WeForest

2024 Project Update

The Mpumba Community Conservation Project

Transitioning into the broader REDD+ Lavushimanda Community Conservation Project (LCC)

Lavushimanda, Muchinga Province, Zambia
Miombo Belt

Timeline:
2022 - 2032

Targeted ecosystem:
Miombo woodlands

KBA
KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS

South Luangwa #7195
North Luangwa #7196
Mutinondo #24242
LavushiManda #7200

Project management and M&E team

Main implementing partner:
WeForest Zambia

Dr. Fainess Lumbwe
Country Director, Zambia

Dr. Dries Van de Loock
Regional manager Muchinga

Nyambe Kalaluka
Project Manager Mpumba Community Conservation

Gift Mazimba
MEL Manager

Catherine Zulu
Monitoring and Evaluation Officer

See the full team at:
www.weforest.org/about-us/#our-team

Project story

In 2024, WeForest took an ambitious step forward to expand its vision to a landscape-level approach to Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR) across community and private land in Zambia's Muchinga Province. The goal is to establish ecological connectivity between Lavushimanda National Park and the Luangwa Valley, forming the Lavushimanda Community Conservation Project (LCC). This project area, integrating WeForest's work in Chintumukulu Conservancy and Mpumba Community Forest Areas, is one of strategic hydrological and biodiversity importance.

Currently, LCC directly works with three Community Forest Management Groups (CFMGs) and four private landowners, covering approximately 30,000 hectares. However, the long-term vision is to scale this to over 350,000 hectares of under-threat forests across Lavushimanda, Mpika, and Kanchibiya Districts. If realized, this scale-up could deliver transformative benefits for thousands of households and support Zambia in achieving its emission reduction and biodiversity conservation goals.

Key challenges in the landscape

Forest clearance for low-productivity small-scale agriculture

Large-scale clearance of leasehold land for commercial agriculture

High levels of poaching and loss of historical wildlife populations

Unsustainable off-take of non-timber forest products (e.g., honey, caterpillars)

Forest degradation through late dry season fires

Low perception of forest value and limited forest governance capacity

Weak market access for forest-friendly products

Our integrated approach

Improve forest governance and stewardship through:

- Strengthening CFMGs and private landowner capacity through training, planning support, and joint monitoring.
- Channelling carbon revenues into local development and forest management through participatory benefit-sharing structures.
- Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes and equitable agreements with traditional authorities.
- Alignment with district development plans.

Conserve and restore the forest through:

- Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) of miombo woodland.
- Rebuilding ecological corridors between protected areas.
- Fire management and law enforcement.
- Monitoring biodiversity and forest biomass, with baseline data for REDD+ tracking
- Securing carbon finance as a mechanism to reduce deforestation and incentivize long-term forest stewardship

Strengthen forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviors through:

- Value chain investments in honey and by-products (e.g., beeswax, propolis), forest fruits like masuku, and sustainably harvested edible caterpillars and chikanda.
- Eco-tourism development, including a planned Community Forest Centre.
- Vocational training and enterprise support in beekeeping, tailoring, guiding, and climate-smart agriculture.
- Partnerships with private sector actors to connect farmers and harvesters with secure markets.
- Diversified income sources to reduce seasonal reliance on forest extraction and support community resilience.

A long-term vision

Climate

The conservation of the Lavushimanda landscape will contribute to both climate mitigation and adaptation: safeguarding tree cover to sequester carbon while improving water retention and soil stability to help communities adapt to droughts and erratic weather.

Nature

Conserving the landscape will protect biodiversity and secure critical ecosystem services like water and soil health. Improved land management will enhance habitat resilience, ensuring the forest continues to sustain both people and wildlife.

People

Strengthened governance and forest-friendly livelihoods will ensure communities see the forest as an asset: one that provides resources while being sustainably managed. By integrating agroforestry, beekeeping, and ecotourism, the project reduces deforestation-driven income reliance while securing long-term economic stability.

