



# In Their Lifetime

Fast-growing bamboo offers producers the chance to create eco-friendly and highly marketable products that could dramatically boost their income.



## The untapped potential of bamboo to tackle poverty

This project will lay the foundations for an ambitious plan to boost the bamboo value chain in Malawi, equipping small-scale producers to break into a \$60bn global market.

### Growing opportunities

**As the world wakes up to the need to reduce plastic waste, the market for bamboo is soaring. This project lays the groundwork to trial bamboo production and processing as a viable livelihood for people living in poverty, with boundless potential to scale up.**

Agriculture is Malawi's main industry, making it extremely vulnerable to climate change impacts. Farmers grow crops for both food and income, with tobacco being the biggest export. But this global market is shrinking as smoking declines, leaving vulnerable farmers even worse off.

Bamboo has immense potential as a profitable, sustainable and climate-resilient alternative, including the

opportunity for producers to add value and earn more by crafting a wide range of bamboo products, from crockery to toothbrushes to bicycles.

Phase one of our Bamboo Value Chains project explores the opportunities and challenges involved in growing, processing and trading bamboo in Malawi. Phase two will build on these foundations to craft an ambitious programme to boost the bamboo sector, enabling countless poor producers to pull themselves out of poverty.

### PROJECT SUMMARY

**Full name of project:**  
Bamboo value chains  
(phase one)

**Location:** Lilongwe, Malawi

**Duration:**  
December 2023 – June 2024

**Partner:** Green Livelihoods

**Budget:** £42,697

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## LOCATION:

# Lilongwe, Malawi

- Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranked 169 out of 191 countries in the UN's Human Development Index
- Over half the population lives in poverty and one fifth in extreme poverty
- Around a quarter of young people are unemployed.



## PRODUCT:

# Benefits of bamboo



- Cash crop with significant potential
- Fast growing and low input
- Can grow on unproductive land
- Reduces deforestation and erosion
- Protects against floods
- Many ways to process and add value
- Climate resilient and eco-friendly
- Growing international market.

## Roots and shoots

### PHASE ONE: STRONG ROOTS

Although bamboo is easy to grow in Malawi, many poor farmers have never heard of it as a crop. Awareness is also low among policymakers and the local government extension workers who advise and guide farmers.

**This project will thoroughly investigate existing and potential bamboo production in Malawi.** It will map existing bamboo estates and current land use among target communities, look into the pros and cons of different species, and explore how bamboo can grow alongside other crops.

Existing bamboo farmers lack the equipment, knowhow and funds to process their raw crop into finished products that would fetch higher prices. The absence of a strong commercial eco-system for bamboo also limits producers' opportunities to reach customers.

**This project will map and analyse the entire bamboo value chain, from farmers to final consumers.** It will undertake detailed research to identify suitable focus products and scope ways to increase poor producers' access to markets at both local and international level.

Some bamboo farming already exists in Malawi, but the sector is not yet well established. There is huge potential for sustainable, pro-poor growth, but little strategic leadership or policy framework for how to move forward. This offers a critical window for influence.

**The project will engage with stakeholders across government, private sector and research institutions to raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges of strengthening the bamboo sector, with a view to nurturing a healthy value chain that benefits poor producers.**

**'The bamboo value chain has huge potential. Engaging in this currently untapped market offers unemployed but motivated young people the opportunity to increase their income and provides real hope for their future.'**

**Robert Thindwa**, Economic Justice Specialist, Malawi

### PHASE TWO: GREEN SHOOTS

**The delivery phase of the project will be entirely shaped by the findings and learnings from phase one.**

Rooted in a deep understanding of both community needs and market drivers, phase two will aim to kickstart the development of a pro-poor, eco-friendly and climate-resilient value chain that will maximise market access and income for vulnerable producers, with a likely focus on young people.

### In Their Lifetime

**In Their Lifetime** is Christian Aid's seed fund for innovation and learning, enabling us to pilot new ideas and take intelligent risks.

Through this fund, we are able to invest in high impact, solutions-focused projects which build towards transformative change.

To find out more about investing in this project, please contact [ITL@christian-aid.org](mailto:ITL@christian-aid.org)