

SGG-ZOMBATREEZ-NANKHUNDA TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIC PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project is to foster local community development at the same time as improvements are made to the local environment upon which the community depends for its well-being. The project described below is based on an agreement between the UK-registered development group Sustainable Global Gardens [reg. no. 1116243] and Zomba TREEZ, who are based at Zomba Forest Lodge and who are the partners responsible for local implementation in Malawi. It is intended that this partnership and framework of development activities can be continued for six years. It should be acknowledged there are other partners who are essential for the success of this programme. The most important is the village community living in close proximity to the Zomba Forest Lodge. These villagers will undertake much of the physical work needed to implement this strategic plan but they will also be the main beneficiaries. We also intend to engage various NGOs with both similar aims and field experience of community development in Malawi. Tiyeni, who specialise in achieving increased small-scale farm production by improving soil conditions there, made a significant contribution at the start of this programme in late 2021. See www.tiyeni.org for details. There are other NGOs, such as Mbedza who have taken some of the actions described below beyond the catchment area of Nankhunda. See www.mbedza.org for more information.

CONTEXT

At the start of this 6-year programme in 2023 Malawi was a peaceful but economically poor country. In the U.N. Human Development Index [HDI] it was ranked 169th out of 191, with most countries below Malawi either locked in political instability/war or located in the Sahel. It was estimated that some 70% of the local population were living on less than \$2.15/day with most of the rural population engaged in subsistence farming. The main food crops were maize, which rapidly drains soil fertility when grown under a mono-cropping system, and cassava, which can provide bulk food but is of low nutritional value. Recent World Bank data mentioned the following:

- in 2022 expected economic growth was projected to be 0.9%, compared to 2.8% in 2021;
- the year-on-year inflation rate was 26.7% in February 2023, with a sharp rise in the price of basic foods including maize during the previous twelve months;
- the Reserve Bank of Malawi devalued the Malawi Kwacha against the US dollar by 25% in May 2022;
- in 2022 the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee projected that 3.8 million people, about 20% of Malawi's population would go hungry between November 2022 and March 2023;
- such figures show the consequences of climatic shocks, both unseasonal drought and tropical cyclone damage, low agricultural productivity and slow structural transformation.

The above figures illustrate the national economic context in January 2023, the time of SGG's first field visit to ZFL and Nankhunda village in Zomba District. They do not take into consideration the severe disruption to life and the economy caused by Cyclone Freddy in March 2023. During this national disaster official figures reported 1,216 killed and a further 537 missing, presumed dead. Furthermore, 180,000 people needed to abandon their homes, including 140 in Nankhunda village where we work. Southern Malawi suffered from three tropical cyclones in 2022-2023 i.e. Cyclone Ana, Gombe & Freddy. Such climatic disasters remain a major threat to the success of this programme.

Thus, community development in Malawi requires several agricultural and environmental issues to be addressed, and new revenue sources to be established. This particular six-year 2023-2028 programme will focus on improvement of soil conditions to increase farm yields, crop diversification by promoting kitchen gardens using permaculture methods, agroforestry on farm plots, and forest restoration as a basis for alternative employment outside agriculture.

PROPOSAL

Actions had already been taken before 2023 towards some of these goals. Those actions were mainly concerned with forest restoration, which is crucial where income is based on ecotourism, but also vital for local community water supply. That forest restoration work has three main strands i.e.

- working with local community groups to reduce continued damage to the forest by suppressing wildfires;
- spot-planting of trees, especially indigenous species which will foster an improved habitat for local fauna;
- encouraging rewilding, which may prove to be a more effective mechanism for spreading tree cover than tree-planting. It is achieved mainly by fire suppression and regular maintenance. Further details of these activities can be found at <https://www.zombatreesz.com>.

The SGG-ZombaTreez-Nankhunda Transformation programme proposal incorporates six different actions. These are:

1. training farmers to use the Tiyeni method of ‘deep bed farming’. See www.tiyeni.org for details. The basis of the Tiyeni method is the breakup of the hardpan layer found under regularly cultivated fields. This will allow much better root penetration and higher rates of rainfall infiltration, especially when combined with a range of permaculture techniques. The outcome of this extra work by farmers is a much higher yield. SGG has already witnessed the success of this method, and we believe this will bring the local farming community ‘on board’ and gain community support for other agricultural & environmental improvements;

