Turning Malawi green again

Enabling communities to escape poverty through environmental stewardship

Proposal
September 2022 to August 2023



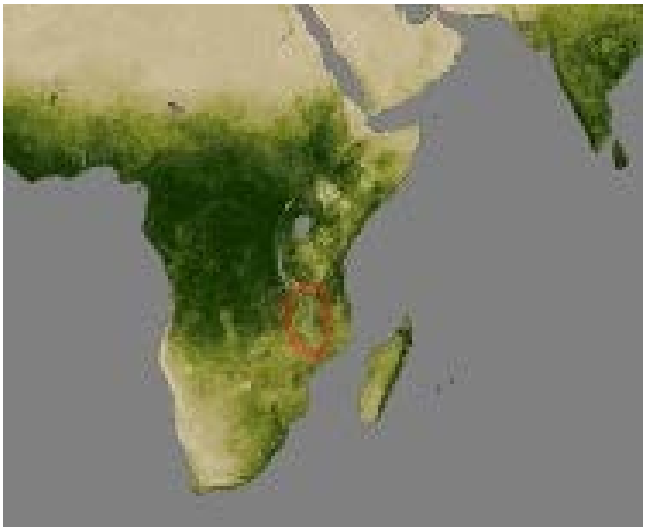
In Malawi, as climate change makes farming increasingly difficult, people are cutting down trees to enlarge their farms to try and increase their meagre yields. Sadly, the loss of trees is hastening the degradation of the ground here and Malawi is turning brown. Many are consequently even more badly affected by hunger, flooding, and deforestation. They are stuck in a vicious cycle. Source: Alex Baker/ Tearfund

Overview

This project will support 500 vulnerable families in the Balaka district, central Malawi, to sustainably mitigate the impacts of climate change. This project will empower communities to increase sustainable agricultural production and improve forest cover, enhancing the capacity and resilience of small scale farmers.

"Felled, all felled, are all felled"[1]





Satellite imagery from March 2000 compared to that from November 2020 reveals a disturbing change where the dark green of Malawi's landscape has been replaced with a much paler scene over the last twenty years. In Malawi, deforestation is estimated to be responsible for the loss of 33,000 hectares per year, the highest deforestation rate in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.[2] **At current rates of deforestation, all of Malawi's trees could be felled by as early as 2079.**[3] Deforestation is not only linked to floods and thus the destruction of crops, but also to the long term fertility of the soil. This is particularly ruinous for Malawi, where agriculture is the main industry and biggest source of income.

Climate change is exacerbating the situation. 2018 delivered unexpectedly low levels of rainfall to Malawi, but in a cruel twist of fate, 2019 brought flash floods which proved disastrous for families.[4] The 2020/21 rainy season started late across most of Malawi and erratic rains at the end of last year have delayed planting.[5] Consecutive climatic shocks are leaving the small farming families, who are dependent on rain-fed agriculture, reeling.[6] **Over and over again, another season delivers unexpected blows to families' harvests and lives, and people are finding their relationship with the land increasingly fraught.**

Malawi remains one of the poorest countries in the world with more than two-thirds of the population living in poverty.[7] Over 1.9 million people were estimated to be facing severe food insecurity in Malawi before COVID-19[8] and the pandemic has only exacerbated the chaotic situation here. As the population increases and climate change makes farming more difficult, poor families are resorting to cutting down more trees to open up more land for farming, in an endless dysfunctional cycle of damage and loss.

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[1] 'Binsley Poplars' Gerard Manley Hopkins laments the destruction of a row of poplar trees near the village of Binsey, northwest of Oxford (1879)
[2] 'An Analysis of the Causes of Deforestation in Malawi' Susan Ngwira and Teiji Watanabe (15 March 2019)
[3] 'Addressing Malawi's deforestation crisis' Jonny Vaughan, CEO of Lilongwe Wildlife Trust (21 March 2019)
[4] Harvests fell by over a quarter compared to Malawi's five-year average. OHCA Malawi Country Profile February 2019
[5] Malawi Food Security Outlook, FEWS NET (30 December 2020)
[6] Prices of maize and alternative commodities rose by 60 to 100 per cent above average in 2019.
[7] Around 70 per cent of the population in Malawi live below the international poverty line of US$1.90 per day - https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_SSA.pdf.
[8] UN Malawi Emergency Appeal (May - October 2020).

