

# Malawi

## VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION

### Community-Based Natural Resource Management



Since 1961.

**Country:** Malawi

**Program:** Environment: Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM)

**Job Title:** Community Based Natural Resource Management Extension Agent, Environmental Education Volunteer, Agriculture and Forestry Extension Volunteer

**Staging Dates:** February 28, 2016 to March 1, 2016\*  
(in the USA)

**Pre-Service Training:** March 2, 2016 to May 3, 2016\*  
(in Malawi)

**Dates of Service:** May 4, 2016 to May 3, 2018\*

\*dates subject to change

AA100 = 33648R

AA104 = 3363BR

AA117 = 3358BR



This document is intended to give an overview of the project you are invited to work on in the Peace Corps. For more detailed information about Malawi and living there, please read the Welcome Book via the link included with your invitation and check out the related Web sites referenced in the Welcome Book.

For further information about serving as an Environment Volunteer in Malawi, call the Country Desk Officer for Malawi at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., (9AM to 5PM, EST):

Toll-free: 1-855-855-1961, press 1, then extension 1822;

or directly at (202) 692-1822;

or via email at [Malawi@peacecorps.gov](mailto:Malawi@peacecorps.gov)

## A NOTE FROM THE PROGRAM MANAGER

Greetings from the Warm Heart of Africa!

You are invited to join us in working with Malawians to strengthen a community-based, participatory approach to natural resource management. The Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) Project began in 1999 in partnership with Malawi's Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Wildlife, and the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy & Mining. This is an exciting, challenging, and critical time to be working in natural resources management in Malawi.

Malawi faces more pressure on its land resources now than ever before. Malawi is one of the most densely populated areas in Africa, putting huge pressure on the limited land resources. The economy of Malawi is linked to the environment in many important ways. The state of the environment determines the level of prosperity now and in the future. This underscores the need to examine changes in the environment to determine how prudent use of the environment can promote sustainable development. Despite the high economic value of natural resources and their role in the economy of Malawi, they are not being used in a sustainable manner. There is evidence that forestry resources, for example, are degrading at an alarming rate of 2.6% per year (World Bank, 2002). The main cause of this is agricultural expansion caused by rapid population growth. Many natural resources such as fish, crop yield and wildlife continue to show declining trends.

Malawi's economy is agricultural and natural resource based with the majority of Malawians practicing subsistence farming characterized by small land holdings; continuous cultivation on the same piece of land; and encroachment into marginal lands and protected areas. Promoting participation of local communities in tree planting and forest management; establishment and management of village forest areas (VFAs); strengthening community based natural resources management plans; and training communities on management of the reserves, will assist in the preservation and maintenance of healthy ecosystems. Despite this great importance, forests are still declining due to deforestation. Climate change is an emerging threat to biodiversity conservation in Malawi and is already observed through floods, droughts, high temperatures, reduced agricultural productivity due to heavy reliance on rain fed agriculture, and water scarcity.

Environment Volunteers work with Malawians in the protection and sustainable use of natural resources. Volunteers work at the grass-roots level and often live in mud huts with a grass roof or simple brick and tin roof houses with no electricity or running water. Some aspects of the work are as tangible as planting trees, constructing improved cook stoves, or making compost,



while other facets are as nebulous as mobilizing and promoting groups in order to strengthen community dynamics. Whether working with individuals, out of school-based wildlife clubs, or Village Natural Resource Management Committees (VNRMCs), sustainability of natural resources depends on attitudes and behaviors of Malawians.

Sometimes you will feel overwhelmed by the critical needs of the people in your community and the conflicting theories about cause and effect. I can only say that being a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in Malawi will draw on all your reserves of patience, inner strength, and humility. If you come with a commitment to maintain an open mind and an open heart, you will find all the resources you need to live and work in Malawi's beautiful and exciting environment.

For more detailed information on the state of the environment in Malawi, I encourage you to read a Malawi Government Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy, and Environment's report that was produced in 2010:

[Malawi State of Environment and Outlook Report: Environment for Sustainable Economic Growth](#)

Sincerely,

Lughano Cecilia Munthali  
Associate Peace Corps Director/Environment

## PEACE CORPS MALAWI HISTORY

Peace Corps Malawi's involvement in environmental sustainability through natural resource management has changed over the past few years. Starting in 1999, Peace Corps/Malawi introduced the Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) Project in the Environment sector. The project works with both the Malawi Government's Department of Forestry and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife to enhance community participation in natural resources management of protected areas.

