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Malawi

The Malawi Government builds on PEI pilot projects to support the use of energy efficient stoves that also improve the lives of women

Key Messages

- Forest resources provide important livelihood opportunities for Malawians, especially women; 93 % of the national energy demand is met by firewood and charcoal
- One of the few options to fuel rural households is the burning of charcoal and firewood, which has led to higher rates of deforestation and heavy and dangerous workloads for women
- One ton of wood can be saved annually per household that uses energy efficient stoves
- Introducing briquettes and energy efficient stoves in rural households can decrease the time women spend on collecting firewood, thereby freeing time for other economic activities and reducing the risk of rape
- Inspired by the UNDP-UNEP PEI supported pilot projects on the production, marketing and distribution of energy efficient stoves and briquettes in four districts, the Government and other donors are scaling up similar projects

Background

Malawi's environment and natural resources are the main sources of peoples' livelihoods and the backbone of the country's main productive sectors. When the UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative (PEI) Malawi started in 2009 the project situation analysis noted that forest resources provide livelihood opportunities for a majority of Malawians, especially women and also meet 93% of the national energy demand. However, the unsustainable use of these resources through firewood collection and the burning of charcoal to fuel rural households, has led to high rates of deforestation thereby resulting in decreased livelihood opportunities.

Addressing deforestation and gender issues with briquettes and energy efficient stoves

To demonstrate to policy makers and donor agencies how the issue of burning charcoal can in part be addressed, the PEI supported the Ministry of Energy in the production, marketing and distribution of energy efficient stoves and briquettes in four districts (Balaka, Dedza, Ntcheu and Machinga). The pilot projects were designed and implemented in close collaboration with local communities and authorities, and in total 245 people participated in the trainings.

The introduction of briquettes has eased the rate of deforestation and provided cleaner technology for energy production. The ceramic stoves, made from locally sourced clay, are estimated to save one ton of wood per household annually. The stoves use wood fuels instead of crop residue which reduce smoke when cooking and are safer than an open fire.



Photo credit: Concern Universal

"Before the introduction of the briquettes and energy efficient stoves, women and children spent several hours in search of firewood but the introduction of the technology has provided some free time for other economic activities. We know that it has also reduced their exposure to smoke hence reducing respiratory infections" said Mr. Kalonyere, Village Headman in one of the villages using energy efficient stoves in Machinga District.

As Mr. Kalonyere indicates, addressing problems around the use and collection of firewood and burning charcoal also helps in tackling gender issues. Ms. Malita Sabili, a local woman who has benefited from the use of briquettes, notes that briquettes have not only saved women's time but have also reduced the risk of rape faced by women when they search for firewood in the forest. As briquettes can be made from a variety of materials, the women no longer need to go into the forests in search of firewood, thereby reducing the risk of rape.



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Scaling-up the pilot projects

Inspired by these pilot projects the Head of State and Government, Her Excellency Dr. Joyce Banda, in 2013, launched a similar initiative in Balaka district on briquette and energy efficient stove making with the target to produce two million stoves under the national cook stove initiative. The government initiative aims to upscale energy efficient stove and sustainable energy production with the support of Irish Aid and USAID as an environmentally sustainable option for improving energy provision, building on the experiences and lessons learnt from the Ministry of Energy-PEI supported pilot projects. Additionally, MAEVE, a civil society organization, is also promoting the production, use and distribution of energy efficient stoves. Within a year, 1000 stoves have been sold.

The key lessons learnt from the pilot projects are the need to intensify trainings on marketing and distribution of briquettes and energy efficient stoves, and the need to formulate a monitoring and evaluation plan to follow up on the progress and challenges. Ms. Annie Magaisa, one of the project beneficiaries, highlights that the key challenge has been to find markets for the briquettes as they don't always sell as fast as she would like.

Influencing National Policy

At the policy level, PEI is supporting the Department of Forestry to review the 1996 National Forestry Policy to better reflect links between forest resources and the livelihoods of the poor, including access to energy. PEI is supporting the drafting of the policy and district consultations and the Improved Forestry Management Programme is facilitating community participation in



Photo credit: PEI

the review process. The revised policy is awaiting consideration by the Permanent Secretary Committee on Agriculture and Environment.

However, it is not only deforestation that is an environmental problem with economic implications in Malawi. For example, reduced soil fertility caused by unsustainable land use practices has resulted in the productivity of major crops being significantly below potential yields. The PEI Malawi country programme supports the government in addressing these problems. It focuses on integrating sustainable natural resources management into national and sector policy, planning and budget processes, thereby contributing to the achievement of national development goals. PEI Malawi is led by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development in collaboration with various sector ministries.

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