DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

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

Charcoal Focus

One of the growing environmental challenges for Zambia involves the production of charcoal. While charcoal is very useful it also contributes to high rates of deforestation.

Charcoal and wood fuel use have been classified as the main contributors of deforestation and forest degradation in many countries across Africa.

In Zambia, alone, three quarters of the population relies on charcoal or wood for their energy needs. An estimated 15% of all charcoal is consumed in rural areas with urban areas accounting for a whopping 85%.

The total charcoal consumption in Lusaka, alone, is valued at 25 million US dollars per year.

It's estimated that about 78,000 jobs depend on the charcoal business.

The Problem: Charcoal Production

The use of charcoal for cooking and heating is having a significant impact on Zambia's environment. An estimated 75% of the country's population uses firewood or charcoal to supply their energy needs.

This is a result of lack of electricity for most Zambians. Only 25% of the population has access to the electric grid. The production of charcoal is costly to the environment in a number of ways.

First, a large area of land must be cleared to produce just a small amount of charcoal – leading to deforestation. For instance, it is estimated that between five and ten tons of wood is needed to produce a tone of charcoal. Secondly, the use of charcoal has significant health impacts apart from the environmental effects.

Burning charcoal in braziers and other types of cook stoves emits black carbon as part of visible smoke. Black carbon is now considered the second or third largest climate warming agent after carbon dioxide and methane.

Black carbon can have a detrimental effect at the local and regional level, it contributes to local and regional pollution which can alter weather conditions, including precipitation patterns, over a wide area – leading to drought and flooding conditions.

It can also lead to health issues – such as upper respiratory infections.

Activities for Journalists

Use your community radio station to help citizens understand that charcoal is bad for them and the environment – and what alternatives might be available.

One possible long-term solution could be charcoal briquettes made from saw dust. Makweti Sishekanu, of the National Farmers Union in Zambia, notes that the country has mountains of saw dust that can easily be converted into briquettes.

Sishekanu says the briquettes are not as wasteful as charcoal. They burn relatively longer so they can be used for cooking and heating for longer periods of time than charcoal.

The manufacture of these briquettes could create new jobs for the unemployed in rural areas and he says they are a locally affordable technology.

Sishekanu says the saw millers association in the Copper Belt is ready to provide saw dust free of charge to briquette-making factories.

The problem, says Sishekanu, is that the saw millers have encountered hurdles in convincing the government to create a political will for this enterprise.

Briquettes are cheaper than charcoal, burn without smoke and saves time for cooking. It is estimated that around 1.2 million tons of charcoal could be replaced by biomass-based pellets.

Some of this information may be common knowledge in some communities, so you can adapt these questions. Local environmentalists can answer many of your questions, but don't forget to talk to villagers, too. Find out how they feel about using alternatives to charcoal. Do they believe enough alternative fuels are available at afford prices?

- Are there any alternatives to charcoal in your community?
- Is anything being done in your community to encourage the use of charcoal briquettes made from saw dust?
- Are local saw mills willing to provide saw dust for free to someone who wants to start a small factory?
- What, if any, is the government policy on charcoal briquettes?
- What do those who harvest charcoal think of the idea of using saw dust?

Community Engagement

Urge listeners to send SMS, call or stop by the radio station to talk about alternatives to charcoal and what can be done by the government to encourage the use of waste products – such as saw dust.

Thanks to Jac Connell and Makweti Sishekanu for their contributions to this Bulletin.

Useful Links

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

Basic information about charcoal use in Zambia: http://bit.ly/PKbMGd

A possible source on alternatives to charcoal: www.emerging.se/zambia-national-biomass-conference

This link features alternatives to charcoal and traditional cook stoves: http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=81797

A contact in Lusaka that makes stoves that are less polluting than traditional cook stoves: Elizabeth Musonda, technical officer, Zengo, +260-211-265-979 or +260-977-433-523, +260-965-433-523; email: musonda.elizabeth@yahoo.com

Good technical information on deforestation in Zambia: http://www.fao.org/forestry/32680-0c227f4c90a3ef146c7f4e1728302c62b.pdf

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

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