

# HEALTHY HABITATS STRONG COMMUNITIES



**MyTrees**  
MITI YANGU

# THE TIPPING POINT

Zimbabwe's indigenous woodland is in trouble.

Up to 330,000 ha are lost every year and around 60,000 ha of this is due to tobacco production.

The Zimbabwe tobacco industry has committed millions of dollars to address this issue through the establishment of sustainable fuel sources but, in the meantime, our natural woodland continues to diminish. Until now, there has been no programme in place to restore the hundreds of thousands of hectares already lost.

## PLANT, RESTORE, PROTECT

My Trees is an independent trust, established as a partnership between private sector agri-business and the Zambezi Society. The organisation's aim is to restore and protect indigenous forest across Zimbabwe, and provide the communities which rely on these forests realistic alternatives to their consumption.

My Trees began in 2019 and has been incubated through its Pilot Phase by Rift Valley Corporation. This phase has seen roughly 200,000 trees planted, 16 nurseries established, over 400 community members employed by the trust, and 120,000 ha of intact woodland brought under conservation.

Our next phase seeks to build on this foundation and double our scale over the next 3 years.







# GIANT AMBITIONS

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My Trees' goal is to reduce the net rate of natural forest loss in rural Zimbabwe. We work towards this goal by following three interwoven strands of activity.



## Restoration

Increasing contiguous natural woodland cover by replanting, maintaining and restoring affected areas.



## Preservation

Protecting large areas of remaining intact woodland by enforcing existing legislation and working with our national institutions and agencies with a mandate for conservation.



## Providing Alternatives

Providing rural communities affected by deforestation with alternative sources of income, technology and fuels.

# THE MY TREES TRUST

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## FOUNDING PARTNERS

The Trust is registered in Zimbabwe and the board of directors includes representatives from the Zambezi Society and Rift Valley.

Rift Valley is one of Zimbabwe's largest agricultural companies, bringing finance, technical expertise and other essential inputs to the development of agriculture in Zimbabwe. [www.riftvalley.com](http://www.riftvalley.com)

The Zambezi Society (ZamSoc) is a registered Private Voluntary Organisation which has been promoting the conservation and sustainable management of the Zambezi Basin for the benefit of both its wildlife and people since 1982. [www.zamsoc.org](http://www.zamsoc.org)

The Trust is also supported by the Sustainable Afforestation Association (SAA) – this association was put together by the tobacco industry in an effort to provide sustainable sources of fuel for tobacco curing, and is now one of the largest plantation forestry owners in Zimbabwe.

## NEW RELATIONSHIPS

Over the last year, the trust has gained recognition on the international stage, and attracted funding and accolades from the following organisations:

**ColdPlay** – [www.sustainability.coldplay.com](http://www.sustainability.coldplay.com)

Coldplay have announced My Trees as their conservation partner and their support will enable us to scale up efforts to protect threatened parts of the Zambezi Biosphere Reserve.

**AFR100** – [www.africa.terramatch.org](http://www.africa.terramatch.org)

My Trees has been named as one of the AFR100 top 100 tree planting projects in Africa. TerraFund and WRI are partnering with us to plant 100,000 trees in the 2022 season.

**Uplink Innovator**

Uplink is a World Economic Forum initiative and My Trees has been selected as one of 12 winners of the Carbon Market Challenge for our work on clean cooking and reducing firewood consumption.

**One Tree Planted**

One Tree Planted is a global tree planting initiative and they have selected My Trees as a partner in Zimbabwe, aiming to plant 80,000 trees in the 2022 season.

**COLDPLAY**

**afri100**





**TOTAL  
CURRENT**  
2021

**TOTAL  
NEXT PHASE**  
2022 / 2023



**850 HA**

TREES  
PLANTED  
**180,000**



**250,000**

TOTAL NUMBER OF  
EMPLOYED COMMUNITY  
TREE CHAMPIONS

**300**



**626**

COMMUNITY FOREST  
AREAS PROTECTED  
(COMMUNITY STEWARDS)

**0 HA**



**500 HA**

CO-MANAGED HABITAT  
AND WILDLIFE AREAS  
WITHIN THE ZAMBEZI  
LANDSCAPE

**120,000 HA**



**160,000 HA**

## OUR APPROACH

Our approach to all three strands of activity starts by building strong relationships based on mutual trust with affected communities, leadership, schools and churches.

### RESTORATION

Once we have established grassroots relationships with the community, sites are volunteered to the Trust for restoration. Appropriate sites are selected with the aim of creating contiguous forest cover connected by a network of habitat corridors. Each site is evaluated to determine the appropriate indigenous species mix and silvicultural treatment or regime. The Trust selects one of five regimes to apply to the site, depending on remaining forest cover, and the current land use.