Empowering people to protect the environment

Tearfund's partner, Eagles, will work with the local church and community to mitigate the impact of climate change on the people living in Balaka and the land they farm. This is part of Tearfund's overall strategy for Malawi, a country where 85 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, low levels of household income are causing stark levels of hunger, and the nation's forests are being depleted at an alarming rate. Tearfund's five-year aspiration is to see 600,000 people freed from poverty and living transformed lives. People like Esme.

Esme used to be married. In her own words, she described it as a ***"sad life".*** They had little food and many challenges. They did not have their own land or house and so she would ask around her community for casual work of any kind, like washing other people's clothes. When her husband divorced her and left her to care for their five children, life became sadder still.



But then Esme joined a Self Help Group (SHG). Comprising around ten members, these groups meet weekly to support each other, save together, and receive training on topics such as WASH, livelihoods, and agriculture. They pool their resources in order to take out small loans which can be used to start new businesses or meet family needs.

For Esme, it was the start of a new happier chapter in her life. Encouraged by her new friends, and with a small loan, she decided to start a new business selling bread 'scones' and tea (pictured right, source: Alex Baker/ Tearfund). Her venture was an immediate success and she was able to use the profits to pay back her loan and buy some land.

She started farming on her new land using the new agricultural techniques she had learnt in her Self Help Group. **This course improves the fertility of the soil and conserves water, negating the need to plough, and introduces farmers to improved drought-resilient seeds and affordable, organic pesticides and fertilisers made from local resources.**[9] Entrepreneurship and new agricultural businesses are encouraged as part of the training. The result is higher crop yields, improved income from the sale of surplus food, reduced manual labour, and greater resilience to climate change. It also benefits the environment, with outcomes such as healthier soil, erosion control, water conservation, and keeping carbon in the ground.

Esme has focussed on growing maize and groundnuts[10] and continues to see a yearly increase in her crops as the new agricultural techniques bear increasing fruit. She has been able to feed her family with the produce and sell the surplus. ***"My children are having a good life, eating two meals a day. I can buy school materials for them. I am so proud. I am enjoying my life".***

Part of Esme's healing journey has included a restoration of her relationship with the land. As Wangarĩ Maathai [11] said: ***"You cannot protect the environment unless you empower people, you inform them, and you help them understand that these resources are their own."***

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[9] The course promotes goat dropping and compost-manure making, irrigation, small livestock production, crop diversification, community seed systems, post-harvest crop management, backyard and sack vegetable production, maximum soil cover principles, agroforestry, vetiver grass planting along ridge contours, and year-round tree planting.

[10] Groundnuts are a great blend of healthy fats and one of the best sources of protein. They are a great source of fibre that curbs appetite, lowers the risk of heart disease and regulates blood glucose levels. Groundnuts are also immensely rich in potassium, calcium, phosphorus and B vitamins which offer a host of health benefits.

[11] Kenyan social, environmental, and political activist and the first African woman to win the Nobel Prize.

2,500 people like Esme

Esme's situation had been desperate. The sadness that pervades the lives of those like her, living in extreme poverty in rural Malawi is deep. Grief is the natural consequence of such need, the oppressive weight of climate change and now the cruel blow of coronavirus and the impact of lockdowns that continue to bear upon the most vulnerable. Tearfund's partner, Eagles, is hoping to transform the lives of the poor and the landscape they live in.

The transformation in Esme's life is now spilling out to those around her. Her business has become so successful that she now employs two bakers to help her make enough scones to meet demand. And her land is so fruitful that she employs four others to help care for and manage the farm. People who previously, like her, survived on casual, inconsistent and poorly paid labour, now have stable jobs and are starting their own healing journeys.

