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SUCCESS STORY

Securing Tenure to Promote Climate-Smart Agriculture



Photo: Matt Sommerville

Zambian farmer Matthew Nyunge points to his field with young msangu seedlings in contested land that was almost lost to outside investment.

Lack of clarity around ownership of trees and security of land tenure in Zambia is ubiquitous. District Land Alliances and some other paralegal services are emerging in Zambia to help farmers address land disputes around boundaries, inheritance, and land takings. Over the coming years, USAID's Tenure and Global Climate Change program will support these processes to strengthen the governance of customary tenure systems in the Eastern Province of Zambia, and will track the extent to which farmers increase uptake of climate-smart agricultural practices, and other investments in long-term land productivity.

Over the past six years, Donaldson Phiri has been planting the tree *Faidherbia albida* in his corn, cotton, and tobacco fields in the Eastern Province of Zambia. The tree, known locally as msangu, is a nitrogen fixing "fertilizer" tree that can be planted in fields and over time reduces the need for costly inorganic fertilizers. Unlike most trees, msangu loses its leaves during the rainy season when crops are planted and harvested, and thus does not compete with crops for light. A range of international, regional and national organizations have promoted msangu as a miracle tree that can increase food security, help farmers cope with the negative impacts of climate change, and even sequester carbon.

Yet despite these benefits, there has been relatively low uptake of msangu by farmers in Zambia. One potential reason for this limited adoption is the lack of tenure security of farmlands for smallholder farmers. Msangu takes 8-12 years before it provides noticeable yield benefits and as many as fifteen years before the full benefits are realized. Farmers who are willing to plant and care for long-term investments like trees on farms must have some confidence that they still be in control of their farms when benefits materialize.

Consistent with other farmers in the customary systems of Zambia where Chiefs and village headman allocate land, Mr. Phiri has no documentation of his rights to his farmland. Historically, when population densities were low and land was widely available, this system was effective. More recently, national and international investment, people moving from urban areas to secure new family farms, and increasing population densities have placed new demands on land. In 2012, a new settler came to Mr. Phiri's village and asked the headman for land to cultivate. Following approval from the Chief, the headman allocated approximately an acre of land Mr. Phiri had been cultivating, which had dozens of msangu trees, to the new settler. Mr. Phiri received no compensation and contested this decision, but the Chief ruled in favor of the new settler.

Upon further appeal to the Chief, Mr. Phiri argued that he had invested time and money in the trees on the land. Under the Zambian Constitution the President owns all trees, but in discussions with Chiefs and farmers, the perceived ownership of trees is ambiguous. Many farmers feel secure in "owning" the trees they planted on their farms. Other farmers and Chiefs feel that because the Chiefs "own" the land, they also own the trees; while others were aware that the State legally owns the trees. With respect to Mr. Phiri's appeal, the Chief ultimately decided that the new settler must plant an equivalent number of msangu on Mr. Phiri's other lands and care for them for three years, or the settler will lose the originally allocated plot back to Mr. Phiri.