#### Reforestation

This regime is applied to sites with less than 10% remaining natural forest cover. Appropriate species are selected with reference to the species growing on the site or in adjacent stands.

#### Interplanting

Where natural forest cover is greater than 10% but less than 30%, we will interplant with appropriate species to densify the tree cover and increase the rate of recovery.

#### Stewardship

Where natural forest cover is more than 30%, the site is not planted, but is protected from tree-cutting, fire and domestic animals to increase the rate of recovery.

#### Habitat Corridors

Habitat corridors provide cover for insects, birds and small animals to move between the larger ecological islands formed by blocks of woodland. These corridors utilise idle land on field or village margins and link the larger stands of trees together.

#### Riparian Management

This regime specifically refers to the treatment of the riparian zone of streams and rivers. Any stream bank cultivation will be removed from these sites and appropriate vegetation (not necessarily trees) will be re-established within 50m of the riverbank.

All saplings are grown by My Trees nurserymen within communities, using locally collected seed.

# TREES



**ACACIA SPECIES**

All fix nitrogen and efficient at sequestering carbon. They provide foliage for animals when there is no grass. They protect crops from excessive sunlight but do not completely block it out. They aid in moisture retention. Pods provide food for both animals and coffee for humans.



**FICUS SPECIES**

These trees have been added at this stage as they are a vital refuge for many animals, providing much food and facilitating food chains. They are favoured in communities for shade and all produce figs which are of different palatabilities but all utilisable in times of famine.



**ZIZIPHUS MUCRONATA**

This naturalised tree, brought in to Zimbabwe by the Arabs is a favoured tree for wood as it can be pruned to this end whilst also providing delicious, often abundant fruit. It is fast growing and easily cultivated. A concoction of the bark and the leaves is used for respiratory ailments and other septic swellings of the skin.



**AFZELIA QUANZENSIS**

Pod mahogany, a nitrogen-fixing, pioneering legume, is a slow growing deciduous shade tree with a large spreading flat crown. It usually grows 12 - 15 metres tall but with some specimens reaching 35 metres. The wood is hard and good for timber as well as firewood.



**PILIOSTIGMA THONNINGII**

This naturalised tree, brought in to Zimbabwe by the Arabs, is a favoured tree for wood as it can be pruned to this end whilst also providing delicious, often abundant fruit. It is fast growing and easily cultivated. A concoction of the bark and the leaves is used for respiratory ailments and other septic swellings of the skin.



**BAUHINIA PETERSIANA**

A legume that is the only one in its family that does not fix atmospheric nitrogen. Its value to communities is as a fuel and food source and it is a hardy, fast-growing pioneer. The wood is favoured for fuel as it burns even when wet and can be pruned for wood. Its pods and leaves provide a very good drought food for rural communities.



**AZANZA GARCKEANA**

Grows easily, is hardy and ubiquitous. It is a well-loved tree of the miombo woodlands of Zimbabwe. Azanza garckeana is also traditionally used to treat or manage at least 22 human diseases and ailments. It has been chosen as the local communities love to chew on the fibrous fruit and because of its varied medicinal uses.



**ALBIZIA VERSICOLOR**

Again, chosen in the first plantings as it is a good pioneer and nitrogen fixer. It grows quickly, producing shade quickly, which lessens water losses. A multipurpose tree, providing medicines and materials for the local population. It has a good potential in agroforestry systems.

