

COMESA has launched a tree planting exercise targeting schools to cultivate the habits among children so that they learn to protect the environment. The exercise started with a donation of 1,000 seedlings to an all girls' school known as Matero Girls High school based in Zambia's capital, Lusaka. The exercise was carried out in partnership with the Lusaka province forest department. Speaking at the planting ceremony, Secretary-General Sindiso Ngwenya, in a speech read on his behalf by Director of Administration Victoria Mwewa, announced that the choice of a girls' school for this endeavor was deliberate.

"Women and girls carry the burden of climate change the most, they therefore equally stand to benefit most from environmental protection. The choice of a girls' school therefore took into account that as future mothers once they get into the habit of protecting our environment, they will pass on the practice to the future generation," Mr Ngwenya said.

He added that the 1,000 trees planted that day was just the beginning. The target for Zambian schools under the COMESA supported initiative for the year 2013 is 5,000 trees. The exercise will be extended to other schools in different countries in the region.

He implored the girls under the guidance of the school head and staff to look after the trees well, pointing out that the planted varieties included fruits trees that will not just be environmentally friendly but will also enhance nutrition value. Mr Ngwenya added that the exercise has started with Zambia, as a gesture to appreciate the hospitality Zambia has given to COMESA.

"As you know, Zambia hosts the COMESA Secretariat for the 19 Member States. Charity begins at home so we are starting this exercise with Zambian schools."

The Lusaka Provincial Minister, Mr Freedom Sikazwe, represented by his Permanent Secretary Brig. Gen. Emelda Chola emphasized the importance of tree planting programmes in communities, schools, farming communities and other institutions.

The school tree planting sensitization programme is one of the many adaptation activities that are being carried out by the COMESA Climate Change initiative. Others include climate smart agriculture such as conservation farming, and sustainable land management. COMESA has also in the past targeted youths by supporting their participation in climate change advocacy including participation in international negotiations such as the Conference of Parties; and supporting the youth to conduct academic research related to climate change.

The COMESA Climate Change Initiative is supported by various partners, the major ones being Norway, the European Union, and DFID.