



## From Firewood to Clean Energy: How Communities in Tanzania Are Driving Conservation and Change

Early in the morning in **Mbuyuni village in Masasi District**, women and children used to spend hours collecting firewood before the day's cooking could even begin. For many families, firewood was the only available source of energy, but it came at a high cost—time, health risks, and increasing pressure on nearby forests.

Today, things are beginning to change.

Through the **Leading the Change Phase II (LtC2) programme**, implemented by **TaTEDO-Sustainable Energy Services Organisation (TaTEDO-SESO)** in partnership with WWF and supported by Sida, communities across southern Tanzania are discovering new ways to protect their environment while improving their livelihoods.

The programme works to strengthen civil society, empower communities, and promote sustainable energy solutions that reduce environmental degradation while supporting local development. The broader goal is simple but powerful: ensuring that people and communities can enjoy their right to a healthy and sustainable environment.

### A Small Stove with a Big Impact

For many households, the most visible change has come through the introduction of **improved cookstoves** and awareness about clean cooking solutions.

In Mbuyuni village, one community member explains how the change has affected daily life:

“I was using firewood costing about 3,000 shillings each week. After adopting the improved cookstove, the cost has decreased to about 1,500 shillings. It has helped our family save money and reduce smoke in the kitchen.”

Beyond financial savings, families report significant improvements in health and time management. Reduced smoke exposure means fewer respiratory problems, especially for



women and children who spend long hours near cooking fires.

Equally important, improved cookstoves reduce the amount of firewood needed, helping to protect local forests that communities rely on for their livelihoods.

## **Communities Taking Ownership of Conservation**

Across districts including **Rufiji, Kilwa, Mtama, and Masasi**, TaTEDO-SESO has been working closely with **District Energy Teams (DiSEDCs)**, community groups, and local leaders to promote sustainable energy and strengthen natural resource governance.

Training sessions and community awareness events have reached hundreds of community members, helping them understand sustainable energy options and their role in environmental protection. **More than 694 people have increased their knowledge of sustainable energy technologies and environmental governance through these activities.**

In **Nyamwage village**, community members have taken the initiative further by forming a local network known as **MJANEUMANYA**, which coordinates sustainable energy and environmental conservation efforts in the area.

Through the network, villagers organize awareness campaigns, share experiences, and encourage neighbors to adopt cleaner energy solutions.

One community leader involved in the initiative explains:

“When people understand how energy choices affect our forests and our health, they are ready to change. Now we are working together to protect our environment.”

This sense of ownership is key to the programme’s success. Rather than imposing solutions from outside, the programme supports communities to design and implement their own approaches to sustainable development.

## **Young Environmental Champions**

Change is also coming from an unexpected group **students**.

In several project schools, environmental and energy clubs have become hubs of learning and action. Students are being introduced to topics such as climate change, sustainable energy, and forest conservation.

More than **541 students have participated in environmental education activities**, learning how their everyday choices can affect the environment.

Many of these students are already influencing change at home.

One student from **Mbuyuni Secondary School** shared how the lessons learned at school are making a difference in their family:

“At our home we used to collect firewood almost every day. Now, after learning about improved cookstoves, we collect firewood only two days a week.”

Schools have also taken practical action by establishing tree nurseries. Across the project areas, students have helped raise **more than 20,000 tree seedlings**, with over **3,000 trees planted around school grounds** to restore degraded land and protect local ecosystems.

Teachers say these activities are building a generation that understands the importance of protecting natural resources.

## **Bringing Voices into National Energy Policy**

While change is happening at the community level, TaTEDO-SESO is also helping ensure that local voices influence national policy discussions.

Through collaboration with organizations such as the **Clean Cooking Alliance of Tanzania (CCAT)** and the **Sustainable Energy Forum (SEF)**, TaTEDO-SESO has organized policy dialogues bringing together government officials, civil society actors, and development partners.

These discussions focus on implementing key national policies such as the **National Clean Cooking Strategy (2024–2034)** and the **National Charcoal Strategy and Action Plan**.



Participants in these dialogues highlighted that many people still lack clear information about clean cooking technologies and the benefits they provide.

As one stakeholder noted during the discussions:

“We need a shared understanding of clean cooking and stronger communication so that communities can make informed decisions.”

Such policy engagement helps ensure that national strategies reflect the realities faced by communities and promote solutions that are accessible and affordable.

## Spreading the Message

To reach wider audiences, TaTEDO-SESO has partnered with local media to raise awareness about sustainable energy and environmental conservation.

Television programmes, radio broadcasts, and online media campaigns have reached **more than 7,000 people**, helping spread information about clean cooking technologies and the importance of protecting forests.

These campaigns are helping to shift public perceptions about energy use and environmental responsibility.

## Building a Sustainable Future Together

The progress seen across southern Tanzania demonstrates the powerful role that communities can play in protecting natural resources when they are empowered with knowledge, tools, and opportunities.

Through the **Leading the Change programme**, TaTEDO-SESO is helping communities move toward cleaner energy, stronger environmental governance, and more sustainable livelihoods.

What started with improved cookstoves, and awareness campaigns is evolving into something larger—a growing movement of communities working together to protect their environment for future generations.

As one community member summarized:

“When we protect our forests and use energy wisely, we are protecting our children’s future.”