

Trees for the future



Left to right: Mildred Dube, Simsngile Siziba and Sibongile Maphosa water saplings at the Mhlangeni woodlot.

The problem of what resources will be available for the next generation is one that everyone around the world is thinking about in the face of climate change. In the Gwanda district of Matabeleland South, communities are taking action to make sure their children will be able to enjoy healthy trees for years to come.

In Mzimuni, 43 members of the local community have formed a group to try and tackle the problem of their environment being depleted. They were worried that this depletion of the indigenous trees would leave their children without building

materials, medicines and firewood, but also that without the trees to protect the land, vital topsoil would be washed away by rain. The Mhlangeni Woodlot is their answer to these problems, and they are being supported by Christian Aid's partner Dabane Trust.

Last year the group worked hard to fence off 175 hectares of land and prepare the ground for the tree planting. Everyone in the group shared the work of digging holes for saplings given by Gwanda Local Council. On 3 December 2016, National Planting Day, 157 saplings were planted.

Fruits for the future

Within the woodlot, the community have planted orange, wild medlar, mulberry and mahogany. Mahogany has medicinal properties and has been used by the community for eye complaints, chest pains, gonorrhoea, kidney problems, bilharzia and snake bites. The seeds can be made into necklaces, which can then be sold for additional income. When the trees have matured, the wood is hard and durable making it good for joinery and furniture.

The fruit trees, like oranges and mulberries, will provide the community with food and additional income through selling the fruit in the village or at local markets, and they are expecting their first fruit in 2018. As the area is well protected by fencing, the grass under the trees will be able to grow long and then be slashed and used to feed cattle.

This project has short-term and long-term benefits as it will provide income through the fruit, cattle feed for livestock, as well as bringing back important indigenous trees which can be used for timber in the future as new trees are planted.

Water from the sand

The saplings still need regular watering, but this is possible thanks to the water pump that Dabane Trust installed in the local sand river to water the neighbouring market garden. At the moment, water has to be collected in buckets from the pump and then carried to the trees. The plan is to install a pipe directly to the woodlot with a solar powered pump to provide water much closer to the trees.

This is a pilot project and the first of its kind for Dabane Trust. They were impressed with the forward thinking shown by the community and the group members, as well as their hard work to get the project started. This woodlot will help Dabane Trust learn how to support communities to protect their local environment, and be sustainable while also generating income for families. If this project is successful, other communities could start similar woodlot schemes.

Deforestation in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe loses about 330,000 hectares of natural forests annually due to deforestation. This has led to the loss of more than 21% of Zimbabwe's forest cover in the last 20 years. Trees are important to the environment, preventing surface run-off during the rainy season and helping more water to be retained in the ground. This is especially important in areas like Gwanda which have suffered drought regularly and where communities are vulnerable to climate change.

Cimecile Ndlovu carries water from a pump in the local sand river to the woodlot to water the saplings. A planned solar pump closer to the trees will make this easier for her.