Outcomes

By integrating these interventions, the project will:

- Restore and protect **miombo woodland**
- Safeguard critical **wildlife corridors**
- Catalyze **green economic development** that directly benefits local communities.
- The **long-term** impact of our work will benefit people, nature and climate.

Theory of Change

Existing problems in the landscape

- Unsustainable forest resource extraction
- Land degradation
- Forest fires
- weak governance structures

Risks

- Worsening economic pressure
- large-scale clearance for commercial agriculture

WeForest Interventions / Project outcomes

Improved forest governance and stewardship

- Improving local forest management structures & regulations
- Improving forest law enforcement and compliance
- Exploring ecotourism opportunities

→ CFMGs have strengthened capacity, skills, resources, and confidence to implement sustainable forest management practices.

Restoring and conserving at-risk forests

- Conservation
- Assisted Natural Regeneration
- Fire management

→ Improved management by communities and private landowners enables the restoration of degraded forests and the conservation of intact forests.

Introducing forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviours

- Beekeeping
- Agroforestry
- Sustainable caterpillar harvesting
- Conservation agriculture
- Community awareness-raising

→ Improved resilience of local communities through sustainable alternative livelihoods, access to value chains.

Long term impact

Climate

Stored and sequested carbon

Nature

Thriving biodiversity and intact ecosystems

People

Sustainable and resilient communities

2024 Major Achievements

Evidence of 29 mammal species were captured in the project area by camera trap, including elephants, lions and leopards.

500 farmers were trained in conservation agriculture and agroforestry.

“My children look up to me now - not just as a father, but as someone protecting their future.”

Sweet Kunda is an Honorary Forest Officer (HFO) and a member of the Mabonga Community Forest Management Group. Prior to the introduction of the forest management initiative, Sweet had limited understanding of the legal frameworks around forest protection. But since becoming an HFO, he has undergone extensive training, supported by Kasanka, WeForest and the Department of Forestry, on topics such as community bylaws, patrol planning, and handling forest offenses in a lawful and respectful manner.

Before the project, forest encroachment, illegal logging, and unregulated hunting were common in his area, often seen as normal survival tactics. Sweet himself recalls times when he would turn a blind eye, not understanding the long-term impact.

Now, with knowledge and support, Sweet leads patrols across Mabonga CFA, using GPS and mobile data collection tools to monitor illegal activities. Through regular patrols and community sensitizations, he has helped reduce illegal logging in hotspot areas.

Sweet has been instrumental in mediating community conflicts involving forest boundary issues, using bylaws and dialogue to restore peace. His efforts have earned him recognition from both the Forest Department and the CFMG, who now consult him during boundary disputes or when setting up patrol strategies.

Sweet says being part of law enforcement in the forest space has given him purpose. “I feel proud when I wear my uniform. My children look up to me now—not just as a father, but as someone protecting their future.”

Case study

2024 activity update

Improved forest governance and stewardship

- **Three memorandums of understanding** were signed with the Community Forest Management Groups (CFMGs) in Mwenda, Mabonga and Salamo, granting WeForest the authority to conduct carbon trading on behalf of the three communities.
- **38 forest patrol officers** were engaged
- A participatory remapping exercise took place in Salamo Community Forest Area, expanding it from 800 hectares to 2083 hectares.
- Ongoing law enforcement activities enabled **278 infractions** to be recorded in the project area in 2024. Items confiscated included guns, bushmeat, fishing gear, axes and snares.

Restoring and conserving at-risk forests

- **Camera traps** to monitor wildlife presence and activity were set up, helping us understand species diversity and habitat use.
- **122 Permanent Sample Plots (PSP)** were established to assess forest regeneration, tree growth, and vegetation changes over time.
- **Soil samples** were collected to analyze nutrient levels, carbon content, and overall soil health, which are crucial indicators of forest recovery and sustainability.
- **Fire breaks** were introduced along the Community Forest Area boundaries and early burning took place in Mwenda and Mabonga.

