

## **STATEMENT ON THE ECOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF CHARCOAL BURNING**

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(MP FOR SISSALA WEST)**

Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to make a statement on the consequences of charcoal burning which is eating into the natural balance of the environment.

Mr. Speaker, you would agree with me that charcoal trade is, and will continue to be an important economic activity, and an indispensable energy source in Ghana. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in 2001 reported that, Ghana is among the top two countries in the sub-region in terms of charcoal consumption, and one of the countries with high per capita fuel wood (firewood) demand in Sub Sahara Africa; indicating the importance of wood energy in the socio-economic development of the country.

On a daily basis Mr. Speaker, several truckloads of charcoal are transported to urban centres from rural Ghana, especially the Upper West, East and Northern regions. Statistics indicate that close to 90% of households in Ghana use firewood or charcoal for cooking (Derkyi et al, 2011), with an estimated 60% or higher being urban dwellers. Therefore to protect the forest cover, the focus must be on urban households (demand side) who are the main consumers rather than the rural folk.

The rate at which our forest resources are being depleted, environmentally degraded, biodiversity lost, due to charcoal burning and related anthropogenic engagements, should be a matter of concern to members of this august house.

Charcoal production as practiced in Ghana contributes greatly to the deterioration of the environment through deforestation, air pollution, ecological imbalances and the situation being worst in the savanna ecological zone.

Mr. Speaker, deforestation is the most prominent effect of charcoal burning on the environment, with its concomitant consequences of diminishing wildlife population, bushfire outbreaks and nutrient depletion worsening by the day. On the average, Ghana loses nearly 2% of its forest cover annually. This is because the ecological footprint per capita of charcoal burning and associated activities, far exceed the environment's biological capacity to replenish itself, resulting in alarming rates of deforestation. This has given rise to global threats of climate change and ozone layer depletion, which have taken a centre stage in national and international policy discourse.

Mr. Speaker, the detrimental effect of charcoal production on the environment have raised serious concerns, with stake holders such as the Forestry Commission, MoFA, EPA, MMDAs, CSOs among others, calling for concentric management of the forest resource.

In the face of the fragile vegetation and the heavy dependence on environmental resources, we should be able to strike a balance between economic wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

More often than not, trees such as *Parkia biglobosa* ("dawadawa") and *Vitellaria paradoxa* (shea tree) which have essential economic and nutritional benefits, are the preferred species for charcoal production, depriving them of same values. This gives credence to the assertion that, "the poor are both agents and victims of environmental damage".

Sadly, the youth of our country, who are economically active, are the centre of this "journey of doom". In excess of 90% of charcoal burners are usually between the ages of 21 and 40. This shows that the youthful population, who should be concerned about sustainability is rather engaged in the destruction (charcoal production).

Mr. Speaker, it is therefore imperative to look at charcoal burning as a livelihood support system to either develop long-range charcoal policies to ensure efficient charcoal production and sustainable forest resource management or interventions that minimize charcoal use. It is not entirely impossible to derive multiple enviro-economic benefits from charcoal production.

In addressing this issue however, draconian and punitive statutes and rules may not be the antidote in this regard but perhaps, a worthy blend of community ownership and resource management strategies vis-à-vis non plant biomass livelihood or energy schemes would be able to disengage the minds of charcoal burners.

Mr. Speaker, what needs to be done is to find ways to reduce the rate of exploitation of forest trees for charcoal production. This we could achieve by providing alternative energy sources as well as livelihood regimes for those who largely depend on these resources for survival. It is against this backdrop that we as the people's representatives, should applaud the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources' policy of "waste to energy". Urban energy requirement could be met by the policy output, thus reducing their charcoal demand and saving the environment.



Job creation, youth employment, are among sustainable ways of managing the forest resource and restoring the dignity of the environment.

As part of our industrialization efforts, and as part of measures geared towards sustainable consumption, we could strive to evolve a technology that would produce charcoal from other organic waste material such as coconut husks, palm nut husk, wood dust etc. Mr. Speaker, the existing system of charcoal production can best be described as unpolished, uneconomical and insensitive. Improving the efficiency of the current practice could minimize the exploitation of our forest.

Invariably, charcoal trade is informal but very significant business in Ghana. State regulation of the business in terms of granting of permits to charcoal merchants will regularize the market and bring some level of control into the charcoal trade.

As a country, we could prioritize plantation development efforts and undertake conscious reforestation programmes to restock the environment. Both silvicultural and agrosilvicultural practices such agroforestry, enrichment planting, boundary planting, orchards, etc could be carried out to resurge the lost vegetation. Promoting reforestation efforts among farmers has the potential of reclaiming denuded lands, apart from increasing the farmer's income. Therefore, incentive packages, in the form of farm inputs, awards, foodstuff among others could encourage farmers to take up reforestation efforts seriously.

Mr. Speaker, it is my conviction that, the detrimental effects of charcoal burning in Ghana, have assumed alarming dimensions and if not checked, could easily become a national security issue.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you once again for the opportunity.