As an Environment Volunteer, your ability to communicate in a local language is crucial and cannot be over emphasized. Your ability to share experiences and information with your local partners and neighbors is vital to the transferability and sustainability of your project work. Volunteers work with individuals, local committees, and local groups to explore possibilities in a variety of technical areas, such as wildlife clubs with local schools, tree nurseries for local woodlots, improved cook stoves to conserve fuel wood, and income generating activities, such as fish ponds, bee-keeping, diversified cash-crops, and livestock management.

One area of increasing importance for the project now and in the future is Volunteer support to rural individual entrepreneurs and community groups that are designing and selling handicrafts, producing important local cash crops, making and selling jam, or making household items, such as soap. Further, individuals and groups that are involved in village community banking, savings, and small businesses, are important to the future of Malawi's natural resources. Improving livelihoods leads to decreased dependence and pressure on nearby protected areas. Another priority area in Malawi is food security, which requires your involvement. You will see that there is a deliberate effort to integrate food security into your activities at site in your upcoming training.

Peace Corps Malawi's Environment plan is a living document, and this is a living, ever-evolving project. This means that while we have set goals and objectives, the success of this project relies on Volunteers' ability to respond to the priority needs and interests of the communities we serve.

## YOUR PRIMARY DUTIES

The foundation of Peace Corp/Malawi's environmental approach is that success is based on building human capacity. It is very important to understand that this is a grassroots, community-based extension position. Volunteers work with local communities and leaders, formally with staff from our partner ministries/departments, and informally with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or community-based organizations (CBOs). While the work is hands-on and includes working with technical environmental issues, all of the work is geared

towards building the capacity of Malawians. Preparing nurseries, planting trees, and researching appropriate species for different environments and purposes are only a small part of the work. The social aspect of this assignment is the most critical and difficult. You will work with both individuals and groups, and a great deal of the work is building or strengthening relationships with community natural resource committees and groups. The biological technical work is mainly basic, elementary silviculture (development and care of forests), agronomy (cultivation of land, soil management and crop production), and horticulture (cultivating gardens for the growth of fruits, flowers and vegetables).

As an Environment Volunteer, you will be assigned either to the Department of Forestry or the Department of National Parks and Wildlife. The Government of Malawi has asked for your assistance to implement their strategy of collaborative community management of protected areas. You may be working in collaboration with National Parks and/or Forestry staff, and will report directly to either a District Forestry Officer or a Park Manager; or you may be working alongside an innovative NGO project to increase year-round yields of a cash crop through irrigation. You will work side-by-side with your community members and counterparts. You may be placed just outside a national park or a forest reserve in a community bordering those protected areas, or in a village away from those resources.

**The primary aspects or your job will include:**

- **Teamwork:** Working, learning, and planning with local Malawian residents to ensure project sustainability.
- **Community Natural Resource Management:** Building the capacity of existing community groups' plan for and understanding of appropriate natural resource management.
- **Conservation Awareness:** Learning and extending local biological technical information as a means of extending locally appropriate natural resource management technologies. Encouraging the use of sustainable agricultural practices that discourage deforestation.
- **Government staff and local relationships:** Contributing to the creation of positive relationships/liaisons between local communities and Parks, Forestry, NGO, and CBO staff, and helping staff and community members to understand policy changes.
- **Micro Enterprise Development:** Assisting rural Malawians to develop and implement strategies for improving their livelihoods. Small business startups, community savings programs, basic business, marketing and sales education, as well as improving financial literacy, will help to achieve this goal.

Working alongside Malawians, Volunteers are expected to perform a number of tasks related to learning about and managing locally available natural resources, including:

- Facilitate participatory community assessments
- Facilitate environmental awareness and behavior change education campaigns with community-based organizations or groups
- Work with existing Village Natural Resource Committees (VNRCs)
- Understand challenges to enterprise development and household security, and help communities to be creative in approaches to income generation
- Assist in the demonstration of sustainable farming methodologies, such as conservation agriculture and permaculture
- Provide assistance and support to local efforts to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS and to improve the care of those living with HIV
- Encourage changes in agricultural practices that lead to improvements in household food security
- Identify and execute activities to ensure the participation of women and youth in business management and development with a gender sensitive approach to your work.
- Learn about, locate, and recommend forest and park products for harvesting
- Learn, practice, and extend knowledge of appropriate natural resource alternatives (including technologies, resources, and local knowledge) to reduce dependency on community resources and protected area resources
- Explore, practice, and extend information about appropriate income generating activities
- Introduce new ideas and ways of thinking about natural resources
- Write and submit regular reports both to Peace Corps/Malawi and Government supervisors

To succeed at these tasks, you will have to be resourceful and innovative. You must also be ready to address logistical, bureaucratic, and financial obstacles inherent in any development project. You will be stepping into an unfamiliar environment and you will need to be motivated, open minded, flexible, and patient. These tasks come together to achieve goals specified in the Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) Project plan.

