



USAID | **MALAWI**
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

STORIES

2012 — 2014



According to the mission's Country Development Cooperation Strategy, the goal of USAID/Malawi is to improve Malawians' quality of life. We have three Development Objectives that will help us reach this goal: *Social Development Improved. Sustainable Livelihoods Increased. Citizen Rights and Responsibilities Exercised.*

This collection of stories shows what happens when those Development Objectives are realized in real people's lives. In these pages, you'll meet parents who are making their families healthier, children who have fallen in love with reading, and farmers who are producing more and better crops thanks to the diligent work of USAID/Malawi and our implementing partners.

These are the people on whose behalf USAID/Malawi works every day. These stories convey what USAID stands for and achieves in Malawi. As the lives of Malawians improve through development action, communicating this progress in individual lives is proof of a better world. It is our intention with this collection to inspire development colleagues and Malawian citizenry with hope for the future of the warm heart of Africa.

The USAID/Malawi Development Outreach Communications Team
August, 2014

HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENTS LEARN TO READ FASTER IN MALAWI

Teacher modifies methods to better instruct third graders

By Kevin Roberts, USAID/Malawi

Transforming Lives, June 2014

When you ask Judith Phiri, a Standard 3, or third grade, teacher about her students, she breaks into a beaming smile.

Teaching her hearing impaired students how to read was an uphill battle for years. She lacked resources and was constantly searching for ways to help her students. But now, things have changed.

“At last,” she says, “I have been able to climb up the mountain and get a glimpse of the mountain view.” Fittingly, Mountain View is the name of the school for the deaf where she teaches in Thyolo district in southern Malawi.

Phiri was looking for ways to help her students when the USAID/Malawi Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) invited her to a five-day training on effective early grade reading practices in August 2013. The training helped her find ways to adapt teaching techniques to the circumstances of her deaf students.

“My students need good language and reading models, access to adapted instruction, and appropriate teaching materials,” she explained. “Hence, I decided to modify what I had learned to best suit my students.”

Some of her creative adaptations included a semi-circular seating arrangement which allows students to see all class participants; a drum for signaling the class schedule; signals to indicate to her students who is speaking; and highlighting key words and concepts in printed text.

Phiri’s hard work has paid off. Due to difficulties with oral language, her students obtain skills at a pace that is on average three times slower than hearing students. But while it used to take a year, her students are now reading after just one term, or three months.



“It feels good seeing your students succeed and overcome the challenge of their hearing status.”



Judith Phiri 's students

More than 13 percent of Malawian citizens live with some form of disability and over 85 percent live in rural areas, including Phiri's students. People with disabilities are among the poorest and most vulnerable citizens in Malawi. They struggle against socio-cultural and economic discrimination and are unable to fully participate in society. They lack access to education, health and legal services, and are often denied the right to earn a living or participate in community decision-making.

Even in the best of circumstances, academic achievement in Malawi is very low. Malawi ranks last of the 15 countries participating in the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality III standardized test in literacy. This environment makes the situation for Phiri's students that much more difficult.

EGRA helps teachers overcome these obstacles in a deceptively simple way, using resources that are already available in most schools. It encourages students to spend time on pre-reading skills that includes linking letters to sounds, then building

syllables that are combined to make words. Phiri believes that this approach helps her students build a vocabulary base and improve their reading abilities.

"It feels good seeing your students succeed and overcome the challenge of their hearing status. My students are faring well."

If the excitement on their faces as they read is any indication, Phiri's students are determined to continue up that difficult path toward reading mastery.

The USAID/Malawi Early Grade Reading Activity is a three-year, \$24 million program implemented by RTI International in August 2013. It promotes quality early grade reading instruction, the production of high-quality reading and learning materials in Chichewa and English, improved policy for reading at the national and local levels, and building a community of reading within and outside the school setting. An evaluation is currently under way to measure the impact of this intervention and how household factors and other USAID/Malawi activities affect reading scores in participating schools.



A volunteer teacher discusses the letter “n” at an after-school reading camp in Mbeti, Malawi. Photos: Catherine Kazmirski

CHILDREN BECOME READERS IN MALAWIAN VILLAGE

Community leaders, parents, teachers, and volunteers work together to teach children reading basics to teach children reading basics.

