



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

Desertification Focus

Desertification is the result of two main factors: climatic phenomenon and human activities. As a result of both, the land is left bare.

The factors include: climate change, soil erosion due to overgrazing, deforestation and over-cultivation.

These factors are the result of an increasing amount of stress on the natural resources due to an increasing worldwide population. More and more swaths of land must be cleared for agriculture and food production and as more animals are raised on the land it depletes the soil – leading to erosion and other detrimental effects.

While climate change is directly and indirectly causing desertification, desertification, itself, is directly and indirectly causing climate change.

It is perhaps the worst form of environmental degradation because it combines such mutually reinforcing factors described above: deforestation, soil erosion, climate change, overgrazing and over-cultivation.

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: Desertification

The farm land in Zambia's southern province used to be the country's food basket with fertile soil and lush, green crops.

Today, it's a vastly different story. Farmers are no longer able to grow crops there like they once did.

The reason: a serious lack of rainfall has made the soil less productive and that has meant a big drop in crop yields.

All across the southern province, droughts have become common-place – and the lack of water is not just affecting crops.

Makweti Sishekanu with Zambia's National Farmers Union says animals, especially cattle, which have traditionally

been the most important economic commodity in the province, are dying of newer forms of diseases.

What is happening in the southern province is called desertification.

It's a complex environmental problem and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification has found that about two-thirds of the entire planet is already experiencing desertification or environmental degradation. In fact, Sishekanu says existing deserts are expanding – and this problem is now being felt and seen in more areas of the world than usual.

Activities for Journalists

Use your community radio station to help citizens understand what desertification is, how it is already affecting Zambia, particularly in the southern province and what can be done to stop or slow it down.

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification suggests the solution may be a bottom up approach.

In other words, the key to addressing desertification is to identify the socio-economic, political and cultural issues that cause the problem in a particular area.

As mentioned earlier, the beginning of the desertification process in the southern province is caused by a need to feed more people – leading to a need for more arable land – resulting in deforestation, soil erosion, over-cultivation and over-grazing.

To solve this problem requires a well-thought out strategy on land use policy, socio-economic safety nets and food security.

Makweti Sishekanu of the National Farmers Union says climate-smart and green alternatives are the best choices to consider offering people whose lives on the land are extremely dependent on exploiting the little natural resources on the ground. Green alternatives include: farming trees for money; agroforestry; beekeeping as opposed to charcoal processing; use of charcoal briquettes for energy use and conservation farming.

There are a variety of stories that can be created on this topic.

The Zambian Government is currently developing a climate change National Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) on desertification issues.

- Does the NAMA plan take into consideration the poor farmers of the southern province? If so, what is the plan

to help them?

- Many farmers from the southern province have relocated to the fertile Lufwanyama District of the Copperbelt Province. Is anything being done to stop desertification from eventually happening in Lufwanyama District?
- What do local environmentalists think are the solutions?
- What is the district government doing, if anything, to address the factors that cause desertification?
- How has desertification affected your community?

Community Engagement

Urge listeners to send SMS, call or stop by the radio station to talk about the issue of desertification and what they think are possible solutions. Do they believe the government could do more to stop desertification?

Useful Links

Information about farming and the environment: Makweti Sishekanu, National Farmers Union Zambia: +260-211-252-649 or +260-965-098-360. Email: makwetiskanu@yahoo.com

Good source of information: Vincent Ziba, National Coordinator, Community-based National Resource Management Forum, Zambia; Email: vinceziba@yahoo.com. Phone: 0966-246-924

Reforestation can help mitigate desertification. Short article on tree planting in Livingstone: <http://desertification.wordpress.com/2013/09/08/trees-for-zambia-a-reforestation-and-eco-awareness-project-greenpop-the-guardian/>

You can find Zambia's National Action Programme for combating desertification here: <http://www.unccd.int/ActionProgrammes/zambia-eng2000.pdf>