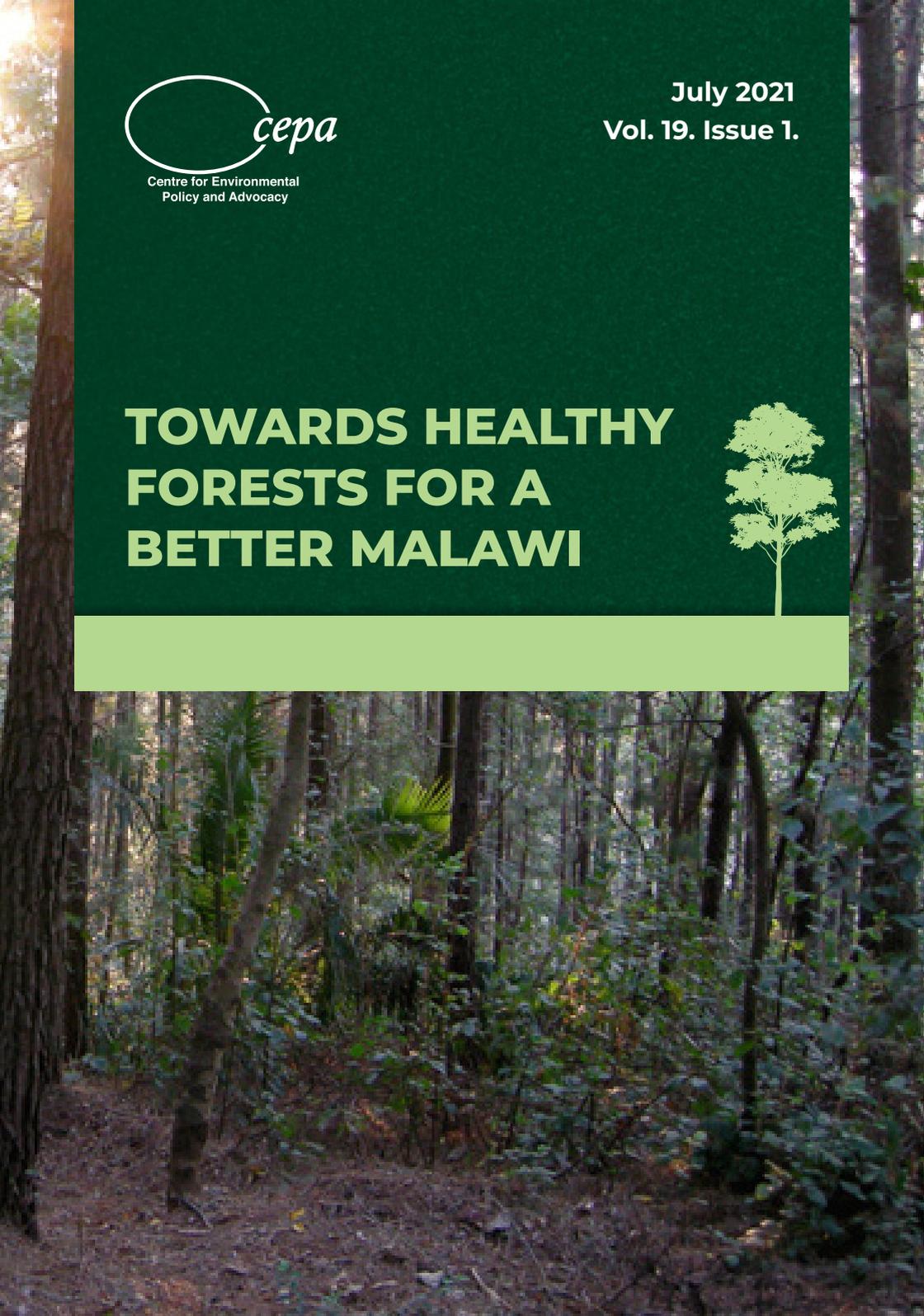


TOWARDS HEALTHY FORESTS FOR A BETTER MALAWI



Malawi's forests are home to a wide range of indigenous tree species, including many rare species such as M'bawa and Mulanje Cedar.

- Trees and forest resources have cultural, livelihood, economic and environmental value.
- Our forests are a public good that should benefit everyone. However, shameless unsustainable clearing of forests for illegal charcoal production has reached an alarming rate, well exceeding the regeneration capacity of the forests. This is unacceptable, unsustainable and detrimental to our environment, our livelihoods and our economy.
- We need to protect our trees and green spaces to increase our resilience to the impacts of climate change such as flooding which is exacerbated by loss of forest cover.
- Everyone has a role to play to save our remaining forests.
- Say no to illegal charcoal.