By Catherine Kazmirski, USAID/Malawi

Transforming Lives, June 2014

On a sunny Monday afternoon, dozens of children have gathered just outside the small village of Mbeti, Malawi. One group sits in a circle, reading a story about a hippo and a hare. Another group practices syllables out loud: “dwa, dwe, dwi.” Another plays an educational version of hopscotch, calling out names of letters written in each square.

The children range in age and size, from the almost-toddler to the lanky 10-year-old. They have self-organized according to grade level and interests. Adults monitor, but each group has appointed a young leader. At the sound of a whistle, all the children drop their games and rush into a nearby schoolroom, ready for today’s lesson: the letter “n.”

These enthusiastic children are participants in

a *Tiwerenge Ndi Ana Athu* (TiANA) reading camp in Traditional Authority (TA) Mlumbe, Zomba, in southern Malawi. TiANA, funded by USAID, works in 10 primary schools in 110 villages in TA Mlumbe, including Mbeti, reaching 9,000 students and 20,000 community members. TiANA helps children in grades one to four develop and improve their reading and writing skills in Chichewa and English, since English is the official language of instruction beginning in first grade.

The activity involves the entire community—parents, teachers, community leaders and volunteers—in nurturing an environment in which children read and write regularly, in and out of school. *Tiwerenge Ndi Ana Athu* means “let’s read with our children.”

TiANA trains teachers and provides appropriate

Development Objective 1: Social Development Improved • Children learn to read

“Before, I could not read or write. Now I can read letters and syllables because I have learned with my daughter.”

learning materials for the classroom. Professional and volunteer camp facilitators host after-school reading camps that include pronunciation lessons and educational games. If the children’s enthusiasm about their Monday afternoon activities is any indication, the camps are a resounding success.

Parents and teachers credit TiANA with improving their children’s lives—and sometimes, their own. Violet Chongwa, a woman whose daughter attends regularly, says: “Before, I could not read or write. Now I can read letters and syllables because I have learned with my daughter.”

The reading activities supplement lessons already taking place in government schools, reinforcing the curriculum and giving children opportunities to practice.

The students aren’t the only ones excited about reading. Community leaders, who work in partnership to make TiANA successful, are equally

passionate.

Joseph M’phinya, Machado 2 village headman, is thrilled that children now have a place to spend time in a constructive way. “TiANA changes our students’ behavior,” he says. “Children are looking forward to school ... It has become appealing for children to come to the camp, and go back to school the next day.”

Why does the TiANA activity work so well? Richard Fadweck, a member of a local community literacy group, believes there are two reasons: strong community partnerships and innovative use of local materials.

Community leaders work with parents, teachers, volunteer committees and school teachers to spread the word about TiANA and encourage parents to send their children. They convene meetings to discuss problems and agree on solutions, some of which are remarkable: organizing a village savings and loan in order to buy new classroom materials, for instance. Communities work together to create lessons that use local materials—alphabet hopscotch is just one example. Schoolrooms are full of colorful homemade alphabet posters and cardboard letters.

The TiANA activity started in September 2012 and concludes in September 2014. But Solomon Nasiyaya, vice-chair of the local Youth Literacy Movement and active participant in TiANA, is optimistic about the future. “We hope to continue the camps. The materials we use are simple and available. The community supports us. The parents are involved. There is a lot of momentum.”

The partnership is giving Mbeti’s children a priceless gift: a love of reading.



A student plays an alphabet game with her friends



Msekaniwana (L) and Mapulesi display their USAID reading materials and in the background, some of their students. Photos: Oris Chimenya

USAID-sponsored Students Open Community School

By Oris Chimenya, June 2013

Nkhotakota District is situated about 180 kilometers North-East of Lilongwe, Malawi's Capital City. Connection to Nkhotakota is through a tarmac road that cuts through Salima, a small lakeside town.

In Nkhotakota, two boys – Msekaniwana Zambia and Mapulesi Niason – have stunned community members by taking their zeal and zest for education far beyond what anyone would have expected.

Msekaniwana, and Mapulesi, both in Standard 2, look just like any other village child, born and raised in a poor and remote area. Spend an hour with them and you will realize they are truly extraordinary.