### **Project Purpose & Goals:**



Malawian communities living near or around protected areas will improve their livelihoods through better agricultural and natural resource management practices

- Goal 1:** Community members will improve the management of local natural resources and practice better food security practices.
- Goal 2:** Members of communities near protected areas will start or expand sustainable income generating activities based on forest resources and agricultural produce.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR SECONDARY/ COMMUNITY PROJECTS

While 80% your work will be focused on environment activities, all Volunteers are encouraged to get involved with and promote activities that are not directly related to the goals of the CBNRM Project Plan. For example, many Education and Health Volunteers in Malawi get involved with learning and teaching about home gardening, composting, environmental conservation, and promoting appropriate technology activities. In the same way, Environment Volunteers work with school and out-of-school groups, build social skills with youth groups, embark on nutritional projects at health centers, and promote activities linked with girls' education. The secondary activities you take on are dependent on the interests of your community, as well as your skills and enthusiasm.

HIV/AIDS issues are specifically included in your training programs; all PCVs in Malawi are expected to take part in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Given the critical and sensitive situation related to HIV/AIDS in Malawi, all PCVs should identify ways in which they can help to promote awareness, provide outreach with information, and inform and influence their Malawian friends and colleagues about HIV prevention and treatment. HIV/AIDS affects every community, and virtually every individual Malawian. It is the responsibility of every PCV to establish how she/he can act locally to help mitigate the impact of this crisis.

Malaria is also one of Peace Corps Malawi's cross sector program priorities, as one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in Malawi with an estimated 6 million cases occurring annually, especially among children. As such, you will have the opportunity to get involved in the Stomp Out Malaria program.

You will quickly notice different gender roles and norms in Malawi. Peace Corps Malawi is working to mainstream gender equity activities in all of our programming as a cross-cutting theme. Volunteers are expected to incorporate a gender equity lens in their day-to-day work in communities.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

### **Available Resources:**

You will be working in villages with limited infrastructure and varied human and physical resources. A Volunteer's best internal resources are flexibility, creativity, and an interest in learning, as well as training others. Peace Corps/Malawi will provide basic technical references and Volunteers supplement these with local resources. All Volunteers are issued a mountain bicycle with necessary accessories (i.e., helmet, repair kit, pump) for local transport needs.

**Location of Job:**

All Community-Based Natural Resource Management sites are in villages and some villages can be quite remote. Expect to be dependent on your bicycle not only for visiting villages, but also for getting to public transport and local food markets.

**Working Hours:**

Community extension fieldwork requires a great deal of time. You need to recognize that as a facilitator you must first be a learner; you are not stepping into a highly structured work situation or job description. In order to meet and work with communities, Volunteers must be willing to work with early morning starts and late afternoon ending times, even on weekends. Time spent with people in the community, especially if not in a planned meeting, is a vital part of the program; you are often learning what works well and how you might support local innovators. In most instances, it will take some time before you have a sense of structure to your assignment.

**Cultural Attitudes and Customs in the Workplace:**

Some of the challenges you will face will be related to the history of colonialism and post-colonial rule that encouraged little distribution of information and even less capacity building at the local level. You need to be motivated, patient, flexible, willing to work hard, and capable of dealing with ambiguous situations. It may take time for your colleagues and community contacts to understand the assistance you provide and the role you play as a Volunteer. An extremely important aspect of your work will be your ability to communicate with your community members. Language acquisition is the key and, as such, requires that you continue to learn the local language spoken at your site and understand the cultural norms existing.

Gay and lesbian Volunteers must know that Malawi is a very conservative society and that homosexuality is a crime for men and women. Expatriates in Malawi can be prosecuted under this law. Homosexuality is not likely tolerated with the general public and many Malawians are in denial that homosexuality exists in their culture. Thus, any display of homosexuality will be severely frowned upon and it is important for the Volunteer's success to exercise discretion. While physical contact among men and among women is not uncommon (you may see hand-holding in public), it is often of short duration and not sexual in nature. For newly arrived Volunteers, it is imperative to recognize this contact for what it is and not misinterpret its meaning. Peace Corps/Malawi has a Diversity Committee and a Volunteer Supporting Volunteer (VSV) Network, made up of current Volunteers, to support Volunteers of all backgrounds and Peace Corps staff members are trained in diversity issues for volunteer support.