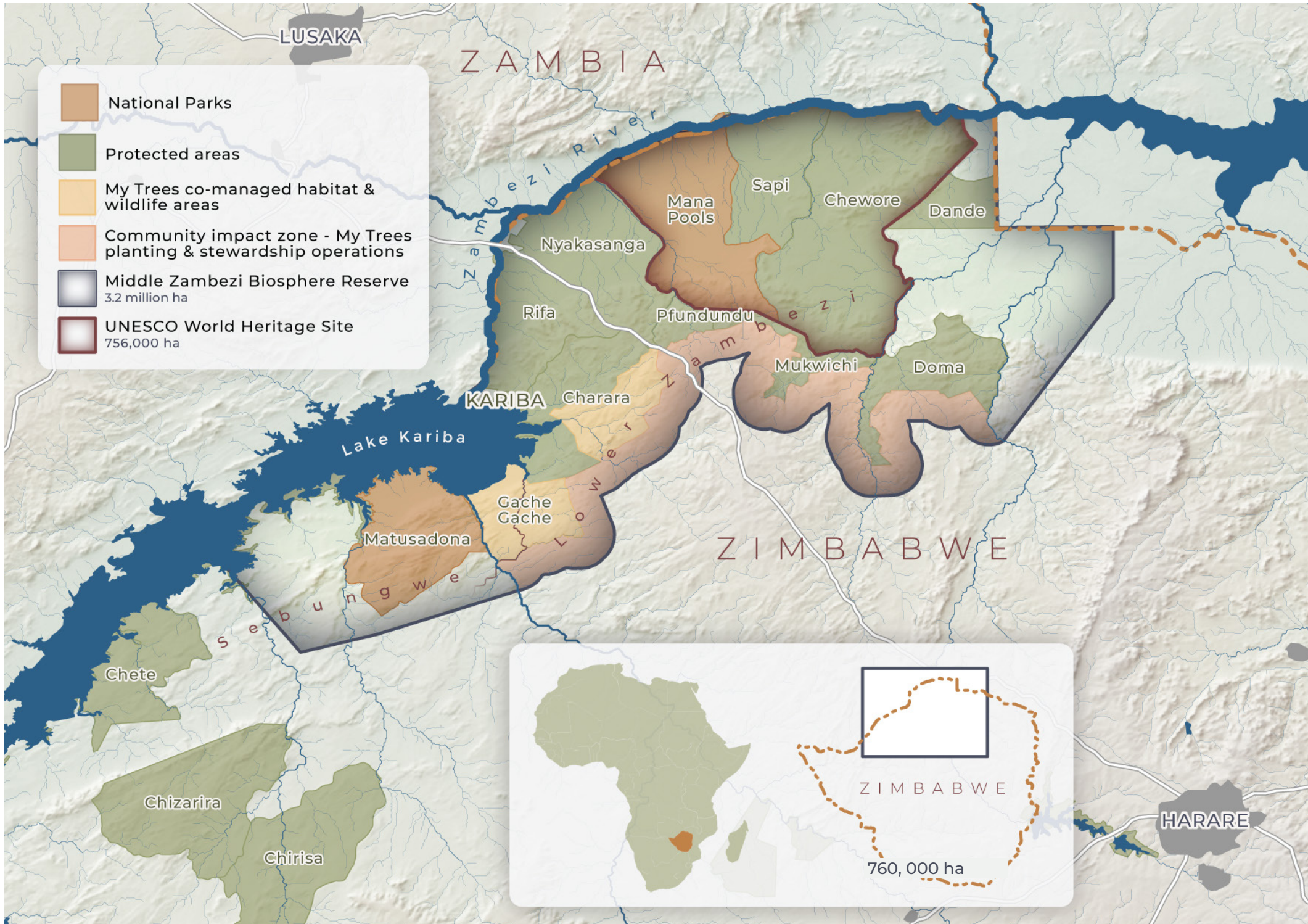
## PRESERVATION

Whilst restoration is a vital part of dealing with deforestation, it is expensive and painstaking work. In order to limit the requirement for restoration, we must first enforce existing legislation that protects intact habitat. My Trees is now leasing 120,000 ha of vulnerable wilderness within the Zambezi Biosphere Reserve between settled areas and the iconic Zambezi Valley. These areas are heavily threatened by unmanaged encroachment

from communities to the south who are extracting firewood for cooking and curing tobacco, as well as clearing land for agricultural use. My Trees will work with the Rural District Councils (RDC), Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks), Forestry Commission and other stakeholders to manage the protection of these areas and enforce existing legislation that prohibits their exploitation.











# ALTERNATIVES

The third strand of activity pursued by the Trust is the provision of alternative incomes, fuels, and technologies to communities who currently rely on exploitation of natural capital to survive. These communities need alternative sources of income to reduce reliance on tobacco, they require alternative technologies that burn fuel more efficiently and they need viable fuel source replacements. The Trust provides all three of these.





## INCOME

The Trust recognises that many previous tree planting projects have failed because the local communities live hand-to-mouth and do not have the resources to commit to the establishment of wood reserves for the long term future. The Trust therefore specifically employs community members to plant trees and care for them, assigning an immediate monetary value to their woodlands. In the context of rural Hurungwe, this additional household income is a significant incentive and our hope is that it will allow communities to diversify from tobacco.