Trees and People

Trees and forest resources are deeply embedded in Malawian society, culture, livelihoods and economy. Forests provide natural catchments for all of our natural springs and water boards; timber for our construction needs; firewood for cooking/heating; fruits, mushrooms and other forest based products; and traditional herbs and medicines. Our forests also are home to diversity of animals, including bees, butterflies and other pollinators that fertilize our crops. They also beautify our surroundings. Furthermore, they provide social amenities such as shade on a warm day and a place to conduct cultural ceremonies. What is more, forests are an integral part of human life because of their environmental services such as water, nutrient cycling and climate regulation.

Incidentally, Malawi's major forests are found in Forest Reserves, National Parks, Game Reserves and Nature Sanctuaries. These are often surrounded by rural communities with high dependency on forest resources including illegal charcoal and firewood for their livelihoods.



Sustainable Cities and Life on Land

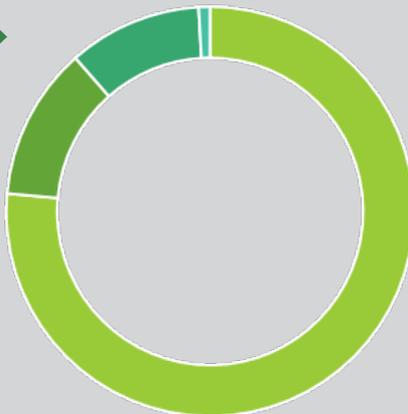
Sustainable Development Goals recognize the need to create green spaces to make our cities more resilient. They also support sustainable management of all types of forests; halting of deforestation; and restoration of degraded forests through afforestation and reforestation.



Trees and Forests are Disappearing

Trees provide a source of energy for cooking/heating. More than 97 percent of households in Malawi rely on illegally and unsustainably produced charcoal and firewood for domestic cooking/heating energy. In urban areas, more than three-quarters (76 percent) of households rely on illegal and unsustainably produced charcoal for cooking/heating. While this is critical in supporting livelihoods in the short-term, the practice has catastrophic impacts on local agricultural production and productivity in the long-term, and this could worsen food security. This has been exacerbated with high growth in urbanization over time. Suffice to say, there is unprecedented pressure on the remaining forests to the extent that illegal clearing of forests for charcoal production exceeds the rate of reforestation and natural regeneration. Thus, failure to address urban demand for charcoal will result in significant deforestation and depletion of biodiversity in our remaining forests.

How do you cook your food in urban areas?



The Elephant in the Room, Charcoal

If you live in one of our urban areas, then you probably cook using illegal and unsustainably produced charcoal, on a conventional “mbaula” (Jiko cookstove). And if you do, you are not alone because more than 76% of urban households use illegal and unsustainable charcoal as their primary source of cooking/heating energy.

Between 2011 and 2018, the number of households using charcoal as their primary source of cooking/heating energy doubled from 9 percent to around 18 percent. During the same period, the proportion of urban households relying on charcoal for cooking/heating increased from 42 percent to more than 76 percent. This has resulted in high levels of deforestation and forest degradation throughout the country.



12 Kgs
Firewood



1 Kg
Charcoal

**It takes a lot of firewood
to produce charcoal!**

The Consequences of Deforestation

The increasing rate of deforestation is negatively impacting lives and livelihoods in a number of ways including the following:

- **Reduced agricultural productivity.** Increased soil erosion ultimately leads to loss of agricultural productivity and food insecurity. Available estimates show that 29 tons/ha of soil is eroded every year and this has resulted in the loss of annual agricultural productivity, estimated at more than 50 Billion Kwacha.
- **Increased exposure to impacts of climate change:** Illegal clearing of forests for unsustainable charcoal production has caused serious deforestation leading to loss of tree cover, leaving bare land which is prone to surface run-off that results in flooding during the rainy season. In recent years, this has affected our cities which have experienced climate related disasters due to flooding occasioned



by heavy rains and fast flowing run-off water and overflowing rivers and streams. This has resulted in loss of lives and property, especially among communities living close to hills and mountains such as Chilobwe in Blantyre and Ntandire in Lilongwe. The absence of forest cover has also caused most rivers to dry up quickly, making access to water extremely difficult for rural communities especially women who have to go far to fetch water for domestic use.