Although the boys stay in Nkhotakota, their closest school is in Ntchisi, a district that borders Nkhotakota to the west. Msekaniwana and Mapulesi make the 7 kilometer journey to their school each day and attend their normal classes just like many thousands of students across Malawi. It's what they

do afterward and how they bring their education back to their community that captures people's attention.

Msekaniwana, 10, and Mapulesi, 11, have since September 2012, been teaching over 50 colleagues in the afternoon, after their normal classes at school. Essentially, they have started their own community primary school to share what they learn with youth who do not attend formal school or who struggle with their lessons.

Msekaniwana's father, Samson Zambia, is a small holder maize and groundnuts farmer, who is not employed, and depends on selling farm produce to earn a living.

"My son does very well at school and also teaches his colleagues here at home. He has taught some people who are older than him and are in upper classes," says Zambia, promising to continue funding his son's education.

Development Objective 1: Social Development Improved. • Children learn to read



The father, having not reached secondary school level, feels strongly that he has a hero in his house and is proud to see his family get the community spotlight.

The boys' teacher, Mrs. Mita Kamende, is a proud mentor, having nurtured two natural tutors herself. She said that the boys are usually number one and two in class and "if I make any presentation errors while teaching, these two boys raise their hands to correct me."

"I gave them USAID reading materials and they use them for teaching," said the teacher, whose school benefited from a USAID-sponsored project, the Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support, MTPDS. She also observed a well-delivered classroom session by the boys to her shocking joy and immeasurable surprise.

When USAID/Malawi officials visited the home of the two extraordinary champions – Chikango Village,

Traditional Authority Mwansambo, Nkhotakota – the entire village was witness to the inspiring development.

"I would like to become a teacher," says the humble Msekaniwana, whose class session demonstrated he is fully taking after his teacher's skills in teaching phonology and phonetics, and in mobilizing class participation in a lesson.

In a country where reading ability is a problem especially in lower grades, Msekaniwana and Mapulesi have registered greater achievements by improving the reading skills of their fellow primary school-going children and out of school friends. To support their efforts, community members have constructed a learning shelter to support their young heroes. The boys have now started their second cohort of students, and now have several students from Standard 4 and 5 attending their literacy classes.

"My son does very well at school and also teaches his colleagues here at home. He has taught some people who are older than him and are in upper classes."

DISABILITY IS NOT INABILITY:

Helping Blind Learners Read

By Oris Chimenya, USAID/Malawi

Transforming Lives, August 2014

One by one, the learners come to sit near the podium. They are escorted by their teacher, not because they cannot walk on their own, but because these students are blind. Upon arriving at the table, the learners are given a piece of paper. A look at the piece of paper shows no text for the learner to read. There is not a single letter, no sentence, no paragraph. However, a closer look at the paper shows something else—colorless, raised dots, or braille.

Slowly, the students begin to move their fingers over the passage, and before long, they start reading the passage. Line after line, the tips of their fingers move from left to right.

“Once upon a time, a hare wanted to propose to a hyena for marriage. He did not know how to approach the hyena because they had not talked before. One day, the hare said to himself that he will

meet the hyena and tell her that he wants her for marriage ...,” a student reads out loud from the comprehension portion from the braille passage.

For the first time in Malawi, blind and visually impaired students from five schools are gathered in one place to compete for the first Braille Cup. Ekwendeni School for the Blind represents the Northern Region; resource centers in Malingunde, Nsiyaludzu and the hosts, Salima, represent the Central Region; while the Southern Region is represented by Montfort School for the Blind. As a partnership between the USAID Early Grade Reading Activity and the Malawi Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the Braille Cup competition showcases the skills of blind learners in spelling, reading fluency, proofreading, reading comprehension and oral essay presentation.

Listening to the blind learners sing and seeing them jump with excitement, win prizes, interact and pose



A Grade 7 learner takes his turn reading the braille passage.

Development Objective I: Social Development Improved • Children learn to read



“Today’s Braille Cup is ... an opportunity to inspire students to learn to read, stay in school, and reach their full potential.”

for photos, one needs no further evidence that the Cup has achieved its objectives. Far beyond reading skills alone, the Cup raises societal expectations for students who are blind to succeed socially and academically. “Today’s Braille Cup is an academic competition, a model for good sportsmanship and social inclusion. It is an opportunity to inspire students to learn to read, stay in school and reach their full potential,” said Christine Djondo, USAID/Malawi’s education team leader.

