

# The Weekly

## Information Resource Bulletin

### FOCUS: Brick Kilns

Malawi has among the highest deforestation rates in the world.

This is because of agricultural expansion, growth of human settlements, dependence on wood for cooking, reliance on burnt bricks for construction and low levels of reforestation.

One of the major reasons the world is experiencing climate change is deforestation. People are cutting down trees for human activities, but the trees are not being replaced by new saplings.

In this bulletin, we will discuss the impact that the process of brick making has on the environment.

### The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To learn from other listeners on what Malawians can do to take care of the environment
- To understand the effects that firing bricks have on the environment
- To give journalists tips and guidance on their reporting on the dangers of firing bricks.

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### The Problem: Brick Kilns and the Environment

Most houses in Malawi are made from bricks and these are commonly made by putting clay soil into molds and then drying them in the sun.

These sun-dried bricks are then placed into a large kiln-*uvuni* and a huge amount of wood is used to fire the bricks.

It is normal to see people burning bricks all over the country, but there is no restriction on this activity which encourages deforestation.

To make enough bricks for a small family house would require the equivalent of three large mango trees.

The main environmental impact of brick kilns is the emission of fine particulate matter, which can have an adverse effect on the human respiratory system.

A recent study conducted by Dr. Danesh Miah, an associate professor at the Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences-IFESCU, suggested that brick kilns cause air pollution at an alarming rate.

The research found that kilns produce six kinds of gases: carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, nitrous dioxide, nitric oxide and methane.

All these gases are bad to human beings – and contribute to global warming.

## Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand the negative impact of brick kilns.

Make the following points:

When brick kilns are fired, they produce some harmful gases which pollute the air.

People who breathe this polluted air are affected by it. Particulate matters such as dust and smoke particles penetrate deeply into the lungs and get deposited there.

Sulfur dioxide causes irritation of the respiratory system. Carbon monoxide inhalation also causes dizziness, vomiting and in higher concentrations it can be fatal.

Crops are also adversely affected by air pollution. Pollutants like fluorine, lead and mercury cause damage to plants.

Those who work at the brick kilns are the ones most at risk of suffering health issues from the smoky pollutants.

Inhaling of these pollutants causes irritation of the skin and eyes and can cause pulmonary diseases.

The harmful effect of these pollutants can be reduced by dispersing the pollutants across a large area. That is why it is recommended to have tall smoke stacks for brick kilns.

A tall smoke stack on a kiln ensures release

of pollutants at a higher height, which gives more time to pollutants to disperse in the atmosphere before reaching the ground.

An even better solution is to try not to use burnt bricks. Cement bricks are better. They are more expensive, but they don't harm the environment.

Do an interview with people who are about to fire a brick kiln. Ask them about the materials needed to burn the kiln. Ask them about the number of trees needed to burn the bricks.

A follow up question could be -- how do they got the trees. Also find out if they know the impact that this activity has on the environment.

Talk to a local environmentalist and have him/her talk about the negative effects of burning brick kilns.

Ask the environmentalist if there are inexpensive alternatives to using burnt bricks? Find out if the government plans to provide any subsidies to people who don't use burnt bricks to build their house.

### Community Engagement

Ask your listeners to call or SMS and share with fellow listeners on the negative impact of firing brick kilns.

### Useful Contacts

- Ministry of Environment and Climate Change; Dr. Aloysius Kamperewera; +2651772428
- Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy; Tel: +265 (0) 212 700 104
- Kamperewera, A., A. Banda, P. Salifu (1999). Malawi Environmental Monitoring Program (MEMP) A Final Technical Environmental Monitoring Report. Lilongwe, Environmental Affairs Department: 95.



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