

Reforestation - a promising approach to public health for rural hospitals

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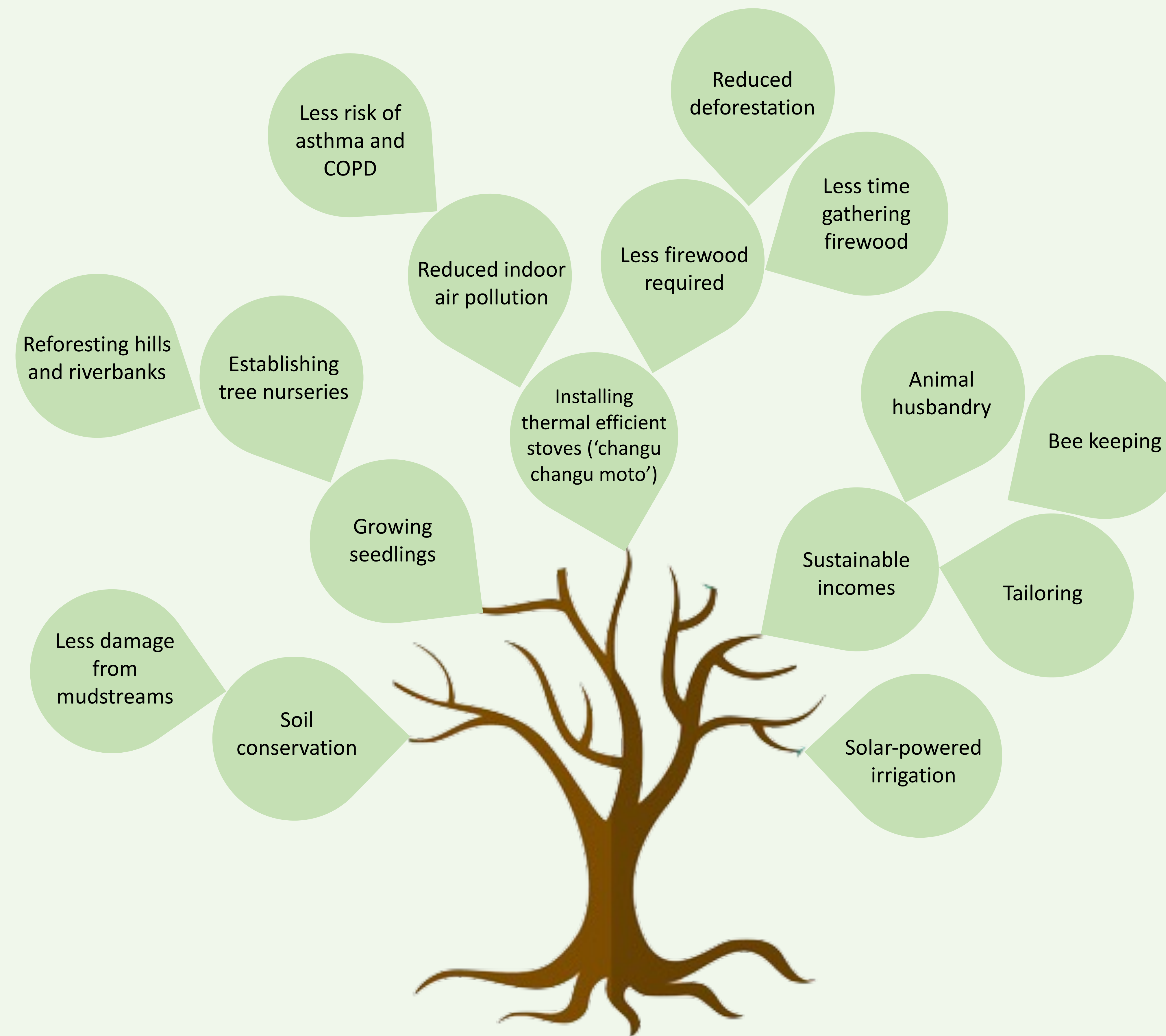
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Background

Climate change disproportionately affects the Global South. The recent cyclone Freddy (Malawi, March 2023) was a prime example of this, causing extensive flooding aggravated by deforestation. To prevent this in the future, reforestation of vulnerable areas is essential. However, many communities depend on timber as a source of fuel and income, so reforestation interventions must be implemented cooperatively and sensitive to the local situation.

Methods

Mulanje Mission Hospital and Greenpop established a large landscape restoration programme in Mulanje, in partnership with the logistics company DHL. The aims were to 1) reforest environmental hotspots, such as hills and riverbanks, and 2) reduce the dependency on local forests for living.



Results

Reforestation was achieved by training people from 4 villages in reforestation practices, such as establishing tree nurseries, planting seedlings, and soil conservation practices. Under this joint intervention, a total of 6 tree nurseries were established and 33,400 trees were planted from April 2022 to March 2023. In its wider programme, MMH has planted 290,000 trees since 2017. Dependency on local forests was reduced by introducing energy efficient cookstoves and by enabling more sustainable types of income in forested areas, such as beekeeping and animal husbandry. In areas with adequate tree cover, storm Freddy caused significantly less damage.

Conclusion

Hospitals in SSA hold an unique position due to their existing network and long history of community interventions. This may enable them to successfully counteract the effects of climate change. Furthermore, public-private partnerships are an innovative and promising way to fund these projects.

