



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

Focus: Land clearing

Clearing land for agricultural production is an activity that is done by many farmers usually starting in the month of October. This practice has been done for some time by Zambian farmers.

The most common practice that is used in land clearing is bush burning. The massive burning of bush for agricultural production leads to an increase in the amount of toxic gases being emitted into the atmosphere. When huge amounts of these toxic gases are released into the atmosphere – it can cause changes in the weather patterns. Those most affected by these weather changes are – farmers. It often means reduced crop yields and ultimately – less income for farmers.

Farmers need to adopt practices that do not have dramatic effects on the environment. Those practices could include conservation agriculture and organic farming.

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: Clearing of Farming Land using Fire

Bush burning produces major air pollutants. These pollutants do not only pose an environmental hazard to man alone, but also affect human health in general. For instance, the gases that are emitted during bush fires can affect people with breathing problems.

One of the burning practices is called the Chitemene system. It is practiced mostly in the Northern Province. It involves the clearing of farm land through the cutting of trees and then the trees are piled up and burned. The ashes are spread on the farm. It creates fertilizer, but it destroys the forest.

Where the trees have been burned the bare land is then cultivated and crops are planted.

Not only does the burning of trees create air pollutants, it also disturbs the ecosystem.

Some of the insects depend on the plants that are burnt and therefore when the land is cleared they die out.

In conclusion, bush burning and bad farming practices have exposed the environment to land degradation, deforestation, loss of biodiversity and a decrease in soil fertility -- leading to low crop yields and large-scale hunger among the people.

What's worse, the Chitemene system is growing in popularity in Zambia. Traditionally, people in the Northern Province were brought up to believe that burning the bush for agriculture is the best solution because it enables a farmer to have a good harvest. Now, many other regions of Zambia are adopting the cutting and burning of trees.

Activities for Journalists

Bush clearance for agricultural production can bring about a lot of harm to the environment.

There is a need to continuously educate the farmers on the benefits of using permaculture as a method of agriculture. The benefit of using this kind of farming is that the farmer does not need to cut down trees -- crops can be raised under the trees.

The farmer can also be educated on the need to reduce the effects of climate change through the use of organic fertilizers and get good crop yields.

In the Chitemene system of farming, the trees are cut down and the ashes collected from the burned trees are used as fertilizer. However, in organic farming, the trees are not cut, and there is only the use of organic fertilizer --which can be cow dung or compost manure. Organic farming is inexpensive compared to the labour intensive job of cutting down trees.

Farmers should also be encouraged not to burn the existing farming land for agricultural production because the plant waste can serve as fertilizer for the next crop. This is an inexpensive way to fertilize crops and it saves money since the farmer doesn't have to buy fertilizer each growing season.

Farmers need to be educated on the need to have trees on their farm. Trees can be used for many things. For instance, they help in the mitigation of

climate change. They can be used for medicine -- and also for food. Some of the trees that are cut down are food for birds and animals that help in fighting off insects that may attack crops.

Therefore the need to intensify awareness to farmers about the benefits of trees is important and vital in the effort to slow the effects of climate change. Ultimately, farmers need trees to ensure their crops are bountiful.

Talk to farmers who have decided to plant trees. Why did he/she do so? Has it made a difference? Are they practicing organic farming?

Talk to other organic farmers. How have their crop yields been compared to conventional farming techniques?

What are some ways that the farmers can help reduce deforestation?

Urge listeners to contribute on this topic through comments and questions.

Useful Link

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