

## Tiny Forest Project, Malawi



**Background** As one of the poorest countries in the world, most Malawians struggle to meet their most basic daily needs. This naturally has a significant knock on effect to conservation, with wildlife habitats being destroyed in people's desperate attempts to survive.

The biggest environmental issue that Malawi faces is deforestation. At current rates of deforestation, Malawi could be stripped of all trees by as early as 2079. One of the main drivers of deforestation in Malawi is people's dependence on wood for meeting their energy needs, including for cooking, given 89% of Malawians don't have access to electricity. Additionally the illegal cutting of trees is fuelled by a growing demand for charcoal within urban parts of Malawi and the international demand for hardwoods.

Rapid deforestation triggers a dangerous domino effect leading to catastrophic impacts on people, biodiversity, ecosystems, wildlife and weather patterns. The tragic loss of life caused by the floods in Malawi due to Cyclone Freddie earlier this year was a stark reminder of how land degradation can literally be a matter of life and death.

# HIGH FIVE CLUB

changing lives in Africa, £5 at a time



In previous years Malawi has sent in its armed forces to protect areas where deforestation is rampant. Militarising Malawi's forests may sound extreme, but the country really is at a tipping point. Putting Malawi's forests under military protection is, however, clearly not a long-term solution to this crisis – a much more progressive approach is needed including changing hearts and minds at the community level. Legal and political interventions to protect Malawi's forests must go hand in hand with

targeted awareness raising and through securing the buy-in of local communities. Instead of using troops to protect forests, a national army of citizen-custodians needs to be built who understand the significance of protecting trees and are empowered to live more sustainably within their environments. A good place to start is with Malawi's children.

## High Five Club Support:

We have joined hands with **The Brown Munthali Foundation** to provide technical input and the seed funding needed to pilot our first ever **Tiny Forest** project in the primary school in Chitimba community where High Five Club works in Northern Malawi.

One of our Trustees, Fen, actively works on re-forestation projects in the UK. Fen raised the potential for piloting a Tiny Forest project at one of our High Five Club-supported schools in Africa and we jumped at the opportunity! The concept is simple. Planting a diverse range (20-30 different local tree species) of saplings close together in an area the size of a football pitch, with care and attention to watering, can develop in a relatively short period of time into a 'tiny forest'. Such close, diverse planting means trees grow at an accelerated rate compared to trees that are planted further apart in a bigger area, as they compete for resources.



# HIGH FIVE CLUB

changing lives in Africa, £5 at a time



The children at our **Hajimac Academy Primary School** collected seed pods last year from around their area and categorised these according to species. Our Trustee Manny used his own local knowledge of tree planting from growing up in rural Zambia, with the support of Fen and 'JaKenya' Ratwar Okoth from the community based organisation HAFIFE in Kenya and who is experienced in pioneering community reforestation initiatives, prepared a 'how to grow a tiny forest manual'. This provided advice from the initial seed collection and germination of the seeds through to growing these into saplings and transferring across to the tiny forest plot. Ratwar, ourselves and the Malawi community are on a WhatsApp group together so he is able to impart advice as needed – thank you Ratwar! The children collected the seed pods of ca. 20 different local tree species and prepared and planting these in a nursery bed at the school.

They then watered these until they had grown into seedlings and then transferred these into black seedling propagation tubes to further develop them into saplings.

Once ready the saplings were then transported to the tiny forest plot alongside the school (measuring 30m by 10m) and planted up during the rainy season.



Nursery bed at the school



# HIGH FIVE CLUB

changing lives in Africa, £5 at a time





# HIGH FIVE (LVB)

changing lives in Africa, £5 at a time

The saplings are doing well and the children are regularly watering the saplings (collecting the water from nearby streams or Lake Malawi which is only ca. 700m away from the school) so that they will grow over the next few years into a 'tiny forest'. This will not only provide shade



for the children during their breaks at school but will in due season provide fruit and medicines for the community along with a natural habitat for birds, insects and small mammals. In tandem with this practical action, the children are being taught at school the importance of protecting trees. This knowledge they are taking back to their parents and elders in the community, along with saplings to plant and care for alongside their homes.



**Our first tiny forest in Malawi 6 months after planting out the saplings**

# HIGH FIVE CLUB

changing lives in Africa, £5 at a time



Funding of **304,140 Malawi Kwacha (£289)** was provided by High Five Club members to enable the community to purchase locally the equipment needed to implement the project. This included 1000 black seedling propagation tubes, 8 watering cans, 2 hoes, 2 shovels, a wheelbarrow, a rake, 2 pairs gum boots, along with transport costs to/from Mzuzu town to purchase these items plus printing and photocopying costs for the technical manual we prepared.

A very small price to pay for a tiny forest in the making and an upliftment of people's lives in the community! The school in Malawi will continue to collect seed pods and develop an annual cycle of propagating tiny forests in their area for the benefit of the environment, wildlife and people.

We hope at some time in the future to be able to replicate this model at our 3 High Five Club-supported schools in Zambia.

For more information contact  
[Cheryl@highfiveclub.co.uk](mailto:Cheryl@highfiveclub.co.uk)