Introducing forest-friendly livelihoods

- **19 lead farmers and 481 follower farmers** from across the project area were selected, trained and monitored in Conservation Agriculture and Agroforestry. The 19 lead farmers also received training in financial management and leadership skills. Each of these farmers then cultivated 0.25 hectares of land using conservation-smart agriculture (CSA) techniques.
- **10,000 kgs of 'Lungwebungu'** bean seed were distributed to these 500 trained farmers.
- **2 community-based nurseries** were established in Mabonga and Mwenda, growing 72,000 Gliricidia seedlings.
- **A beekeeping programme was** initiated. In 2024, **255 farmers** were trained in Assisted Natural Regeneration practices and beekeeping, **11 carpenters** were trained in beehive assembly, and **8 enumerators** were trained in mapping and verification of forest beekeeping plots. **2000 hives** were assembled and distributed, and **400 farmers** engaged. Hive hanging and mapping is ongoing into 2025.

Progress tracker

See end of report for our progress tracking methodology

Bird species sighted **201**

Mammal species sighted **53**

2024 Challenges

Camera trap sampling showed that mammals were significantly more abundant on private lands than in the Community Forest Area, suggesting that poaching is still a major issue in the forest. However, mammal abundance is expected to rise in the coming years because of strengthened law enforcement.

Insufficient manpower and firearms led to lower law enforcement in 2024 than previous years, indicating a need to formalise law enforcement partnerships.

Gliricidia seedling survival in 2024 was very low because of dry spells and a lack of good fire management practices during the dry season. Fire management activities will be better monitored in 2025.

Looking ahead to 2025

The three Community Forest Areas will have their forest management plans revised and better monitored in an effort to reduce illegal activities further and better introduce a quota-based permit system.

An additional law enforcement training program has been planned and some digital monitoring for 2025.

The first honey harvest from the newly introduced beekeeping scheme will take place at the end of 2025.

Supporters & Partners

2024 project partners

Community Forest Management Groups in Mwenda, Mabonga and Salamo - Key community implementation partner

Mpumba Community Resources Board Key community implementation partner

Mpumba Natural Resources Management Society Key community implementation partner (ended partnership in 2024)

Good Nature Agro Supplier / offtaker for Conservation Agriculture activities

People's Process on Housing and Poverty in Zambia Partner to roll-out Participatory Village Land Use Planning and People's Adaptation Plans in Mpumba chiefdom

Chief Mpumba Traditional leader supporting project

Forestry Department collaboration and involvement at local and national levels

Department of National Parks and Wildlife collaboration and involvement at local level

Department of Agriculture involvement in roll-out of livelihood activities

Lavushimanda Town Council engagement and inclusion to support development of LCC project

Zambia CRB Association provide policy advice, training and support on integration of community-based natural resource management

Private landowners engagement in project activities to varying levels

KU Leuven ongoing Masters' research project

With thanks to our supporters in 2024, including: Brambles TUI CARE FOUNDATION wex

Contact us

Visti **www.weforest.org** or for more information or email: **contact@weforest.org**

How we measure and forecast our impact

Baseline

For the sake of simplicity, the progress bars in this report show a baseline of zero. This represents the concept that the area covered by WeForest forest and landscape restoration (FLR) activities was zero; thus the associated trees conserved and restored, carbon stored and households impacted through WeForest intervention was also zero.

In reality, when a WeForest project begins, our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning team undertakes a detailed survey on forest structure and regeneration through establishing Permanent Monitoring Plots, and conducts an extensive questionnaire on livelihoods, to establish meaningful baseline values. You can read more about our full MEL activities here.

Hectares planted, conserved and restored

Progress up to 2024

Verifiable cumulative total since the project began of all mapped intervention sites, also known as polygons, of:

1) Conservation forest areas, such as forest reserves

2) Restoration forest areas, such as Assisted Natural Regeneration and planting areas

3) Agroforestry areas on community/farm land

End of Project Target

Target number based on the potential area of land able to be conserved, restored and planted in the project area under the known and expected conditions at project start. However, it is subject to change based on unforeseen opportunities or challenges that may arise.