## TECHNOLOGIES

The majority of deforestation in Zimbabwe can be attributed to wood-fuel being cut for domestic use. Improving cook stove efficiency is an effective, measurable way to tackle this aspect of deforestation. My Trees is rolling out a 50,000 stove project country wide, building fuel-saving clay stoves, as well as using certified metal cook-stoves. The metal Kuniokoa woodstove has been independently assessed and United Nations approved, having been shown to use 70% less fuel than a three-stone fire. It has been the stove of choice for similar projects in Kenya and Zambia. My trees is acting as a distribution agent for these cook stoves and our aim is for all My Trees growers to receive a fuel-efficient stove.

## FUELS

My Trees is partnering with Rift Valley to encourage the use of sawdust briquettes produced in the Eastern Highlands of the country as an alternative fuel for tobacco curing. We are also rolling out a woodlot programme this season, which will see our growers receiving 200 indigenous trees, each selected for their commercial, nutritional or medicinal value. As part of this package, we include a fast growing indigenous bamboo that produces ideal fuel for the rocket stoves described above. This woodlot programme will be open to all our growers as well as small-scale tobacco growers in the area.





## OUR PROGRESS

My Trees has grown rapidly over the first three years of operations, learning vital lessons through this process.

In our first season we set out to replant a modest 16,000 trees to trial our assumptions on community buy in and logistics. This went well, but it was immediately apparent that much more focus was needed on the ecology of our growing sites and site-species matching.

In our second year, we introduced the 5 regimes we now use, recognising that a one size fits all approach is inappropriate, but that in order to scale successfully we can't tailor bespoke planting plans for every different site. We therefore restrict our interventions to 5 main "regimes" or planting plans under which we then select appropriate species. Year 2 also saw a radical increase in scale, going from 16,000 trees to 60,000 planted which challenged our logistical capabilities.

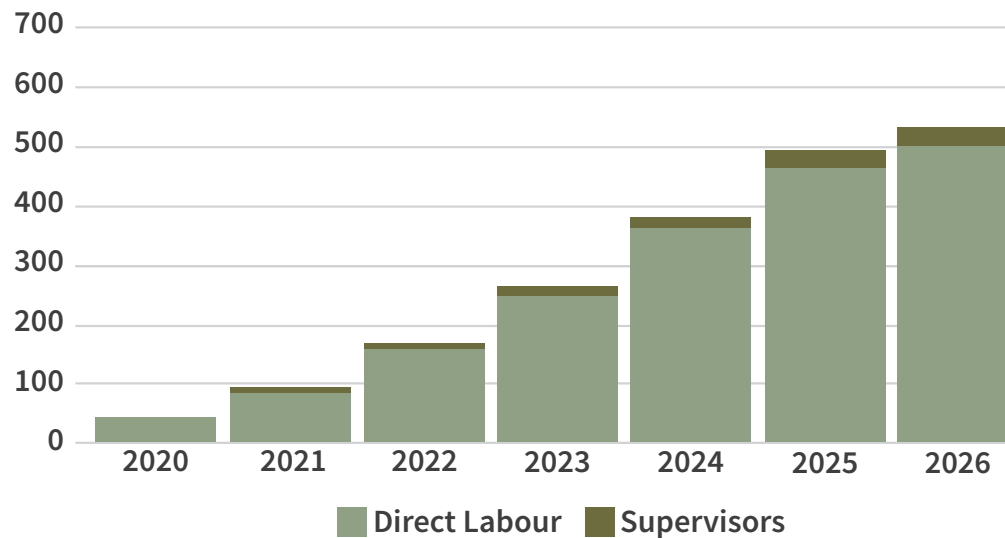
In our third year, much more planning went into our nurseries, and the quality of seedling improved dramatically, along with our logistical planning and execution. We successfully planted 80,000 trees with 95% of them being planted before the main rains started and therefore maximising their success rates. We also established several satellite nurseries to spread the seedling production throughout our growing areas.

We are now in year 4, and hoping to more than double our planting plans this year to 180,000 trees. We have opened up new planting areas in the Honde Valley and Kanyati, as well as taken on the protection of over 120,000 Ha of vulnerable wilderness. Our first phase stove project will see 50,000 fuel efficient stoves distributed by June 2023, and we hope to partner with Cicada Carbon to introduce REDD+ or ARR projects in our operational footprint, opening a new chapter of landscape management that will allow the environment and the communities that rely on it to flourish.



# THE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES IN HURUNGWE

DIRECT EMPLOYMENT / YEAR



Rural communities in Hurungwe currently have very limited employment opportunities. My Trees offers an important step in income diversity, particularly within fringe populations bordering the protected areas of the Zambezi Valley.

From 2025, My Trees aims to be Hurungwe district's largest employer, providing jobs for hundreds of people through tree planting activity, as well as providing additional income for tobacco growers to help pay for sustainable wood fuel.

