



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

Briquettes from waste?

More than 87% of households in Cameroon use some form of biomass energy (fuelwood, charcoal, sawdust), principally for cooking, heating and drying.

The popularity of wood energy sources, which is unlikely to fall anytime soon, is a major environmental problem, contributing to deforestation and associated carbon emissions.

Since using wood for energy is unlikely to be reduced overnight, several initiatives are exploring new ways of generating biomass energy with reduced impact on the environment.

A group of students at the University of Douala has developed a technique of producing briquettes, dubbed bio-charcoal, from household waste.

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

Finding cleaner biomass energy

Charcoal is often praised as a cleaner alternative to fuelwood mainly because it generates less smoke. Charcoal stoves are also considered more energy efficient than traditional firesides.

However, charcoal production could intensify deforestation. A large volume of wood is needed to produce a small amount of fuel and producers could target small non-timber tree species traditionally left standing by timber companies.

Briquettes have thus emerged as a cleaner alternative. Most of the production techniques being tried around the country rely on wood industry byproducts such as saw dust

and cutoffs.

A group of university students in Douala have gone further to produce briquettes from banana, maize, vegetable and other household wastes. They call the product "bio-charcoal".

"Bio-charcoal" has two main benefits: waste removal and reduced emissions.

To produce "bio-charcoal", the students collect, sun-dry and incinerate selected household waste such as plantain and corn peelings. Ash from incineration is compressed into briquettes, ready for use in standard charcoal stoves.

Beyond the environmental benefits, the students also see it as a business opportunity.

Activities for Journalists

Unsustainable use of natural resources, like biomass energy production, is traditionally framed as hazardous to the environment. Along with agriculture and timber production, fuelwood use is considered one of the main drivers of deforestation in Cameroon. Felled trees add to emissions and reduce the capacity of the forest to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Unsustainable use of natural resources has thus dominated media reporting of the biomass energy sector. However, almost every environmental problem is an invitation to think and act differently. New ideas improve on existing practices while others go way out of the box to propose alternatives.

Whether it is the production of briquettes from sawdust and timber offcuts, or from plantain and corn waste, several innovative ideas are already transforming how people produce and use biomass energy in environmentally friendlier ways.

These emerging options can widen the scope of media reporting of old and perennial problems by providing material for fresh content. Can you find any in your community to highlight? This is a good starting point for a radio series.

Here are things you can do:

- Find and list different ways in which people are producing and using biomass energy in your community and elsewhere. How do these ideas work? Who are the key players? Who is affected and how? What are the benefits to households and the environment?
- Engage the audience. Give voice to listeners; ask them to contribute ideas and share their views; encourage an open debate; if possible produce on location or invite listeners to the studio.
- Promote the series. Determine when you want to air and communicate with the audience. Involve listener clubs, if applicable, to spread the word.
- Begin a series of features, short documentaries or programs exploring each innovative idea. Find experts, interview producers and users. Tackle cultural resistance to alternatives sources of energy; challenges existing practices and stereotypes (like food tastes better when cooked with fuelwood than with briquettes); highlight best practices.

Useful Links

More information about Doula University students' bio-charcoal project: <http://observers.france24.com/fr/20150825-cameroun-charbon-ecologique-biologique-ordures-menageres-douala-kemit-ecology>;

Contact, Kemit-Ecology, Bio-charcoal production, kemit.ecology@yahoo.com, Muller 6780420995

Evolution of fuelwood use in Cameroon since 1990: <http://www.factfish.com/statistic-country/cameroon/fuelwood,+consumption+by+households>

Example of an alternative to fuelwood and charcoal: http://www.itto.int/sfm_detail/id=2800000

Study of fuel wood production and consumption in the Sudano-Sahelian ecological zone: <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00135780/document>

You may be interested in the national energy efficiency plan: http://www.euei-pdf.org/sites/default/files/files/field_pblctn_file/EUEI_PDF_Fi nal_report_EN_version_MARCH2014.pdf