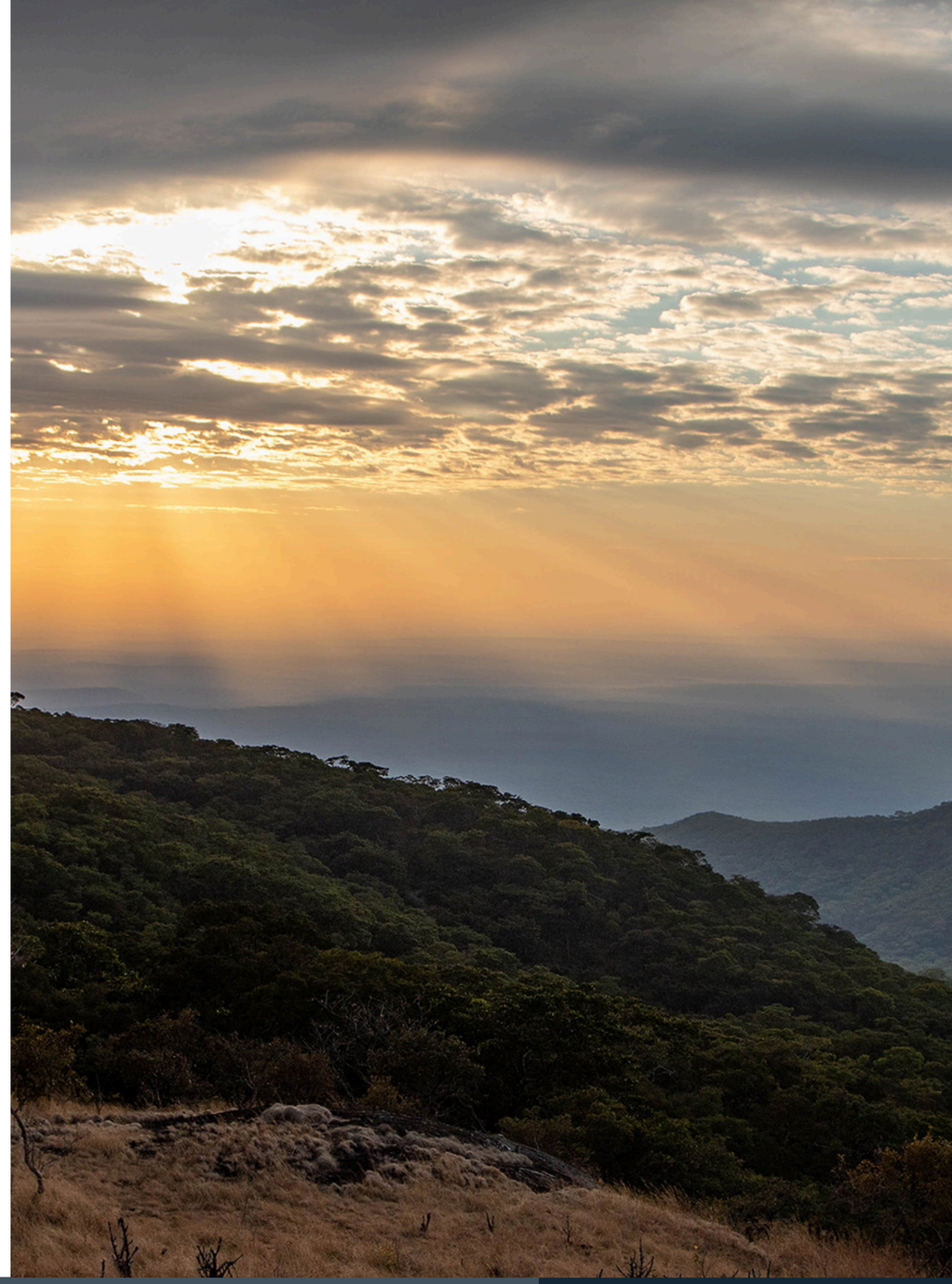
Anticipated tons of CO2 to be sequestered through project activities

