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## **GHANA FACES DEFORESTATION CRISIS AMID CHARCOAL PRODUCTION SURGE**

### ***Background***

The production and possible consumption of charcoal keeps increasing in Ghana. Between 2010 and 2022, the production of charcoal has seen a sturdy growth from about 1.60 million metric tons to about 2.3 million metric tons representing about 44%. The production has increased because of exports and increased in demand by low income households in the savannah and transitional ecological zones of Ghana. The industry makes about Ghc1billion annually, 3% merchants in the supply chain makes 22% of the revenue. Charcoal has become the cheapest and alternative source of household fuel for these regions because most of the population fall within lower quintiles with respect to income distribution. Due to the lack of woods or forest known for charcoal production, producers have resorted to using fruit plants such as Mangoes, Shea, Baobab, etc. for production.

### ***Reasons for charcoal production***

Charcoal production has become a source of livelihood and lucrative option for supplementary income to many households especially those in the Savannah and transitional ecological regions. About 90% of those involved in charcoal production are primarily youth, ranging between 21 to 40 years. Additionally, 35% of rural households are charcoal producers and 64% combine charcoal production and subsistence farming as their sources of livelihood. The implication is that the youthful population in these regions lack awareness of environmental sustainability and for that matter continue to engage in environmentally hazardous practices like charcoal burning destroying our environment.



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Additionally, charcoal is demanded by low income earners and it is estimated that about 80% of Ghanaian households use charcoal for food production. It has also become the source of fuel for commercial entities especially small and medium scale enterprises. It is predominantly used compared to LPG because it is perceived to be cheaper and very accessible.

### ***Effect of charcoal burning***

Ghana is losing its forest resources and biodiversity due to the activities of charcoal burning and related unsustainable environmental practices. Further, the activities of charcoal burning contributes immensely to the degradation of the environment through deforestation and air pollution. Ghana has lost 70% of its wildlife and about 6.15 million hectares of forest in the last ten years. It is estimated that Ghana loses 2% of its forest cover annually, and this is hardly replenish because deforestation due to charcoal burning and other land use activities far exceeds afforestation. This has negatively affected carbon sequestration in Ghana as well as Ghana's efforts in limiting the emission of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. Higher usage of charcoal is likely to derail Ghana's effort of achieving sustainable development goal targets by 2030 especially goal 7.

### ***Government interventions so far***

The balance between economic benefits and sustainability issues demand a coherent policy that regulate the value chain of charcoal production in Ghana in order to minimize the risk on forest resources. The government agencies intervened by promoting the use of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and implementing forest conservation instruments to engender environmental sustainability. However, these intervention could not reduce the production usage of charcoal as wood fuel.



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The increased usage of Charcoal as wood fuel is because of the higher cost of LPG. Cost of LPG is a bane to the utilization of the product especially among low income earners. The achievement of objectives related to safeguarding the environment as well as supporting household income of actors in the value chain depends on the following:

### ***Recommendation***

1. The charcoal industry must be regulated and industry authorization given to investors or entrepreneurs in the value chain. The Energy Commission must include other suppliers in the charcoal value chain, not limited to only exporters. Regulation and licensing helps the government institute tax policies on services and products as well as service providers in the value chain.
2. Government must designate areas for felling down of trees, and indicate the types of trees for charcoal production. There must be a manual in each district highlighting forest resources for wood fuel. Producers who encroach undesignated areas are penalized by law to plant hectares of trees supervised by the energy and forestry commissions.
3. Government must tax the charcoal industry appropriately to compensate for the forest loss. Appropriate taxation of the industry is likely to raise about Ghc100 million annually representing about 10% of the annual income realized by the industry. The taxes could be used to plant more trees or support government's initiatives such as the Green Ghana Project.

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