

Group in environmental conservation

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PSA COMMUNITY JOURNALIST

Quest Capital (CQC) is slowly turning into a darling of many girls and women with an environmental project it has initiated in Laisi and the surrounding villages in Traditional Authority (T/A) Mduwa in Mchinji District.

The organisation taught women how to make a fuel efficient cook stove and one villager, Stella January, describes the initiative as a game-changer.

"In the past, I used to go to the forest twice a week to fetch firewood, but all that is now history since CQC stove consumes less wood than ordinary ones. With few pieces of wood, I am able to cook many dishes.

"These days I only fetch firewood once a week and use the rest of the time doing small-scale businesses to improve the livelihood of my family," she explains.

It is not only January who now finds life sweeter and better due to the cook stoves.

Eliza Wilson from the same

village also waxes lyrical for the organisation's initiative.

"The performance of our children, especially girls has also dramatically improved since they spend more time doing school work," she says.

In the past, Wilson says girls used to spend more time helping their mothers to fetch firewood at the expense of their education.

Last week, CQC also distributed giant bamboos seedlings to communities in the district and encouraged them to plant for future use.

CQC officer Yamikani Liyenda says the initiative is part of their continued efforts not only to ease girls and women of their burden of walking long distances to fetch firewood, but also heal and address environmental issues in the area.

"We did not only come here to teach people how to make cook stoves, but also to help them conserve their environment; hence, the big bamboo distribution exercise," he says.

They are encouraging people to plant bamboo, popularly known as *Dendrocalamus Aspers*, which Liyenda says are "a rapidly



PHOTOGRAPH: JEFFREY MALATA

A beneficiary Msanide Kameta plants a giant bamboo

growing, dense-clumping, non-invasive bamboo species that grow well in tropical climates such as those of Malawi".

He adds: "Apart from absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, these bamboos will add beauty to their environment, provide firewood, protect their houses

from strong winds and soils from runoff."

Mikundi Ward councillor Kennedy Chipanga applauds CQC for the initiative.

"We have no doubt this project will help us mitigate climate change effects in our area," he says.

T/A Mduwa agrees with

Chipanga that the intervention will not only reduce negative impacts of climate change, but also provide a reliable source of building materials and income for many households in his area.

He says the initiative is sustainable because villagers have been empowered through the distribution of seedlings which would help future generations to rely on.

According to CQC's website, the project aims to create a sustainable fuel source at the household level and build a virtual plantation for supply to the urban markets and create effective carbon sinks to mitigate global warming.

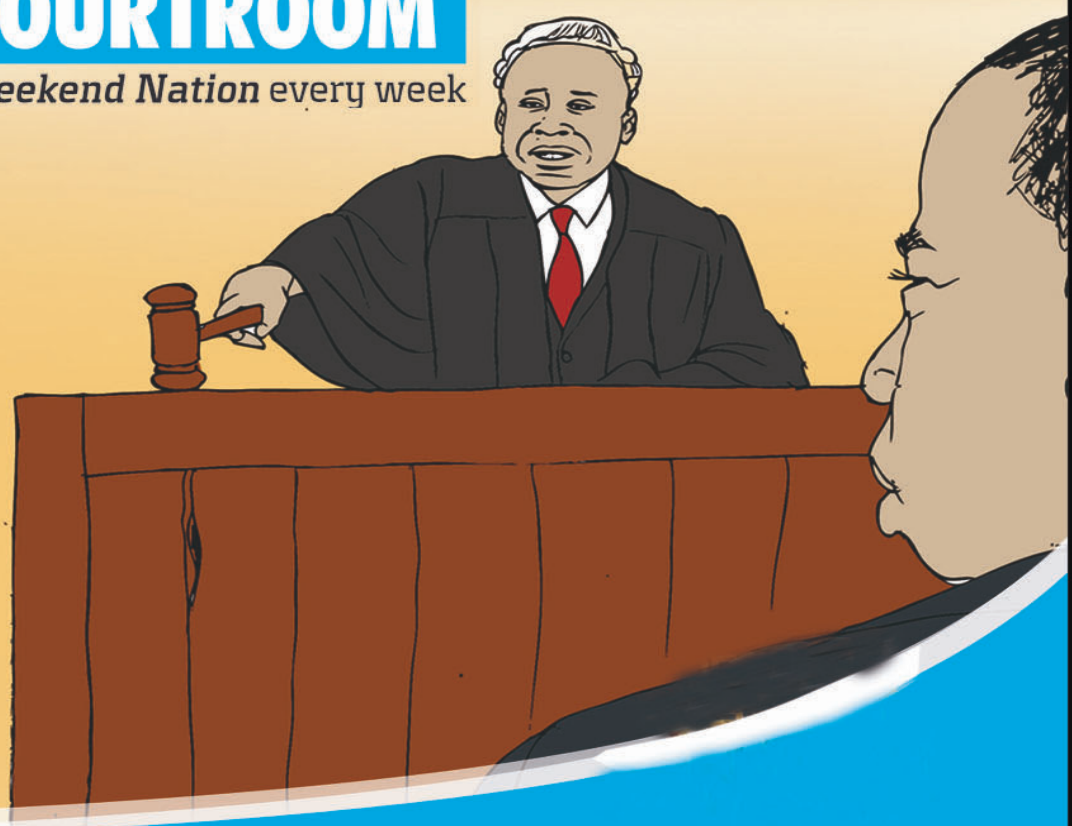
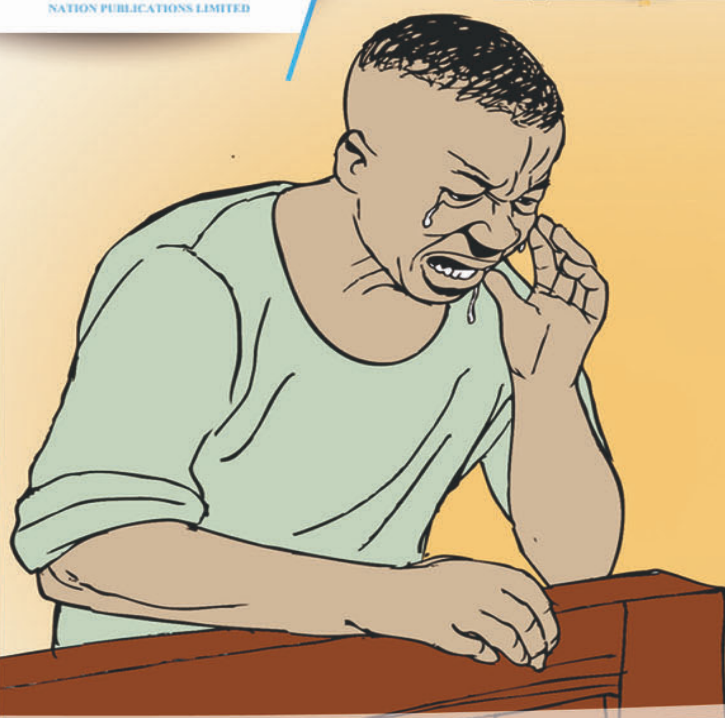
The project contributes to United Nation Sustainable Development Goal number 15 on sustainable management of forest, especially on halting and reserving land degradation, with particular emphasis on reforestation.■

The author is a community journalist of PSA Project which ActionAid, Nation Publications Limited and other partners are implementing in Mchinji and Nsanje districts.

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