Malawi has 210,000 blind people, and over 70,000 of them are both blind and deaf. The Braille Cup is an example of the innovative programs

that USAID and its partners promote to encourage comprehensive and inclusive development. The U.S. Government, through USAID’s Early Grade Reading Activity, is investing in technology, innovation and skills to help blind Malawians get an education. Whether students are sighted or blind, education begins with reading.

The USAID/Malawi Early Grade Reading Activity is a three-year, \$24 million program implemented by RTI International in August 2013. It promotes quality early grade reading instruction, the production of high-quality reading and learning materials in Chichewa and English, improved

policy for reading at the national and local levels, and building a community of reading within and outside the school setting. An evaluation is currently under way to measure the impact of this intervention and how household factors and other USAID/Malawi activities affect reading scores in participating schools.

Including people with disabilities • Communities take action • Innovative ideas

Malawian Journalist Takes VMMC Personally

How a simple media tour turned into a ‘smart cut’

By Pius Mtike

Transforming Lives, September 2014

Photojournalist Denis Liwasa was among a group of reporters that recently visited Zomba district in central Malawi to get the scoop on the ongoing voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC) campaign. Inspired by his interviews and experience during the August media tour, Liwasa decided that he, too, would undergo the procedure.

The TV, radio and print journalists met with Dr. Sten Gift Chinomba, the district health officer, and listened intently as his colleagues explained the health benefits of VMMC and the

Ministry of Health’s campaign to prevent the spread of HIV in the country. They visited the Police College Hospital—one of eight health facilities offering VMMC in Zomba—and interviewed Assistant Police Commissioner Hillary Kapsala, a satisfied client who has championed VMMC among policemen and the general public. They talked with the son of a Zomba chief, who also underwent the procedure safely.

Liwasa, who works for the Malawi Broadcasting Corp., noted that more than 4,000 VMMCs were performed in the first three weeks of the Zomba campaign, which ran from July 28 to Sept. 6, 2014. He also applauded the innovative ways used to raise awareness and increase demand for VMMC. For instance, boys and men who have undergone VMMC were enlisted to act as community mobilizers, and the Malawi Prison Service Brass Band, which is very popular, was engaged to parade the streets of Zomba township playing and singing songs with VMMC



Denis Liwasa, right, is interviewed by a CHANCO radio journalist after his surgery. Photo: Jhpiego

messages. Traditional leaders were also assisted in relaying VMMC messages to their communities, specifically to *ngalibas*, or traditional circumcisers.

The VMMC project, called Sankhani Moyenela—or Smart Choices—is implemented by Jhpiego and funded by USAID and the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

Pius Mtike, community mobilization and communications officer for the project in Zomba district, interviewed Liwasa, 34, and a married father of two, to find out why he decided to undergo the “smart cut.”

PM: Are you comfortable to share your experience on your circumcision?

DL: No problem! As a journalist, it is part of my responsibility to advocate for positive behavior for healthy living.

Development Objective I: Social Development Improved • Keeping families healthy

PM: What do you mean?

DL: You know, there are a lot of things that we journalists work on and publicize—despite the fact that we have not experienced them ourselves. I have, for instance, been covering stories on VMMC for some time now but I was not circumcised myself. Somehow this made me feel like I was lacking.

PM: What else motivated you to get the “smart cut”?

DL: Honestly, my wife contributed to this decision. My wife works as a nurse in one of the hospitals in Blantyre. She has been encouraging me to get circumcised for a while now. She has told me about the benefits of the procedure, especially that it helps to reduce the chances of getting infected with HIV by 60 percent. I am also aware that VMMC benefits women by reducing their risks of contracting cervical cancer. The other thing is that, when I was interacting with clients and service providers at Zomba Police College Hospital, I observed that the environment here is conducive [to a good experience], the hospital is clean and the service providers are friendly to their clients. All these things contributed to my decision to go for the “smart cut.”

PM: I noticed that you announced your decision to the group of journalists that you were with. Why did you do that?

DL: I did that to inspire the other men that I was traveling with.

PM: You are just coming from the operation room, how do you feel?

DL: I feel empowered. The experience of being on the

VMMC surgical bed and have my circumcision will change the way I report on this issue. I was worried about pain but the procedure was painless because of the anesthesia that was used. The counseling which I went through before the procedure was also very informative. I have benefited a lot.