2. it is mainly the traditional food crop maize which will be grown in the improved Tiyeni fields. Thus, there is also a need for much more intensive ‘kitchen gardens’ accompanied by agroforestry planting next to the farmer’s home. This will provide additional vegetables & fruits to improve the local diet, especially for mothers and young children. This promotion of horticulture usually starts with a village ‘demonstration plot’;

3. the above action is to be followed by farmers establishing double-dug raised beds on their own plots from 2024 onwards;

4. it was noticed during 2023 fieldwork that many farmers had agroforestry species planted around the household, but that trees were sorely lacking in the upper maize fields away from the home. Thus, agroforestry planting throughout farm plots will be an important activity during the later years of the programme;

5. another activity will be the continuation of the forest restoration work. The main change from the previous work is that the extent of the restoration work will be increased both inside the Zomba forest Reserve and outside where copses can be established. There are few employment opportunities other than farming in this locality, and nature tourism is one of them. The future realisation of this opportunity is heavily reliant on increased extension of indigenous forest cover

6. some mature trees in the forest will be used for carbon capture income.

The above proposals are a slight modification of the original 5-year Strategic Plan. Those changes are based on findings during SGG’s first monitoring visit and on subsequent events. We are aware that further modifications may be needed as the events of 2024 onwards unfold. A potential new activity is the establishment of a microfinance facility, but this is very much in the embryonic stage. The framework for such an action is not yet established and no budget allocation yet decided. This is something for the future, but another Cyclone Freddy could make this an urgent need.

ESTIMATED BUDGET

The original Strategic Plan included all the actions given above and was based on an estimated budget of £29,820 to be spent over a four year period. At that time it was recognised that such a budget might need modification with the high rate of inflation, the possibility of new environmental disasters, and especially a steady increase in the number of farmer participants. After progress being greater than anticipated in both 2024 and 2025, it is clear that new budget estimates need to be made for the remaining 3 years of this 2023-2028 project

There still remain so many uncertainties about the future so this new budget for the full 6-year programme can only be an estimate at £59,710. During the 2023-5 period SGG followed closely the original estimated budget of £6,000 pa, but for the remaining 2026-2028 period the estimated budget requirement is £39,375. What we think we need for the remaining 3 years of this programme is the following:

1. £2,000 for Tiyeni training of a further 40 farmers in ‘deep bed’ farming methods;
2. £1,500 to establish 2 more Demonstration Kitchen Gardens which will contain double-dug raised beds for intensive production of vegetables, suitable fruits & other small trees to surround the raised beds and a tree nursery;
3. £3,000 to facilitate the adoption of kitchen gardens using the above methods for 150 farmers;
4. £20,000 to be used to support the planting of a further 100,000 agroforestry trees on villagers’ plots;
5. £6,000 to facilitate forest restoration work. This figure is based on a further 60,000 trees, either growing by natural regeneration [‘rewilding’] or spot-planted in the Forest Reserve or nearby copses;
6. £4,250 to be raised for carbon capture payments to be paid in early 2029;
7. £750 for contingency purposes, such as cyclone damage repairs;
8. 5% of the total of the above [£37,500] for general administrative purposes [£1,875]
9. there is no allocation for salaries for those undertaking voluntary work for Sustainable Global Gardens or ZombaTREEZ, although £1,875 is available for administrative costs. Any remuneration for casual work done by members of Nankhunda Transformation has been factored into the above costs;
10. the current estimated budget for the remaining 3 years of this project is £39,375. Approximately half of this amount will be paid to Nankhunda Transformation member households during the final evaluation, which is expected to be during January-March 2029. Thus, the budget allocation for both 2027 and 2028 will be about £10,000 p.a. with project implementation being completed by the end of 2028. Most of the budget allocation for 2027 will be used during SGG’s next monitoring field visit to Nankhunda. At the time of writing the exact time of this visit is not yet decided, but it will almost certainly be between November 2026 and January 2027.

It is SGG’s intention that this “Community Development Through Environmental Improvement” project should engage at least 500 small-scale farmer households and a total of more than 2,500 beneficiaries around the villages of Nankhunda and Nsanama, in Zomba district, Malawi. In view of the progress made and successes achieved in the first three years of this 6-year programme, SGG believe that we have established a development model which other community groups elsewhere in Southern Africa may wish to replicate. Thus, a final part of this Strategic Plan is to engage with anybody or any institution who are concerned to alleviate rural poverty and hunger by environmental improvement and horticultural innovation.

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