



## Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/planting-trees-malawi-sustainable-future>

# Planting Trees in Malawi for a Sustainable Future



Zilani Khonje

Ms. Annie works in her seedling nursery in the Upper Rivrivi sub-catchment area of the Shire River in Malawi. The nursery replaced her charcoal business, which was causing soil erosion and harming agricultural production.

Annie Kaunda\* lives in Malawi's Shire River watershed, where limited economic opportunities and arable land force families to consider unsustainable farming practices. Her story is like that of many other women who live in the area.

For 10 years, Kaunda ran a charcoal business, hiring young men to cut down trees and prepare them for charcoal production. Though charcoal production was her livelihood, it leads to deforestation, which can cause soil erosion and land degradation—and Kaunda knew it.

"When I moved into this area in 1999, I swore I would never cut down any tree for survival," she recalled. "But in 2005, I found myself being pressured to do so. I looked at the trees in my field and the natural forest around me and I got so tempted."

Before long, Kaunda was producing more than 15 bags of charcoal each month, without ever replanting a tree. But when practices such as this become common, the environmental costs are high. In Malawi, these costs include heavy sedimentation loads in the Shire River.

The 250-mile-long Shire River is critical in this southern African nation. The vast majority of Malawi's electricity is generated from three hydroelectric plants at the river's upper and middle sections. The river's vibrant watershed is a source of drinking water, crop irrigation, transport and recreation for the communities that thrive in the area, and most rely on farming and the surrounding natural resources for their livelihoods.

But high rates of deforestation and river bank cultivation, largely from charcoal production and agriculture in Malawi, have resulted in serious river bank erosion, which contributes to heavy sedimentation that flows into the river. As it does, the sediment clogs turbines at the hydroelectric plants, frequently knocking them offline. The impact of increasing soil and land degradation has also begun to threaten agricultural production and availability of clean water.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a Feed the Future partner agency, is helping to limit erosion and increase yields in Malawi by funding technical support and training on sustainable land management and conservation agricultural practices. In this way, MCC also helps to advance the goals of Feed the Future, which include women's empowerment.

In Malawi, most agricultural production, disposition of earnings and land management decisions are made by men, who are considered the heads of household. To support women's empowerment, the MCC Malawi Compact emphasizes full participation of women in training opportunities and technical assistance programs.

MCC also supports educational sessions that include dialogue between men and women. Participants discuss one another's roles, women's rights, domestic violence, family planning, HIV/AIDS, responsible fatherhood and the importance of allowing girls to go to school before marriage. The dialogues promote a better understanding of roles and responsibilities and of equitable decision-making on land use and natural resource management.

Women farmers who have participated in MCC-supported activities have adopted conservation agricultural practices and are now producing enough maize to meet their families' needs without exacerbating soil erosion. They are also able to sell surplus maize at local markets. Some women, like Kaunda, have abandoned their charcoal production businesses and switched to growing and selling tree seedlings.

Kaunda said she doesn't earn as much from selling trees as she did from selling charcoal, but she sees the switch as an investment in both her and her family's future.

"So far, I have planted 155 trees, and I will continue to do so as a way of paying back what I have destroyed," she said.

*\*Name has been changed to protect privacy.*