PM: How do you intend to use your experience?

DL: Surely, now that I have experienced VMMC, I intend to spread the message of its benefits to others. But I will also emphasize that it is not bulletproof—no one gets 100 percent protection from the procedure. I will also tell people about the advantage of preventing penile cancer in men and cervical cancer in women. In the past, I have been involved in a lot of debates about VMMC but I lacked the experience. Now I will draw from my experience and I will also emphasize that, to win the battle on HIV and AIDS, I will advise men that after circumcision they must still follow the ABC: Abstain from sex, be faithful to one sexual partner and use condoms correctly and consistently.

Malawi officially adopted VMMC as a strategy for HIV prevention in 2012. The procedure reduces a man’s risk of acquiring HIV when implemented as part of a comprehensive HIV prevention package. The U.S. Government is the biggest funder of VMMC services in the country.

Sankhani Moyenela is a four-year project, which runs from July 2013 to July 2017, implemented in three districts in Southern Malawi with high HIV prevalence and a low VMMC rate. The target for 2014 is to circumcise 24,000 men and adolescent boys in all three districts. As of the end of the VMMC campaign on Sept. 6, 2014, over 19,000 had been circumcised.

“Now that I have experienced VMMC, I intend to spread the message of its benefits to others.”

USAID Literacy Efforts Yield Results

By Oris Chimenya

Efforts by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to improve literacy in the country by promoting Early Grade Reading have yielded tremendous results in Salima, with pupils in both Standard One and adult literacy levels being able to read and write.

A visit to two schools in Salima showed that unlike in the past when a Standard Four pupil could not read, this time, a Standard One pupil was able to read letters, words and even sentences on their own.

During a class session observed at the two primary schools (Kaphatenga and Ntchuwa) in the district, pupils showed that they enjoyed learning as teachers made it easy for them by engaging them and also by using simple learning techniques for the kids to grasp the concepts faster and easily.

Head teacher at Kaphatenga Primary School, Gilbert Mwasiya, commended the efforts being done by the MTPDS in promoting reading and making sure that pupils read and write.

“Previously, pupils in Standard One, Two or even Three were not able to read, but now they are able to read books, newspapers, The Bible and many materials. “This has happened because we are also working hand in hand with parents so that reading should go beyond the four walls of the classroom as advised by our MTPDS advisor,” said Mwasiya.

And during a meeting at Ntchuwa Primary School,



stories were also told of how adult literacy is changing the lives of learners. One adult literacy learner said she was happy that she was now able to read and write, and that she was now being used in different development committees as a secretary due to her widely-known reading and writing ability.

A Standard One teacher at the school, Luckwell Ngongonda, who has undergone the MTPDS training, the refresher courses offer teachers some of the easiest ways to of making pupils learn to read.

“As opposed to the national curriculum that uses the whole word approach in teaching the pupils, we are taught to start teaching letter sounds, then the names of the letters followed by syllables and finally combination of those words. It becomes easier now for the pupil to know,” he said.

Ngongonda, who is also the deputy head teacher at the school, added that with the new approach,

“Reading should go beyond the four walls of the classroom.”

Development Objective 1: Social Development Improved. • Children learn to read

Standard One pupils can read most of the letters and Chichewa word combinations – just three months after enrolment into primary school on 5 September this year.

The reading and writing skills are being achieved through an intervention by the Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support (MTPDS) – a three-year USAID education project that focuses on seven districts of Salima, Ntchisi, Mzimba North, Ntcheu, Blantyre Rural, Zomba Rural and Thyolo and aims to enhance the quality of primary education in Malawi by providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST).

Among others, through the project, USAID is offering training to teachers focusing on improving teacher effectiveness and developing the literacy teaching skills for all teachers in Standards One to Four as well as strengthening the management skills for all school leaders such as head teachers and deputies.

According to an MTPDS information material, the project mainly focuses on areas such as teacher policy, support and management systems, teacher professional development and early grade literacy.

One of the key findings of the USAID Malawi Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) Report released in February this year is that “children are progressing through the primary school without attaining basic literacy skills”.

