

Community-Based Reforestation Initiative Brings Economic and Environmental Gains to Zambian Villages



With just \$10,000 per year, the U.S. Forest Service and Peace Corps have created a replicable, sustainable model for local reforestation and livelihood gains.



"We sell the oranges and kids go to school or we eat the fruits,"
Lackson Ngoma of Zamanga village.



"Instead of Peace Corps teaching, we now teach our brothers in our local language. Zambians teaching Zambians,"
Emmanuel Moyo of Kalichero village.



"This year we will get fruits from our mango trees and poles, medicine and shade from our bush (indigenous) trees,"
Akren Moyo of Kalichero village.





In Zambia's Eastern Province, communities look to forests for food, energy, medicines and income. Zambia has historically been one of Africa's most forested countries, with vast stretches of Miombo woodlands providing resources for people and animals alike, but this is changing quickly. Unsustainable agricultural practices and the cutting of trees for charcoal and timber has led to increased greenhouse gas emissions, ecosystem degradation and resource challenges for local people.

Zambia's rapid deforestation has drawn the attention of large development organizations. The World Bank and the Global Environment Facility are currently supporting a \$33 million effort called the Zambia's Integrated Forest Landscape Project. The project aligns with Zambia's broader development agenda of reducing deforestation and improving agricultural practices, particularly for farmers in the Eastern Province.

Alongside this massive project, landscape-level project are small, locally driven initiatives that are changing farmer practices one village at a time. For the past several years, the U.S. Forest Service has partnered with American Peace Corps volunteers in Zambia to design and implement community-based reforestation initiatives, through which community members learn best practices for nurturing and planting seedlings. The communities then benefit from the fruit, shade, and the carbon sequestration that growing trees provide.

The initiatives have been a resounding success—galvanizing local reforestation, spurring collaboration among villages, improving nutrition and health, and cultivating an appreciation for and practice of natural resource management. Participants in the initiatives have increased their incomes, formed governance structures and taken on leadership roles. They are also teaching their neighbors how to sustain and benefit from reforestation initiatives.

"Several of the women in the group organized themselves to help each other by visiting each woman's house to dig properly sized and spaced holes in preparation for planting fruit trees. Rather than working alone to dig all of their own holes, they worked as a group to lighten the overall load for each individual. There is a palpable sense of pride among the group at the work they have accomplished," said Alicia Buchanan, 2018 Peace Corps Zambia Volunteer, Kalichero Village.

"I have been able to take a step back in the leadership role and let the members take the club in the direction that they want. That's sustainability. I still attend every meeting and help assist with some logistical issues, but besides that, they are completely running the program on their own, which is amazing," said Thomas Briggs Peace Corps Zambia Volunteer, 2019 Kalichero Village.