The impact localised employment for over 500 people will have on this area is significant. Once project scale is reached, a steady inflow of over \$750,000 per annum to local households will make a meaningful contribution to the resilience of these communities.



# THE INCOME MODEL

Each grower earns USD20 per month for each ha planted in the first year and USD10 equivalent per ha for the second year. On average, each grower is responsible for 5 ha of trees, allowing for USD100 per month income in Year 1, USD50 in Year 2.

Over the next 4 years this declines steadily to USD20 per month as the silvicultural activities reduce. Each nursery manager receives USD100 per month to run a 15,000-tree nursery. The trees grown by the nursery belong to the project.





The Trust aims to continue to develop planting options for the grower base, adding habitat corridors, woodlots and new blocks of woodland to a grower's portfolio over time so that the grower's income can be maintained for several years until all their trees are established. This incremental approach means that growers are incentivised to continue caring for their trees so they remain eligible for expansion in the following season.

There is also an MOU with the local headman that explicitly prohibits restoration sites from being harvested for 15 years – if this is ignored then the Trust will cease activities in that area with the concomitant loss of income to the whole community.





# REACHING HIGH

My Trees aims to reach the following targets by 2025:



## Employment

Number of employees by full time/part time and male/female.  
Over 1000 people



## Restoration of lost habitat

Including ecosystems services hectarage of forest under specific planting or management regime.  
Up to 1,000 ha restored per year



## Preservation of existing forest

Hectarage of stewarded forest.  
Over 200,000 ha under protection



## Forest saved as a result of fuel saving

Through stove provision, savings in wood fuel as a result of stove usage against baseline usage at household level.  
25,000 ha of forest saved by fuel efficient stoves



## Net rate of forest loss

GIS measurements against baseline study and annual forest loss calculations for specific regions.  
Reversal of net deforestation in our operating footprint



# BROADER COVERAGE

My Trees is developing strong relationships with communities; connecting with Rural District Councils, traditional leaders, schools, churches, NGO's and local conservation 'champions' to assist the introduction of a range of additional interventions that directly benefit the rural societies where we work.

These interventions are specifically designed to be locally appropriate for the needs of communities, and we are developing specialist management teams that have a track record of success in their field.

Current programs in development include:

- Human Wildlife Conflict reduction
- Protected area specialist ranger training and deployment
- Community environment ranger training and deployment
- The introduction of Conservation agriculture techniques
- Improved agricultural and cropping opportunities
- Improved cattle management opportunities
- Small business development for local fisherman
- Local conservation education within communities

These projects are growing in scale and ambition and have the potential to meaningfully impact a significant number of households within our operational footprint.



# HEALTHY HABITATS STRONG COMMUNITIES

In an age where biodiversity loss has spiked beyond anything seen before, it is the challenge of our time to restore what has vanished and protect what is vulnerable. My Trees is a tailored intervention to tackle the specific problem of habitat destruction and zooms in on a geography in dire need of help. Our suite of activity offers targeted solutions to one of the most pressing environmental issues in the region and deep within our ambition is a burning belief that we can play a huge role in turning the tide of forest devastation. If we are to achieve success, we will need the guidance, support and backing of a range of expertise and targeted resources, from local communities to international agencies.



## HOW YOU CAN BE PART OF THE “MY TREES” MOVEMENT

### Individual donations:

- Plant 25 indigenous trees - \$50
- Contribute to a nursery manager’s employment per month - \$100
- Buy tools and equipment to create a new community nursery - \$1450
- Establish and fund a community nursery for a year - \$5,000

### Corporate and co-branded partnerships:

Whether it be community woodlot establishment for agri businesses, the development of species specific woodland for fodder values, the restoration of lost habitat or linking habitat corridors, My Trees wants to partner with private sector, resilience building NGOs, climate change programmes and environmental organisations to create co-branded developments and reach scale throughout ecologically distressed landscapes.

**The following is a guide to planting regime costs for a three year establishment period and delivery at scale:**

### Woodlots for farmers\*:

- 37.5 ha - \$50,000
- 75 ha - \$100,000

### Reafforestation or establishment of species-specific woodland within communities:

- 50 ha - \$42,000
- 100 ha - \$80,000
- 200 ha - \$150,000

We are determined to see My Trees bring back life to a beleaguered landscape... join us and we can do this together.

\* Woodlot establishment is a slightly higher cost per Ha than reafforestation due to smaller lot size, greater grower numbers and consequentially higher monitoring and administration overhead.



- @mytreestrust
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