Progress up to 2024

Extrapolated tons of CO2 calculated from the measured areas of different types of land use (for example forest or agroforestry) under “Hectares of forest planted, conserved and restored” to date, and the average amount of projected long-term CO2 per hectare provided from literature review for each land use type in their locations. Although totalled, please note the methodology for calculating these CO2 projections are specific to land-use type, and span a period corresponding to the expected time taken for the trees to reach maturity, which varies between locations.

End of Project Target

As above, but using the target (and not current) number of hectares planted, restored and conserved and their respective area totals as a parameter for calculations. As this parameter is subject to change, the associated CO2 target may also change over time.



Number of trees conserved and restored*

Progress up to 2024
Extrapolated number of trees calculated from the measured areas of different land use types (for example conservation areas, restoration areas or agroforestry) under “Hectares planted, conserved and restored” to date, and the average tree densities observed for each land-use type when mature, known through our MEL activities or scientific literature.

End of Project Target
As above, but using the target (and not current) number of “Hectares of forest planted, restored and conserved” and their respective area totals as a parameter for calculations. As this parameter is subject to change, the associated trees conserved and restored target may also change over time.

*Estimations based on average numbers per hectare

Trees planted to date (2024)

Total
Actual counted number of planted seedlings and saplings of woody (tree and shrub) species in the project to date.

Trees planted for forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviors
Only woody species directly planted for livelihood improvement. This also includes woody fruit, fodder & timber trees, and woody cash crops, exclusively planted on community or farm land.

Trees planted for forest conservation and restoration
Only woody species that were directly planted for ecological reasons, aiding restoration of the natural forest ecosystem.

Woody species in project to date (2024)

Total
Actual observed number of woody (tree and shrub) species:

- Regenerating in the conservation/restoration zones (i.e. in the Permanent Monitoring Plots) and
- Planted, either for restoration or livelihood improvement
- Growing as mature trees in the conservation/restoration zones (i.e. in the permanent monitoring plots).
- Please note, these numbers are not exhaustive and the true species richness is likely to be higher.

Tree species for forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviors
Only woody species directly planted for livelihood improvement. This also includes woody fruit, fodder and timber trees, and woody cash crops, exclusively planted on community or farm land.

Tree species for forest conservation and restoration
The woody species observed in the project area that are not used for livelihood improvement purposes. Where species are used for both livelihood improvement and restoration (which is sometimes the case, as we use native species as much as possible), they have been counted under ‘forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviors’.

Mammal and bird species sighted to date

Numbers are included where we have a good level of biological monitoring, for example using camera traps or audio devices - please note that numbers are unlikely to capture the full species richness of the project area and that the absence of reporting does not imply the absence of species.

Other notes

WeForest works in close cooperation with local partner organisations, institutions, community-based organizations and local people. Therefore, our impact can never be fully separated from the work of our partners. WeForest acknowledges that the presented impact numbers cannot be solely attributed to our work, but is also supported through the hard work contributed by all our local partners.

Terminology

Conservation
Where native forest canopy cover is still intact, we focus on protecting the forest from any threats and disturbances, such as overgrazing, unsustainable wood extraction and fire.

Restoration
Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR): Where there is reduced forest cover but high potential for natural regeneration, we aim to accelerate natural recovery, typically through preventing soil degradation, reducing competition with weeds, and protecting young trees.

Tree planting
Where there is reduced forest cover and little regeneration potential, we actively plant native trees at a density that corresponds with the regeneration potential.

Agroforestry and tree crops
Where agricultural landscapes exist, WeForest promotes the planting of trees for livelihood improvement. These trees can be used either for direct consumption or sale (fruits, timber, fuelwood) or to support other crops or livestock (agroforestry). Native tree species are prioritized but, where necessary, non-native species may be used.