



Limbe Leaf Tobacco Company Limited's (LLTC) contracted burley tobacco farmers adopt a new approach to curing barns

In 2016, LLTC launched its "Dzalani Balani" Initiative, which means "plant a barn", targeting all its contracted growers and believing that it will greatly increase sustainable wood use amongst and around tobacco growing communities.

Burley farming requires construction of barns and the use of hanging sticks for curing. Once a farmer plants a live barn, the barn can be used for many years. This will stop farmers cutting trees every year to get poles for barn construction and will conserve the environment. It will also improve efficiencies on a farm, ultimately increasing farmer profitability.



The goal is to reduce the pressure exerted on natural forests which comes as a result of high demand for barn construction materials.

A traditional Burley barn normally requires maintenance every three years while a managed live barn only requires roof maintenance and will be used for either a longer period or permanently according to the tree species.

The LLTC live barn program implementation seeks to complement barn construction materials, satisfy domestic wood requirement use and improve livelihoods of tobacco growing communities. This is set to be achieved through barn dimensions that allow management of trees for multiple products and use of multipurpose tree species with consideration of growth rates, wood durability, pollarding/coppice ability, and environmental factors.

Bearing in mind that the major bottlenecks for tree program survival in Malawi are late planting and poor management of the trees, LLTC has adopted approaches that aim to guarantee high tree survival rates. The planting season for LLTC live barns begins in November each year to ensure that the planted trees utilize all the rain water for that particular rain season. Modern techniques to retain moisture near the seedling are used and termite control is applied to enhance the survival and growth of the seedlings. Trees are planted by LLTC staff and farmers to minimize mortalities that come as a result of poor planting techniques and delay in planting. Each farmer is expected to plant 48 trees per year following a specific pattern: this allows the farmer to have time to tend the trees better since the number is manageable. The close spacing within the rows of the live barn allows for mid-row trees to be thinned a few years later. In the long run the farmer is guaranteed of well managed trees with few mortalities during the establishment years.

LLTC's approach to the live barn concept offers both short and long term benefits to Burley farmers and this has made the adoption of the live barns concept widely accepted. The live barn dimensions and choice of tree species allows for cultivation of crops on the live barn site to continue until the live barn is ready for use. Just a few years after the seedlings are established, the growers get curing sticks and firewood from thinnings and pollards. The trees also act as windbreaks and enhance soil cover resulting in environmental benefits such as soil and water conservation and biodiversity. The LLTC live barn approach ensures that in the end, a farmer has more surviving trees that form a live barn usable from year 4, and this in the long run makes the farmer sustainable in wood use for barn construction materials and contributes to farmer attaining sustainable tobacco production.



LLTC also supports growers in Kabwafu in the development of a forestry management plan. The Kabwafu Trust consists of an area of approximately 15,000 hectares of mixed agricultural and forestry land in North-West Malawi.

Tobacco growers under the Trust are contracted to LLTC to grow Flue-Cured and Burley tobacco. The Trust's forestry resources consist of partly Miombo woodland and partly Eucalyptus plantations. The forestry plantations under the Trust are yet to reach maturity: to ensure sustainable use of wood, LLTC currently supplies its contracted growers' wood from third-party sustainable sources.

The long-term goal is to have Kabwafu Trust self-sustainable in its forestry requirements and resource enumeration. To ensure this is achieved, LLTC supported the community under the Trust with training. The Trust now has a forest management committee, forestry by-laws and a strategic forestry management plan, and the community is aware of its roles and responsibilities.

