi's annual deforestation rate is among the highest on record. (2.8% annually: FAO UN, 2001).

Deforestation affects the environment by leaving fewer and fewer trees in the ecosystem to help with water recycling. Fewer trees also contribute to severe flooding, erosion and even the extinction of plant and animal species. (Oxfam International)

Malawi, in fact, has been experiencing severe flooding as a result of deforestation. Removal of the forest leaves little vegetative cover to hold heavy rains and this results in flooding.

The cutting down of trees also leads to lower agricultural productivity, income loss and the elimination of a major source of household fuel amongst a host of other problems.

Even though some people have taken the initiative to plant trees, it has not reached a significant level, yet tree planting may represent the single biggest opportunity for increasing Malawi's tree cover and reducing pressure on existing forests.

If everyone in our community decides to plant a tree once a year, Malawi's forest cover would improve and so would the livelihoods of many Malawians..

Activities for Journalists

Use your community radio station to help listeners understand how population growth has contributed to deforestation. Also explain to them the importance of tree planting.

Rising population tends to put a great deal of pressure on natural resources. For example, population growth is directly related to an increase in the demand for food. In order to meet this demand for food, we have to produce more crops. In order to produce more crops, we require more land; and to get more land for cultivation we have started cutting down trees.

While population growth continues to fuel deforestation, the effects of deforestation on population are also becoming pretty obvious in the form of climate change and related environmental issues.

Trees play an important role in addressing climate change and assisting our farming areas to be more sustainable.

Trees help the environment by reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels. They can also assist in preventing salinity (*Salinity is when the soil is affected by salts. Salinity may prevent seed germination and limit crop yields*). Trees also

help prevent soil erosion, cool the Earth – and they provide food and shelter for native animals.

- Talk to an agricultural extension agent and find out what kinds of trees should be planted. Does his/her office provide tree seedlings to citizens and farmers for planting?
- Is the local government sponsoring any tree planting activities? If not, ask them why not.
- Are alternative fuels available in your community? If so, are they affordable? Do people use them? Talk to something about why they use the alternative fuel.
- Organize a tree planting activity within your community and publicize it on your station.

Community Engagement

Urge listeners to send SMS, call or stop by the radio station to talk about alternatives to charcoal and firewood available in the community.

Useful Contacts

- Sandra Mapemba -Population Reference Bureau-PRB- Contact person+265-99-921-9789
- Dr. Thomas Munthali – Innovations for Poverty Action - +265 1-762-424
- Dr. Deepa Pullani – LEED - +265 (0)99385 8798
- Dingaani Mithi-Association of Journalist Against AIDS +265(0) 999 694 832
- <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rp-winds-of-change-malawi-0906.pdf>
- <http://coin.fao.org/cms/world/malawi/en/Home.html>



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

PRB

INFORM
EMPOWER
ADVANCE



INFORMING
DECISIONMAKERS
TO ACT



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS