

Tree Planting

Our tree planting team had yet another busy year supporting 2,715 farmers to build their tree nurseries, fill planting tubes and sow seeds. The farmers cared for the germinated seedlings, prepared their land for planting out, and importantly, planted out their seedlings.

The project continued in Mzimba, Salima and Nkhotakota Districts, and we welcomed 16 new coordinators, bringing our tree planting team to 43 people. They are under the leadership of Wisdom Nkhambule, our new Senior Project Manager.

Talking about the challenges faced in each District, Wisdom said, "We experienced several challenges in Salima and Nkhotakota Districts this year including drought and poor quality seeds which impacted germination. Pests and diseases were a problem too so we want to learn from this and monitor the seedlings planted out."

The biggest challenge in Mzimba District was unreliable rainfall. However, despite these different challenges, 2,866,797 seedlings germinated and have been planted out in the three Districts.



Mzimba District

In 2024, we continued to build and nurture relationships with both new and existing farmers. Follow up visits are important to see how the trees are growing, and to provide ongoing training to the farmers including teaching them how to coppice branches.

One farmer who joined the project last year is Robert Pachati. He raised and planted 2,500 seedlings last year, and this year he is raising 8,400 seedlings.

He said, "I have planted trees before but it is good to have the support of Ripple Africa. I have been taught a lot including the right size holes to dig for planting the seedlings. I am doing this with my younger brother so we will share the trees."



His enthusiasm for the project has inspired his neighbours. Philip, Godfrey and Daniel all signed up to be part of the project. This year Philip has raised 3,000 seedlings, Godfrey 2,400 seedlings, and Daniel 6,000 seedlings.

Philip said, "I now know that they will produce good rainfall, provide oxygen, and earn us money."

Daniel grows tomatoes, bananas, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, and maize which he sells. He has degraded land that is no longer suitable for farming so he is glad he can plant trees on it. He plans to pay locals to help him do the planting out and he is planning to plant sweet potatoes in between the trees for the first couple of years.



PHILIP



GODFREY



DANIEL

Pokani and Joshua are brothers. Pokani has been planting trees for three years and Joshua for two years. He took a year off last year to focus on his farming.

This year Pokani has raised a very exact 3,836 seedlings whilst Joshua has 2,000 seedlings. When we visited their tree nurseries and saw previously planted out trees, it was wonderful to see their passion and dedication to tree planting. Their main motivation is their families.

Pokani said, "We need to plan for the future so we can earn an income to support our families and provide our children with what they need."

Joshua echoed this sentiment. He has three children and the family is fortunate that they have plenty of farmland to be able to grow crops for themselves and to sell. They use old farmland for tree planting.

Pokani continued, "I have grown some other species of tree seedlings so that I can sell them and use the money to pay 15 people to help plant out the pine tree seedlings. The rainy season is a busy time as we are farming too so it is good to hire people. This helps everyone."



ABOVE L-R: POKANI WITH TWO OF HIS DAUGHTERS; HIS ADDITIONAL SEEDLINGS THAT HE WILL SELL
BELOW L-R: POKANI WITH TREE PLANTING COORDINATOR, CECILIA; JOSHUA WITH HIS DAUGHTER FYNNESS



Planting out the seedlings at the right time of year is crucial to their survival but it is also important that the farmers plant them out with the right spacing between them and then care for the trees as they grow.

This is a great example of a farmer doing exactly that. Blessings Mkandawire planted these four years ago. He has a selection of fruit trees too including orange, tangerine, improved mangoes and guava.



Felix is another farmer doing well. Last year he planted 2,000 trees and was raising another 5,000 seedlings which have since been planted out too. We visited him in May to see the progress and the trees are growing well.

Felix has planted cassava and sunflowers between this year's seedlings. He plans to grow sweet potatoes too. This is called intercropping and can only be done while the trees are still small enough to allow enough light to reach the crops.



Phineas, one of our Lead Farmers, has planted trees each year for the last five years. He is able to prune the branches for firewood and is enjoying being a Lead Farmer. He said, "I am working with 20 farmers. I wanted to help others and give advice."



At the beginning of a new tree planting season, once our teams have met and registered the farmers, it is time to help the farmers build suitable tree nurseries.

The tree nurseries are really important as this is where the seedlings are raised. The planting tubes are filled with soil, the seeds are sown, and the farmers monitor germination.

Once the seedlings are growing at the germination stage, the team teach the farmers how to transplant seedlings if more than one seedling is growing in a tube. For some species of trees, they are also taught about establishing seed beds and transplanting the tiny seedlings from here to the planting tubes.

Joseph, one of our Tree Planting Coordinators who works with 72 farmers, said, "I am enjoying my job because I like being with the community helping people."



After the first few months of hard work, it is great to see the tree nurseries with their vivid green seedlings growing.

Father-of-three Luka loves it when his children get involved at the tree nursery as they are learning about the importance of planting and protecting trees.

He said, "I am growing 2,000 seedlings this year to help fight climate change and to create a good future for my children."

Chester is a farmer from Kajombo. This is his first year growing trees and he is hopeful for 2,500 healthy seedlings.

He said, "I want to restore the trees that we have lost due to deforestation and overgrazing. They will also help me provide for my family and pay school fees for my children."

Angel is a father of four living in Kavinkhama. He is aware of the challenging factors that affect life in Malawi and, although he hopes to benefit from the trees he has planted, he ultimately wants them to help his children.

He said, "I aim to raise 2,500 seedlings and I will plant these out in the rainy season. When I die, these trees will provide for my children. If God grants me more years, I would like to buy a car."

Mr Kavulu and his wife have been able to raise an impressive 14,000 tree seedlings this year. They are looking forward to providing their family with a brighter future.



Samson has been nicknamed 'Mr Dedicated' by our team. The 43-year-old father of six has raised 5,000 pine tree seedlings. He said, "This is my first year to grow trees with Ripple Africa and I am loving every moment."

However, Samson has been planting trees for 10 years now and many people in the community often laughed at him. Another new tree farmer said, "We used to think that the trees he was planting were useless and he will not benefit from them."

Samson is now an inspiration and other farmers look up to him for guidance. He said, "Even if it means being an unsung hero, I want to contribute to this war on climate change."



As the tree planting out season approached, our team then taught the farmers how to prepare their land.

Tree Planting Coordinator, Molless, said, "We are working with a group of farmers to demonstrate how to prepare the land ahead of planting out the tree seedlings in December. I was very happy seeing the farmers participating."



One farmer preparing his land and digging holes was Mwandofia Banda. He has successfully raised 3,400 seedlings. He said, "I have six children, and these trees will support my family in the future."

Mwandofia explained that the land he will be using to plant the seedlings was previously used for farming, and although it is no longer good for farming crops, it is good land for planting trees. He will continue growing soya and sweet potatoes on other farming land that he owns.

He is also protecting an area of trees next to his home as they need firewood for cooking. They hope one day to have one of our fuel-efficient cookstoves so that they only have to coppice branches for firewood.



Leonard attended a community awareness meeting about the project. He was intrigued by how his degraded land could be put to use and is grateful to be a part of the project.

He said, "I was farming maize until last year but the soil can no longer be used for farming crops. It is great that we can use our land for planting tree seedlings. My son and I have almost finished doing the pitting (digging the holes) for one plot but I am paying locals piece work to help finish the digging and planting out. It is a big job."



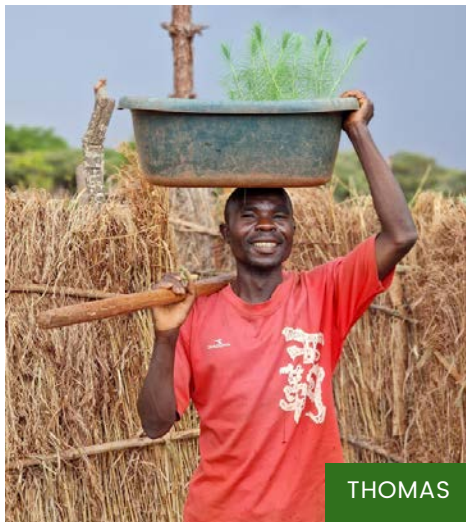
One of the most important parts of the project, after successful germination of course, is planting out the seedlings.

Vincent Phiri has planted out 1,800 seedlings with the help of his family including his son Thomas. This is his second year planting trees and like many farmers, he is doing it for his children.

He said, "I have four children and I want to leave a legacy for them. The land was used for farming maize but it is no longer good for crops. It is fine for planting trees and my family will be able to earn money in future from the pine trees."



VINCENT



THOMAS



Much like Vincent, Leckwin Chunga also wants to plan for his children's future. The father of five has raised 1,800 seedlings and is glad that he can help the environment and earn an income in the future.

He said, "Planting these pine trees will help relieve pressure on the forests. So many areas have been deforested as the demand is high for timber."



Esoul had a great day planting his seedlings. He had plenty of laughs with his Tree Planting Coordinator, Zikani, keeping them both motivated.

Esoul raised 1,000 seedlings in his tree nursery and to save carrying the seedlings by hand, he transports them to his land using a wheelbarrow.

One farmer we met is Mr Phakati. His middle name is Special and after hearing his story of how he wanted to plant trees for his children, we think his middle name is quite appropriate.

Along with his wife, he has raised 2,000 seedlings. He said, "We became involved with tree planting as where we live is heavily deforested. We know that by planting trees, our children will benefit."

With the vision of transforming his community and securing his family a sustainable income in the future, Smart Manda was keen to be a tree farmer this year. He has planted out 1,890 seedlings.

Tereza Gongwe is another hardworking parent. She is dedicated to giving her children a better life and has successfully raised and planted 1,376 tree seedlings.

She said, "I want to secure a brighter future for my family and be able to give them an education."



Salima & Nkhotakota Districts

Our teams in Salima and Nkhotakota Districts supported their farmers and community groups throughout the year to raise various seedlings including senna siamea, mbawa, mtangatanga and nsangu tree species. Once planted and well established, these trees will provide a sustainable source of firewood and in the longer term, timber.

This project continues to complement our fuel-efficient cookstove project which reduces the amount and size of firewood needed for cooking, thereby reducing deforestation and encouraging natural regeneration to take place.

Ketrina, Zelipa, and Eneless are the three members who make up the Mankhwazi Club and together they have raised 7,000 seedlings. They initially had a problem with poor seeds so had to sow a second batch which have germinated well.

Ketrina said, "Climate change is a problem and it is affecting Malawi. Planting trees will help."



Another team of three are Harod, Davis and Fanisa. They have a selection of seedlings including nsangu and mtangatanga. Each farmer has three children and they are all proud owners of a fuel-efficient cookstove in their kitchens.

Echoing each other, they said, "In the future we will have enough firewood from the branches of our trees. We can share them with our family."



On a visit to Gift's tree nursery we were greeted by three of his children. They were watering the seedlings and weeding them whilst their father was out farming. His 20-year-old daughter, Loveness, explained that they hope to create a family forest.



It is the second year for the Biston Mtumbe Club growing and planting seedlings. During a visit to see this year's tree nursery, we took the opportunity to see some of their planted out seedlings from the previous season.

Some of the tree seedlings had been planted on a slope so when the rains come, the rainwater and soil will probably wash down the slope. Therefore, our CEO and founder, Geoffrey Furber MBE, explained the importance of creating basins.

A demonstration followed and the club members learnt about covering the soil with straw and leaves which allow the water to penetrate the earth but help reduce evaporation. Basins have been made for the seedlings and whilst they do not look like much now, we hope that they will continue to grow and flourish.



Tree farmers are very happy when it comes to planting out their seedlings.

Mr James is particularly happy as he has finished planting out 1,000 tree seedlings. He can't wait to see them grow and flourish.



Teamwork came into play in Numeri Village for these nine community tree nursery members who together raised 18,000 seedlings.

These seedlings have now been divided equally between the members and planted out on their respective land but they still supported each other in transporting the seedlings, digging holes, and planting them out.



Zilosi Chauma is a mother of eight. The 41-year-old wanted to improve her family's life, and with the help of her children she has successfully raised and planted out 1,400 seedlings.

She said, "Some of these trees will give me firewood and others will provide timber in the future."



Forest Conservation

This year, to support our Forest Conservation team in Mzimba District, we donated three motorbikes to the Department of Forestry. It is important to ensure that the Government Departments that we work with at community level are able to get out and do their jobs in the same way as our teams can. This maximises the work that can be achieved. We provide a monthly fuel allowance too.

Our Country Director, Force Ngwira, said, "Forestry officials were having difficulties doing their extension work particularly in hard-to-reach areas as they did not have adequate transport. With the provision of motorbikes, we have now reduced the issue."



L-R: FORCE DONATING THE MOTORBIKES TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY; VISIT FROM SECRETARY FOR NATURAL RESOURCES AND CLIMATE CHANGE, DR. MKUNGULA AND DIRECTOR OF FORESTRY, MR ZULU

In the summer we welcomed a visit from the Secretary for Natural Resources and Climate Change, Dr Mkungula. Accompanied by the Director of Forestry, Mr Zulu, they visited various farmers and learned first-hand about our tree planting project.

Force said, "It was a great visit and Dr Mkungula said he had never seen a tree planting project with such a high tree survival rate."

We are proud to be supporting communities not only with tree planting but with fuel-efficient cookstoves too. Together, these projects help protect Malawi's forests and allow areas which been deforested to regenerate.

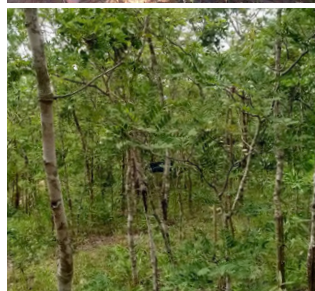


The Forest Conservation team in Mzimba District primarily works to protect Choma Hill. The area has been lost to illegal charcoal production so as part of their work, Bryne, Hope and Annie work closely with the Forest Conservation Committees and the Forestry Department.

One way they achieve this is by supporting them with patrols to confiscate illegal charcoal. Roadblocks are set up in different places within the area, and during 2024, 12 patrols were responsible for the confiscation of 304 bags of charcoal, 212 timber planks, 17 bicycles, 10 illegally cut trees, and two motorbikes.



We continue to encourage all of the Forest Conservation Committees (FCC) to make firebreaks to avoid wildfires getting out of control, and to remove weeds and clear grass which helps to stimulate secondary tree growth. As a result, we are proud to see how well forest areas are regenerating and are protected.



During the year, the Nkhata Bay South team worked with 65 Forest Conservation Committees, supporting them with forest patrols, firebreak clearing, training and attending Chief meetings to further promote the project to local leaders.

They have experienced some challenges including bushfires and people coming to chop down trees or burn them for charcoal. However, the three Umbrella Committees who oversee the 65 Committees are helping to identify anyone carrying out illegal activities and are taking them to the local Chiefs to be fined.

Catherine Banda, one of our Forest Conservation Coordinators, pictured here with her bag bearing the slogan *How hard can it be?*, sums up the challenges facing the community and the team. She said, "When it comes to forest conservation, it really is harder protecting existing trees compared with planting new ones."



The Ndundu Forest Conservation Committee have been established for three years. They carry out regular patrols and create firebreaks to reduce the risk of forest fires. They have installed beehives to deter people who want to cut down the trees because typically people are scared of African honey bees as they are very defensive and react faster to disturbances, and their stings are extremely painful.

Nemon Caster is one of the members. He was motivated to protect the trees because of his grandfather. He said, "My grandfather would talk about the trees and why we need them. He remembers when he was a small boy and the trees were small, and he marvels at how they have grown. I want my own children to benefit from living in the forest and having clean air."

Catherine explained that this year she has trained seven new committees. They are located up in the hills and are actively patrolling and protecting their forested areas.

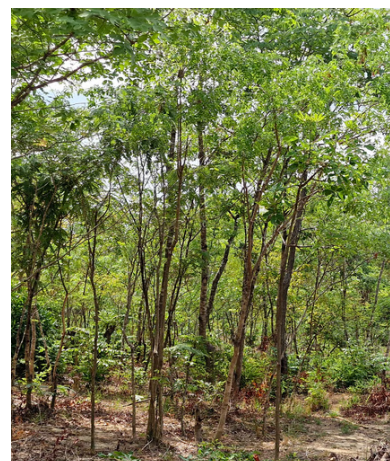


Issac has been a Community Volunteer since he left school seven years ago. He works closely with 33 Forest Conservation Committees and with Mathews, the Forest Guard appointed by the Forestry Department. He said, "It is our responsibility to conserve the environment otherwise we will have challenges in future like unreliable rainfall."

Working as a team, Issac explained that this year the committee have faced bigger challenges with outsiders using chainsaws to cut trees for timber. He said, "Someone came with a chainsaw but we caught him and took him to the Chief. He was fined 50,000MWK (approx. £23/\$30) in cash and five goats too."

Mathews, a Forest Guard for 28 years, continued to say, "People are supposed to ask permission if they need any wood. There is deadwood within the forest which they can have for firewood, and if they need poles, there are some trees that we can coppice."

He explained that if people are caught without permission and it is their first time, he educates them on the rules but if they are caught again, they have to pay a fine. This can vary from four chickens worth a total of 40,000MWK (approx. £18/\$24) to one or two goats worth 75,000MWK each (approx. £34/\$44)



Forest Conservation Manager for Nkhata Bay District, John Banda, said, "This year we have continued motivating the Forest Conservation Committees, supporting them with patrols and firebreak clearing. We have trained and met with Village Natural Resource Committees, and with Chiefs too, ensuring that everyone is working together."