**Dress Code:**

Although Malawi no longer has an official national dress code, attitudes towards dress are much more conservative than in the U.S. In America, dress is seen as an expression of personal identity. In Malawi, dress is a sign of your respect for those around you. Conforming to local dress norms during and after work will make you a much more effective development agent, and will ease your integration into your community. Because of this, shorts, clothes with holes in them, miniskirts or other clothes that reveal a lot of bare skin, and dirty clothes are unacceptable in Malawian communities.

Professional dress at your site usually means a shirt with a collar for men and skirts or dresses that cover the knees for women. Tevas and open sandals are acceptable at your site but inappropriate when visiting with your supervisor in the District Capital, or when participating in village meetings. Inside protected areas, boots are recommended to protect your feet. Community extension is fieldwork and will require travel on a bicycle. While riding a bicycle, it is acceptable for female PCVs to wear trousers/capris pants covered by a skirt for safety purposes. However, long skirts are still required for women at all times. Female Peace Corps Volunteers usually wear trousers underneath a skirt while walking around in a village. Neither men nor women should wear shorts at their sites, except when within your home compound.

## TRAINING FOR YOUR JOB

During your first nine weeks in Malawi, you will participate in an integrated Pre-Service Training (PST). PC/Malawi is successful in providing trainees with realistic experience in PST because of our emphasis on Community-Based Training (CBT). During training, you will live with a Malawian host family. Much of your success will depend on actively participating in household and community activities. Peace Corps Malawi started conducting a combined PST with the Health sector since 2011, so you will be training with Health Peace Corps trainees.

PST focuses on several essential areas to prepare you for service: language, technical, medical, cross-culture, and safety/security. Language, cross-culture, and technical sessions will take place in your village cluster, with both structured and self-directed learning activities. Language and technical trainers will be living within the village, and will provide coaching and feedback as you learn. Medical training sessions focus on preventive health strategies by teaching you how to take care of yourself to stay healthy. Peace Corps Malawi expects that Trainees and Volunteers assume primary responsibility for practicing a healthy lifestyle and avoiding preventable illnesses. After your completion of PST, you will return for In-Service Training at the 3-4 month and one-year milestones in your service to exchange ideas with your fellow PCVs and deepen your technical knowledge and skills.

## LIVING CONDITIONS

Almost all Volunteers in this project are placed in villages that border or are near protected areas. Obviously, this means that some sites are quite remote. On very rare occasions, the host Ministry provides housing for Peace Corps Volunteers, but most houses are rented locally. Expect your accommodations to be very rudimentary. Some houses have a thatch grass roof, earth floor, and mud brick walls, while others might be basic brick and tin. Expect to use hurricane lamps, paraffin (kerosene), and open fire wood stoves for cooking and/or heating. Drinking water must always be boiled and filtered. Peace Corps provides you with an initial settling in allowance so that you can purchase basic furniture such as a bed frame, two chairs and a work table.

A variety of locally grown fruits and vegetables are available seasonally. Staple foods such as beans, rice, and grains are sold throughout the year. The staple dish is *Naima*, a thick porridge made from white maize flour. It is widely available and generally accompanied by cooked greens or beans, and, occasionally, meat. Imported goods and spices, while expensive, can be purchased in the regional hubs or cities. Some Volunteers have noted that maintaining a healthy vegetarian regime in Malawi is challenging due to the limited variety of vegetables. Nevertheless, it is feasible for a motivated, knowledgeable vegetarian to eat an adequate diet. Maintaining a vegan diet is very difficult.



Since 1961.

## POTENTIAL CHALLENGES & REWARDS

Please reference the [Welcome Book](#) for more detailed information regarding diversity and cross-cultural issues, and safety and security in the Peace Corps.

Before accepting this assignment you should give ample thought the potential frustrations you may face. Challenges are many, ranging from personal to cultural. Learning to accept the culture and work constructively within its morals can be frustrating for Volunteers and may bring on mental stress. Volunteers also face physical hardship if they contract an illness, overextend physically (i.e., by biking long and tedious distances on a daily basis), or by failing to maintain a healthy diet.

As noted earlier, Malawi has some of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world. HIV/AIDS is not just a health issue in Malawi; it is an issue that affects every person who lives here. Your friends, neighbors, and counterparts may suffer directly or indirectly from the disease and you will see first-hand the devastating effects HIV takes on the community with large numbers of Orphans and Vulnerable Children.

Food insecurity is another area that you will come across in your village. Many communities where Volunteers live face acute shortage of food at certain times of the year with the lean season starting from November to February when rural household supplies run dry, when households become market dependent and prices rise. The combination of irregular rainy seasons and floods in some areas, high mortality rates and unsustainable practices (such as dependence on fertilizers and minimal crop diversity) has put rural communities in extremely vulnerable situations. Environmental health is linked to physical health, so PCVs are learning and demonstrating the importance of low-input, sustainable agro forestry practices for improved nutrition.

