



## **JANUARY 2011 NEWSLETTER**

Greetings and Happy New Year!

2011 is here and African Community Project is doing well and growing! This year will be my 10<sup>th</sup> year working in Zambia with some of the most dedicated and happy people I have ever known. Robson Nyirenda a forester was one of the first people I met arriving in country and I am proud to say he is now Country Manager in Zambia of African Community Project. Our goal this year is to introduce more opportunities for communities wanting to manage their forests at a sustainable and profitable level. More charcoal plantations as well as Moringa powder orchards are being planned. As funds allow more wells will be rehabilitated or dug. A breakfast program at some local schools will also be implemented this year; giving a breakfast to the less fortunate children of the village who would normally attend school without eating a breakfast. The program which will run about an hour before school will be focused around having fun, playing sports, doing art and of course learning about their environmental. I know that some children come to school with nothing in their stomachs; this will give these less fortunate kids a step up ready to start their day. Sponsors will be needed to maintain the program once it is up and running and we have lots schools (children) that could use the program.

Presentations or questions! I would be happy to come a give a presentation at your school, church or club, showing you what we do in our programs. Or even just answer any questions you may have about our work in Zambia.

Zikomo Kwambiri (thank you)

Garry



*What do you see in the above photograph? (Beside Mr. Mwale our facilitator)*

Some will look and see that the owner of this land is expanding his or her family's field by cutting down the tree which is taking up valuable space, causing shade on the crops and consuming water that would otherwise go to the growing of the crop planted in the field. Another reason might include that getting rid of the tree would eliminate the nesting of birds that raise havoc on some crops. (Growing millet is a good example). Maybe even seeing the way the tree has been cut you may know that the wood will be burnt to produce charcoal, a necessity for cooking in rural Africa.

The following is what my reaction was when I took this photograph. As usually my first question to the farmer is, "why?" Followed by an explanation of the word 'why'. The answer he gives is rooted in the reasons that come to mind. Like the ones above. All good answers.

I will tell you what I told him! The tree made a good wind break: It provided shade for water conservation through slowing down evaporation: It provided shade from the direct sun: It fixed nitrogen in the soil desperate for nutrition: It collected and stored carbon (I got a look of bewilderment when I mention this). My list of reasons goes on and on. At this point I can see my reasoning was going no-where. The farmers reasoning for cutting the tree still won hands down. Especially when he interrupts me with, "it reduces the yield of crops grown for food security for his family"! He is absolutely right!

So from here on I can only suggest; "if you had a smaller family you would not need to produce so much food. The answer came quick! "we need children to sustain our family". I roll my eyes and think of the high infant mortality across rural Africa. The argument continues. Back and forth we debate. Things are heating up! That's right! There is no shade! The only thing that would provide shade lies dismembered on the ground. Less than 30 minutes to chop it down and 30 years to grow it back.

Enough is enough! What is the solution? Simple. Grow more trees. The farmer looks at me in wonderment. I wait for the inevitable, “why?” “Education”, I say to myself. Let us find a tree to sit under and discuss the means to a solution we can both be happy with. My first reason (shade) has been taken well. We need shade! There is a need to explain to the substance farmer that he is absolutely right in his reasoning, food for his family comes first. But the tree in the field is gone, so I must teach him to plant trees in areas that have no agricultural value, believe me there are plenty of locations around his field and the village. Even in their cultivated fields, year after year they plant seeds in vain because of poor soil. Plant trees as wind breaks and erosion control, the value will far out weigh the argument of wasted growing areas. The trees planted may also produce sustainable crops like fruits and nuts; reducing the need of larger fields or after a short rotation of growing nitrogen fixing trees, replant food crops. All this will have an effect on the surrounding natural forests, giving them a reprieve from over harvesting for things like charcoal, firewood, building poles, handles for tools and commercial timber harvesting just to name a few.

A very good article appeared in *The Economist* this last December (2010) describing the disasters of deforestation on Easter Island many years ago and the birth of forests on Ascension Island that is on going today. Human intervention of our natural environment has got us into lots of problems but human intervention can also get us out of some of the environmental problems facing us today. Look after our children (which is the farmer’s main concern and look after our trees (my concern): they will look after us!

**Donations:** We are a donor driven project; the more money we receive, the more trees we can plant. Donations can be made to African Community Project by using the donation page on our website [www.africancommunityproject.com/donations/](http://www.africancommunityproject.com/donations/) or by sending it to African Community Project, 102 – 25 Government Street, Victoria, BC. Canada V8V 2K4. Please specify if you would like a receipt for tax purposes. **Thank you**

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