Some of the challenges noted by the team include illegal bushfires, and people from other areas chopping down trees for timber, charcoal and firewood. John said, "We have protected areas and village forest areas. Often the clearing of trees is in these village areas but every natural tree belongs to the Government and no one is authorised to cut a natural tree down. Even if it is on your land, you have get permission from the Forestry Department."



John continued to say that if people are caught, their tools, timber and charcoal are confiscated and they are brought to the Chiefs where they are charged a fine according to the local bylaws.

We appreciate protecting forests will never be easy nor perfect. However, despite the challenges faced, there are positives too. The Forest Conservation Committees remained dedicated and motivated, and by protecting the forests, they are also helping ensure that there are more plants, flowers and fungi growing there too.

Briquettes

Last year we started trialling a briquette project. This has continued throughout 2024 working mainly with three groups who make the briquettes using agricultural waste such as rice husks. The three groups have made 203 50kg sacks of briquettes which amounts to approximately 135,000 briquettes. The three groups sell to 60 customers who typically buy the briquettes by the 50kg sack load. They use them to replace wood and charcoal for cooking. The trial continues to look for more efficient way to make the briquettes on a larger scale as the families already using the briquettes say they are better than charcoal.

Adam is a member of the Kapanda Briquette Club. Mixing the carbonised agricultural waste is one step in making the briquettes. He said, "We meet twice a week and can make up to 500 briquettes in one day."

The group consists of 10 members, five men and five women. It is an opportunity to earn an income as well as support the environment. Enaly, 24, and Agness, 21, are the youngest members. They both dropped out of secondary school and became mothers very young. They agreed that making and selling briquettes is an opportunity to support their families as they currently earn money through farming or piece work.

Vice Chairman, Adamson Chona, said, "Not only are the briquettes a solution to deforestation as they save trees which are cut to make charcoal, but we can earn an income too."



Several households using these briquettes shared their opinions on them compared to using charcoal on an mbaula or wood on our fuel-efficient cookstove.

Tabitha said, "I used to use a cookstove when I lived in Chintheche but when I moved to Kapanda, it is a long distance to collect wood. I heard about the briquettes from my neighbour so I bought some to try. They are great, they cook fast. I am happy that they save trees too."

Tabitha is married to the local Agriculture Extension Officer, Efran, and he said, "It helps with climate change as it is not cutting down trees. We use one 50kg sack per month costing 12,000MWK (approx. £5.50/\$7)



L-R: TABITHA PREPARING TO COOK; TITUS AND WIGHANE COOKING TOGETHER; ESAU AND FRASCO

Titus is a teacher at Kapanda Community Day Secondary School. He transferred in January 2024 from Karonga District and is married to Wighane. She explained that they used to cook using illegally produced charcoal and, although a 50kg sack is half the price of the briquettes, she said that it does not last as long.

Titus said, "We did not have a cookstove in Karonga so that is why we used charcoal. When we moved here we were introduced to the briquette project and decided to try them. We prefer them as they last longer and do not produce as much smoke compared to charcoal. This is better for my family."

Students from Kapanda Day Secondary School also use briquettes to cook. Esau and Frasco rent a room nearby and to save time collecting firewood, they buy the briquettes. This gives them more time to study. They said, "Our meal is ready within 30 minutes. Our parents send us money to buy 20 briquettes at a time for 500MWK."



L-R: MARY COOKING FOR HER GRANDMOTHER; BRIDGET WITH HER HUSBAND; SHOWING THE BRIQUETTES BURNING

Mary Banda and Bridget Mark echoed the views of Tabitha, Titus, Esau, and Frasco. Mary explained that she moved in with her grandmother so she could care for her. Cooking with briquettes means she does not have to leave her grandmother to collect firewood. The family of three typically use a 50kg sack in a month.

Bridget moved to Matete from Mulanje District. They used to use charcoal to cook with but were told about the briquette project and were willing to try them. She said, "We have been using them for two months now and they cook faster and it is cheaper as the briquettes last a long time."

We will continue this trial to gather more customer feedback and to find an efficient way to scale the project to cater for a potentially high demand in urban areas.

The combined effort of planting trees for sustainable timber and firewood, and trialling new ideas to help people to cook in a more environmentally friendly way helps with protecting existing forests for generations to come. On behalf of everyone involved, thank you very much for your support.

