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Sustainable energy access: A catalyst to landscape restoration and water management in rural Malawi

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Abstract

The high increase in population over the past two decades in Malawi has contributed to environmental degradation. Out of about 20 million Malawians, 82 % live in rural areas. They depend on subsistence agriculture for a living, whereas firewood and charcoal are predominantly used for cooking. The source of water for domestic use is from wells (protected and unprotected) and surface water. The clearing of land for cultivation as well as unsustainable harvesting of biomass for cooking are the main contributors to land degradation. Can increased access to sustainable energy in rural Malawi accelerate landscape restoration and increased agricultural productivity? Through a literature survey, this study argues that energy poverty is one of the salient drivers of the perceptible environmental degradation in Malawi. With access to modern energy, the economic activities in the rural areas can increase and thus uplifting low income levels of the rural populace and hence enabling them to become good stewards of the natural resources around them. With access to sustainable energy, information and knowledge sharing of the environmental issues in the rural communities can be eased, thus assisting in behavioural change of those who unknowingly cause harm to the environment. With access to energy, smart agriculture in the rural areas is possible and thereby reducing pressure on search for cultivation land as adequate yields can be obtained from the small piece of land. With access to energy, efficient water management is possible. It is therefore concluded that integrating energy access in the landscape restoration and water management programmes in rural Malawi has far reaching impacts.

Keywords: Landscape restoration, sustainable energy, water management

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