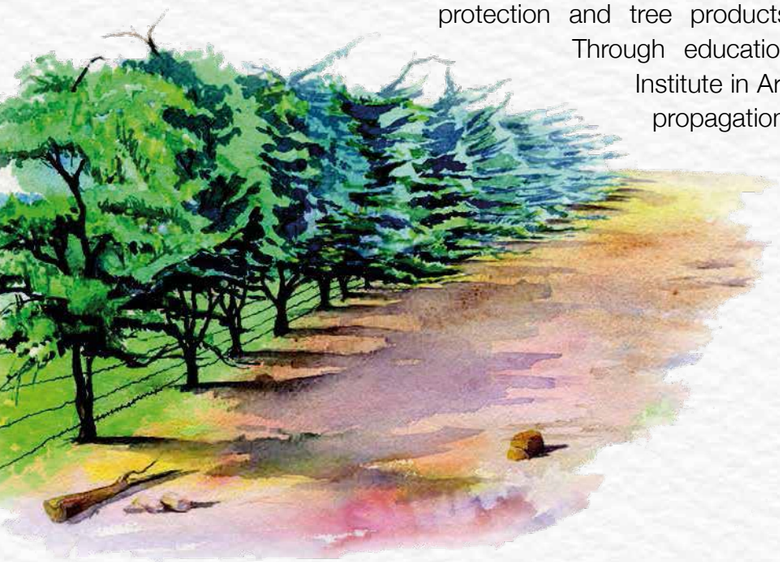
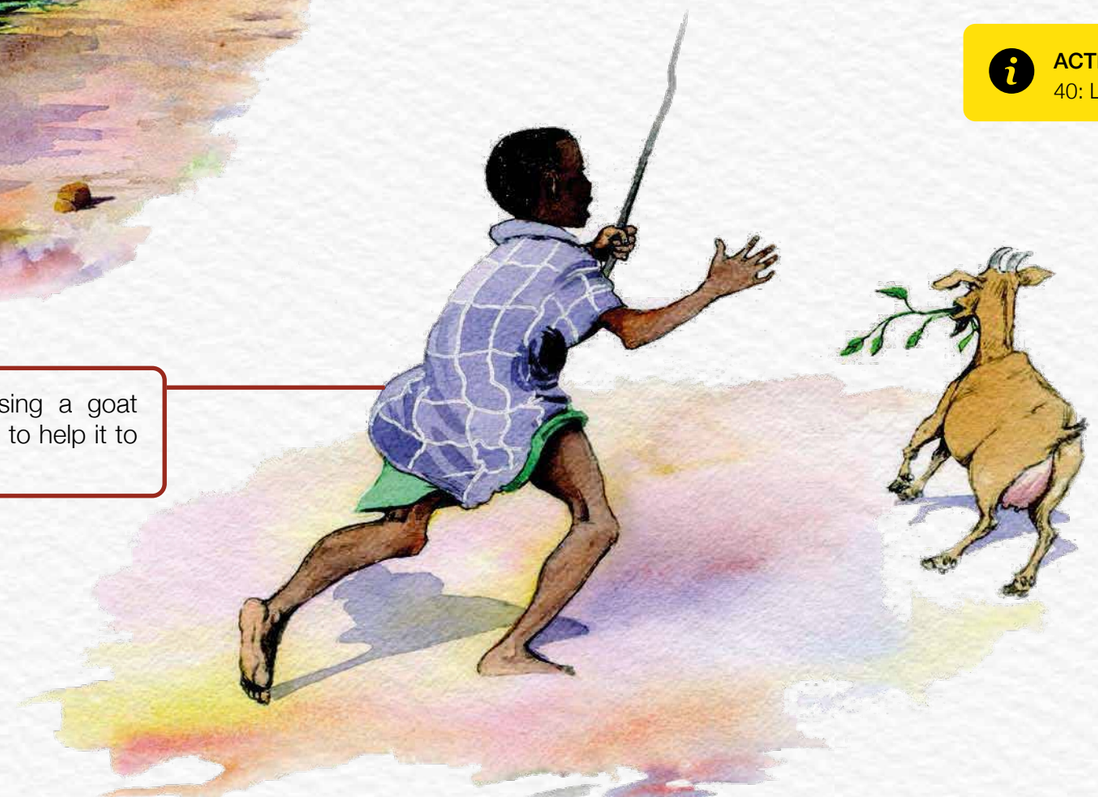
CONSERVATION FARMING

Trees slow down and divert the wind. They provide leaves to feed and protect the soil. Pictured is a living fence from Burkina Faso. A living fence, made of plants combined with wire, provides the service of keeping people and animals off your fields, but they are also brilliant for many other reasons. They can provide: firewood, fodder, sustenance for people (such as fruit), wind breaks, fertiliser, mulch, erosion control, forage for small mammals, increase in crop yield, fibres for cloth, shade, construction materials, and medicines. If leguminous trees are planted, they can provide much-needed nitrogen into the system. Traditional living fences can be more durable than wooden posts, as they are less susceptible to termites and fungus.

A women's group in Moshi in Kikavu Chini, Tanzania, have taken a leading role in their community in educating friends, neighbours, and schoolchildren about wise farming practices. They distribute trees to every household in the village, to provide shade, windbreak protection and tree products for ongoing livelihood needs. Through educational trips to Olmotonyi Forestry Institute in Arusha, they learned about seedling propagation and tree nursery maintenance.





The boy pictured is chasing a goat away from his living fence, to help it to grow.

Conservation Farming is a simple yet incredibly effective method of making the most of the available water, whilst conserving the soil. Conservation farming techniques are being developed for different climates and soil types throughout the world, and are making a huge difference to people's lives. A key principle of conservation farming in Africa is 'minimum tillage' – disturb the soil as little as possible.

Ploughing breaks up the soil surface. When it rains, the soil is washed away more easily. The Conservation Farming Unit in Zambia says: 'Farmers who plough are at the mercy of a tradition that wastes inputs, time and ultimately destroys the soils upon which their future depends'. With no need to till the soil, no need for an ox and plough, there is less work to do, but harvests are better, because the soil is protected.

Below is a boy from a project in Zambia making special pot holes. He puts compost in each hole, half covers the hole with soil and waits for the rains. The amount of compost you put into the dug holes is also critical - too much and you can 'poison' the crop. When the rain falls, he will plant seeds in the holes. Little ponds are formed in each hole, providing plenty of water for the crop. After harvest, the detritus from the crop is left on the soil, protecting the surface as a mulch.

ACTION SHEETS - 36: Agroforestry, 40: Living Fences, 41: Windbreaks