Deforestation creates surface run-off that contributes to flash floods.

- **Loadshedding:** Malawi's electricity grid is dependent on hydro-power generation which is a renewable source of energy. However, the loss of vegetative cover has resulted in soil erosion which has led to siltation and accumulation of debris which have affected power generation at Nkula and other hydro-electricity generation plants. This has limited the ability of the power plants to provide the electricity required to meet the demand leading to frequent power outages and shortages.

The power outages create a higher demand for the biomass energy thereby increasing the rate of deforestation and further exacerbating the limitations of power production and supply.




PRESS RELEASE 7th March, 2019

CURRENT STATUS OF POWER GENERATION AND SUPPLY IN THE COUNTRY

The Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi (ESCOM) Limited and the Electricity Generation Company (Malawi) Limited (EGENCO) wish to inform the general public that the hydro power generation has reduced due to excessive trash which has blocked intake screens at Nkula and Kapichira power stations as a result of heavy rains.

- **A bare future:** Following widespread clearing of forests on customary land, where access to forest resources has generally been less restricted, there has been increased pressure on protected areas over the last decade, resulting in large scale forest cover loss in many forest reserves especially those closest to Blantyre, Zomba

and Lilongwe cities. With dependency rates on illegal charcoal and firewood already among the highest in the world, there will be significant deforestation and degradation in the near future if the charcoal problem is not addressed. Can you imagine hiking up a mountain without trees, forests and nature?

What Does The Law Say?

The National Forestry Act as amended provides for, among other things, the protection and rehabilitation of environmentally fragile areas and forest resources. Forest related crimes in the law include:

- **Cutting, taking, felling, destroying, uprooting, collecting and removing forest produce from a forest reserve, customary land, public land and protected forest area;**
- **Cultivating crops, grazing livestock, clearing land, digging or breaking up land for any road or for any purpose whatsoever on such area of the forest reserve and protected area;**
- **Prospecting for and extracting minerals in a forest reserve and protected forest area;**
- **Squatting, residing, erecting any building, livestock enclosures or any structure in a forest reserve and protected area;**
- **Depositing litter or noxious waste in forest reserves, protected forest area and village forest areas;**
- **Making or selling charcoal from indigenous timber or tree without appropriate license.**



Production and distribution of charcoal is only legal when one has a license issued by the Department of Forestry. The law makes provision for punishment of offences through fines ranging between MWK500,000–10,000,000 and prison custodial sentences ranging from 1 up to 20 years.



An Open Crime

Despite having a comprehensive and robust legal framework, deforestation continues at an alarming rate as organized crime where illegal charcoal producers and traders often collude with law enforcement and forestry officers to evade the law. This results in weak law enforcement. Also, forest crime is perceived as insignificant among members of the general public. Sentiments such as “**it’s just charcoal, after all,**” are typical of this perception.

What Can You Do?

In spite of the bleak picture painted above, there is hope and everyone has a role to play to combat the charcoal problem and save our remaining forests. If you are reading this, you are probably in a position to make decisions that can challenge the status quo or support initiatives towards solving the problem by:

- **Adopt cleaner cooking energy** options available on the market. Diversification of energy sources for cooking/heating can reduce the pressure on forest resources thereby decreasing deforestation. Some of the alternatives to charcoal and firewood (biomass energy) include Liquified Petroleum Gas, electricity, biogas, and legal licensed charcoal/briquettes. The legal licensed charcoal is produced by five licensed producers who sell their charcoal in Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba.
- **Support the policing** of forest resources by reporting forest crimes and supporting law enforcement agencies during investigation and



prosecution.

- **Support enforcement** of the forestry legal framework through deterrent penalties and fines for forest crimes.
- **Make resources available** to support communities involved in illegal charcoal production to diversify their sources of livelihoods. This can be done through micro-financing facilities tailored towards promoting nature based innovations and businesses that are sustainable including beekeeping, fish farming, growing tree crops such as coffee and macadamia, among others.

- **Plant a tree and nurture it.**

The national tree planting season in Malawi starts in November and ends in March of the following year depending on weather patterns. A seedling, typically costs as little as MWK100.00. You can also preserve seeds from commonly found fruits for the planting season. Start preparing for the next tree planting season today.



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The Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA) is a Malawian civil society organisation that advocates for environment and natural resources policies to be implemented for sustainable development.

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