### **Diversity**

The Peace Corps provides equal opportunity for all persons and recognizes that all individuals can contribute to the accomplishment of its mission. The Peace Corps seeks to attract a diverse Volunteer corps, representative of all Americans regardless of race, religion, or lifestyle.

Gay and lesbian Volunteers must know that Malawi is a very conservative society and that homosexuality is a crime for men and women. Expatriates in Malawi can be prosecuted under this law. Homosexuality is not likely tolerated with the general public and many Malawians are in denial that homosexuality exists in their culture. Thus, any display of homosexuality will be severely frowned upon and it is important to the Volunteer's success to exercise discretion. While physical contact among men and among women is not uncommon (you may see hand-

holding in public), it is often of short duration and not sexual in nature. For newly arrived Volunteers, it is imperative to recognize this contact for what it is and not misinterpret its meaning. Peace Corps/Malawi has a Diversity Committee and a Volunteer Supporting Volunteer (VSV) Network, made up of current Volunteers, to support Volunteers of all backgrounds and Peace Corps staff members are trained in diversity issues for volunteer support.

The rewards are as diversified as the challenges. Most Volunteers find satisfaction in making meaningful relationships with people in their new communities. Some base their fulfillment purely in terms of achievement of the projects' objectives. It is important to note that the impact of environmental extension is not always immediately noticeable. All Volunteers who finish their service acknowledge they have grown in different ways—in worldliness, in knowledge, maturity, experience, and flexibility. Another major difficulty involves coming to an understanding of what development actually means. But in the end, all Volunteers gain through an experience that is irreplaceable and unique.

## COMMENTS FROM VOLUNTEERS

"Training is like an entire mid-life crisis packed into two months. Everything you thought you knew is thrown up in the air like a deck of cards, and you have to put them back in order to win a game whose rules you barely understand. There is no other way to gain the wealth of perspective, confidence, flexibility, and experience that I have accumulated in my Peace Corps service. Nothing in the United States can challenge you so completely, teach you so much, and be such fun at the same time."

### **-Volunteer in Southern Region**

"Training isn't there to make you someone you're not, but to remind you of all the things you forgot in college and how to adapt them to a new living and working experience."

### **-Volunteer in Central Region**

"It took me 6 months to figure out who is interested in working and participating in the Village Natural Resource Management Committee (VNRMC), and who just showed up to see the foreigner. However, I now work with two dedicated and motivated VNRMCs, and a third that has great potential."

### **-Volunteer in Northern Region**

"The way to reach sustainability is to teach, demonstrate and repeat. Most of the people I've worked with have had a hard time swallowing my 'crazy ideas' until they've seen success with their own eyes. My Volunteer predecessor worked with a Malawian counterpart for two years before some 'new' agro forestry techniques were embraced. Now that the Malawian counterpart sees that the techniques can work, he demonstrates them to others."

### **-Volunteer in Central Region**

"Good organization and communicating to many members of the community what work you are planning and doing is essential."

### **-Volunteer in Central Region**

“When the rains came, I didn’t even remotely compete in importance with food and planting. So I didn’t try. I planted, too, surprising and impressing a lot of people when they saw or heard about it, and that led right into the conversations about agro forestry and conservation that no one had previously had time for. I was doing something people could relate to, and talking shop is an excellent way to share and learn.”

**-Volunteer in Northern Region**

“My counterpart was completely skeptical about composting two years ago. Today, he is a convert! He has already harvested nine rows of maize, which gave him 50KG of corn—an unprecedented yield, he says. Lots of neighbors saw the corn stalks and asked why they were so green and tall.”

**-Volunteer in Southern Region**

"I have learned that when it comes to projects, no matter what the Volunteer wants to work on, it is best to ask the community. They know what would be best in their community."

**-Volunteer in Central Region**

“The only suggestion I could make to new trainees or Volunteers on the basis of community integration would be the importance of forming both social and working relationships with those people in the village, and language. The better off a Volunteer is in the language of his or her area, the easier community integration will be. That Volunteer, instantly, becomes more trustworthy and more accessible in the eyes of his or her community. Once a community feels the Volunteer is accessible and trustworthy, they will be more willing to come to him or her with ideas, and also be more willing to try new ideas the Volunteer might suggest.”

**-Volunteer in Southern Region**

“When I packed my 100 lbs. of gear and flew off to this foreign land, I was hopeful and brave, knowing nothing of what I might find. I can happily say I have found joy in my life and work beyond what I ever dared to hope.”

**-Volunteer in Northern Region**