With your support, this new project could reach 2,500 people in Balaka directly and another 2,000 people indirectly. These project participants will be identified by local leaders using set vulnerability criteria. Key activities for this project are below:



Agricultural training will be delivered to 300 'Lead Farmers' who will be identified to proliferate the knowledge amongst their communities and demonstrate new techniques. The training will cover soil and water management, organic fertiliser making,[12] crop diversification[13] and rotation, and vetiver hedge contour ridging.[14] The climate-smart agriculture technologies enhance soil fertility and increase the ability of crops to withstand dry spells by conserving soil moisture, reducing temperatures and increasing moisture-holding capacity.



Lead Farmers will also receive training in post-harvest crop management, value chains, cooperative initiatives and market linkages to help farmers increase their incomes. Farmers will be enabled to enter into value-added agriculture and identify commercial farming opportunities, increasing the economic value of their farming through particular production processes.[15] The consequence will be an increase in food security amongst the most vulnerable and crops that are resilient to climatic shocks. The broader community is also expected to benefit through increased circulation of money and informal employment.



Environmental stewardship will also be taught and tree planting encouraged (including indigenous fruit trees) to 2,000 local community members so that people recognise the importance of trees and are acting to protect their natural resources and reverse the rapid deforestation in Malawi. Seeds and polythene tubing (to aid with irrigation) will be distributed to enable communities to establish tree nurseries. Deforestation is linked to floods and thus the destruction of crops, but also to the long term fertility of the soil. Trees produce organic matter that enriches the soil with nutrients. Trees also hold more water than farmland, substantially slowing down the rate at which water reaches rivers, giving them more time to handle excess floodwater and prevent the erosion of precious topsoil.



Self Help Groups (like the one in Balaka pictured on the page below, source Rhiannon Horton/ Tearfund) will be established for 500 vulnerable families and will receive livestock, bee-keeping and agricultural training. They will engage in honey production and goat rearing and as group enterprises, will be better able to engage with local markets. Market research will be conducted to help identify viable opportunities for the SHGs. The SHGs will also establish nurseries for fruit trees and woodlots to be used for firewood. Village Natural Resources Management Committees

[12] The project will encourage the production of locally made fertilizer using materials such as animal manure and manure from ecological sanitation latrines, ash, and maize bran.
[13] Farmers will be supplied with cowpeas, maize and sweet potatoes to plant.
[14] Vetiver grass contour hedges are made of densely tufted, perennial clump grass with stiff leaf bases that overlap. They form narrow, dense hedges when planted along the contours of sloping land, slow down run-off and help the water soak into the soil rather than washing off the slope.
[15] According to one study, value-added agriculture allows farmers to capture as much as 80 per cent of the value of most of their agricultural produce. Mani, Gyanendra; Joshi, P.K.; Ashok, M.V. (2017). *Financing Agriculture Value Chains in India: Challenges and Opportunities*

(VNRMCs) will be established and trained to manage and regenerate these resources. These VNRMCs will draw up forest management plans, and establish new by-laws and penalties to protect forest areas. Women will be represented on a 50:50 basis in decision-making positions to help ensure they have access to and control over local resources.



With your support, people in Balaka could enjoy the fruits of a corrected relationship with the land. Bountiful harvests and plentiful resources could improve their nutrition, raise their economic well being, meet their immediate needs, and give them hope that the future can be good and 'green'.

Tearfund needs to raise **£29,070*** to fund this project. Can you help? A budget breakdown follows:

ACTIVITY OR ITEM	COST (£)
Baseline survey and community envisioning	1,991
Training and seeds for Lead Farmers	3,301
Establish and train Self Help Groups and provide beehives	4,027
Establish and train VNRMCs and provide seeds and polythene tubing for nurseries	1,726
Project personnel	11,481
Local administration and project monitoring	2,474
UK support costs**	4,070
Total costs	**29,070**

* Using an exchange rate of £1 to 1,150 MWK

** 7% of your gift will go to our wider international work, ensuring your money is well spent. 7% will go to help cover running costs in the UK which includes fundraising, enabling us to raise further vital resources. Any Gift Aid received from your donation will go to Tearfund's general work to help where the need is greatest.

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