Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Two U.S. Government Initiatives Promote Conservation in Zambia's Agriculture and Energy Sectors

Zambia has approximately 50 million hectares of forest and a deforestation rate – officially estimated at 250,000 to 300,000 hectares per year – among the highest in the world.

Like many countries facing rapid deforestation, this problem in Zambia is primarily driven by the use of wood for fuel (both timber and charcoal) and unsustainable agricultural practices. Deforestation is also exacerbated by poverty: approximately 80 percent of rural Zambians live on less than $1.25 a day and most rely on natural resources like forests for day-to-day survival.

For the majority of farmers who make a living growing staple crops on small plots of land, it is difficult to grow enough food to feed their families throughout the year, and they frequently turn to charcoal production or poaching to make ends meet. As Zambia's urban population grows in cities that lack reliable access to electricity, higher demand for charcoal is also accelerating deforestation.

In combination, all of these factors have disastrous consequences for Zambia's forests, wildlife and other natural resources. That's why Feed the Future and the **Global Climate Change Initiative** are taking an integrated approach with partners in Zambia to improve rural livelihoods and food security, while offering smallholder farmers and other community members the tools to conserve the land they need to sustain their livelihoods over the long term.

Working with the Zambian civil society organization **Community Markets for Conservation** (COMACO), Feed the Future is training rural farmers from in conservation agriculture techniques like composting, mulching, crop rotation and inter-cropping with agroforestry (i.e. cultivating food crops and trees simultaneously), practices that increase yields while also protecting the soil and trees on farms. COMACO offers market incentives to encourage farmers to change traditional farming methods by organizing them into groups and purchasing their crops at a premium price. As a result, 67 percent of participating farmers have fully adopted conservation agriculture and better natural resource management techniques over two years. COMACO also supplies dividends in the form of seeds and equipment to farmers who exclusively use conservation techniques to grow their crops.

Since this Feed the Future project began in 2011, farmers from 46,000 households working with COMACO have seen a 47 percent increase in their annual incomes, and aerial surveys taken before and during the project show a significant increase in vegetation where participating farmers live compared to neighboring regions.

As a counterpart to conservation agriculture programming under Feed the Future, a project under the Global Climate Change initiative is mitigating deforestation resulting from Zambia's heavy reliance on charcoal for energy. Charcoal is deeply ingrained in the country's economy, and a full 50 percent of urban Zambians use charcoal as their primary energy source. While a full transition to more sustainable energy sources will be a long-term process in Zambia, it is still possible in the near term to slow the pace of deforestation through sustainable harvesting. That's why this climate change project, administered by the not-for-profit **BioCarbon Partners Trust** (BCPT), supports training for traditional charcoal producers (frequently the poorest members of rural communities) to teach them better harvesting techniques that won't wipe out their communities' forests.

Working closely with local leaders in rural villages, the project sets aside land that is actively managed for natural regeneration. Charcoal producers harvest only a small portion of the land each year; use cutting techniques that allow trees to regenerate after the wood is harvested; utilize all parts of the trees instead of just the trunks; and re-plant important trees. BCPT has also introduced more efficient kiln designs that produce greater quantities of denser charcoal out of the same amount of wood with less labor, as well as connected producers of this "eco-charcoal" to the market, where it sells for 20 percent more than traditional charcoal.

By offering climate-smart alternatives to traditional agriculture and forestry practices, these two U.S. Government initiatives are helping increase incomes for vulnerable households while supporting Zambia in building more sustainable agriculture and energy sectors for future generations.

The projects described above are both managed by the U.S. Agency for International Development. ***Learn more*** *about USAID's work on agriculture and food security in Zambia.*