The report then recommends that “There is need to maintain the teaching of phonics to drill children in letter knowledge, their sounds and how they combine to make up words by the end of standard I while in standard four they should be able to read full sentences” – exactly what USAID, through MTPDS, is doing.



MESSAGE FROM MALAWI: STELLA STAYS IN SCHOOL

With extra help, students overcome obstacles to education

By Kevin Roberts, USAID/Malawi

Transforming Lives, June 2014

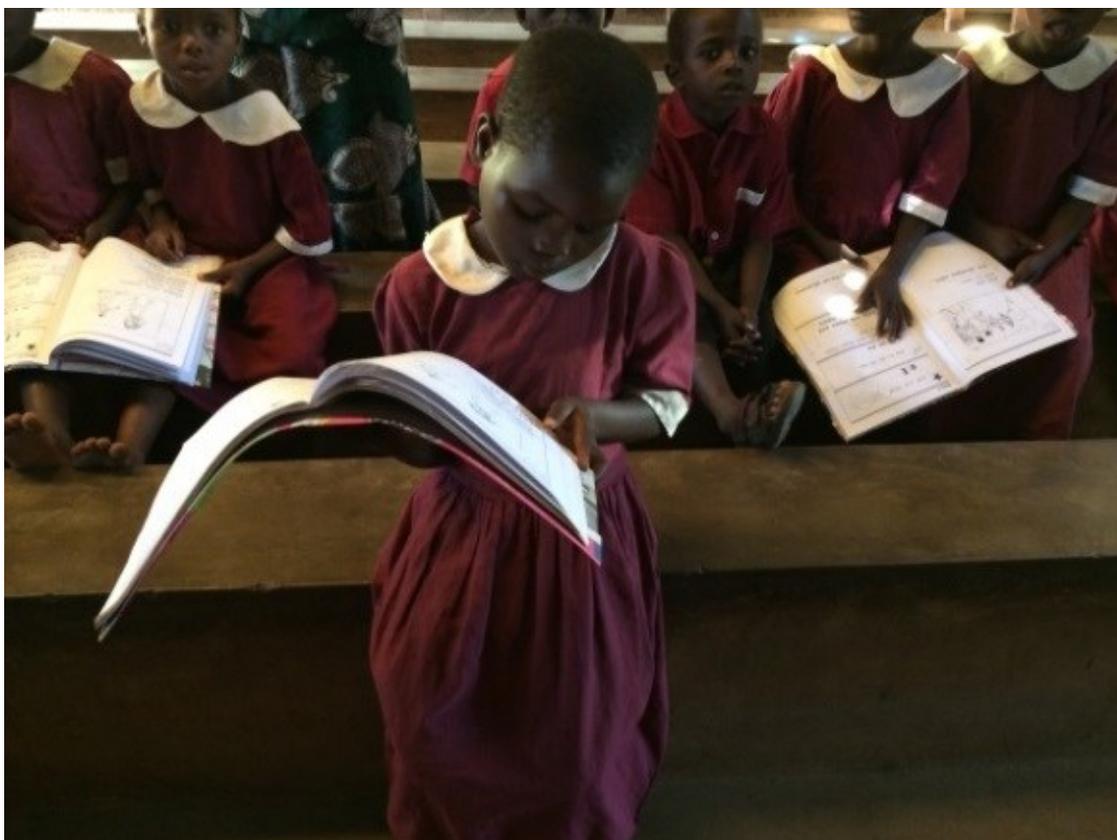
Like many girls in Malawi, 7-year-old Stella Chibonga did not feel safe at school. She hadn't yet mastered the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, and she performed far below grade level. She had trouble keeping up with the curriculum. Her first grade teacher, Melia Swaleyi, said that other children laughed at her because, when she tried to write, she "held her pencil with five fingers as if she was holding a fresh tilapia fish from the Shire River. She could hardly recognize the letters she was trying to write."

Instead of being inspired in the classroom, Stella floundered, often finding reasons to stay at home. Unfortunately and inevitably, the more often she stayed home, the further behind she fell.

Finally, on one of the rare occasions that Stella did go to school, her teacher asked her to stay after

class with some of her fellow students who needed extra help in reading. Using the techniques she had learned through the USAID/Malawi Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA), Swaleyi started to teach Stella letter sounds. In that single afternoon, Stella's experience of school changed from one of bewilderment to one of possibility.

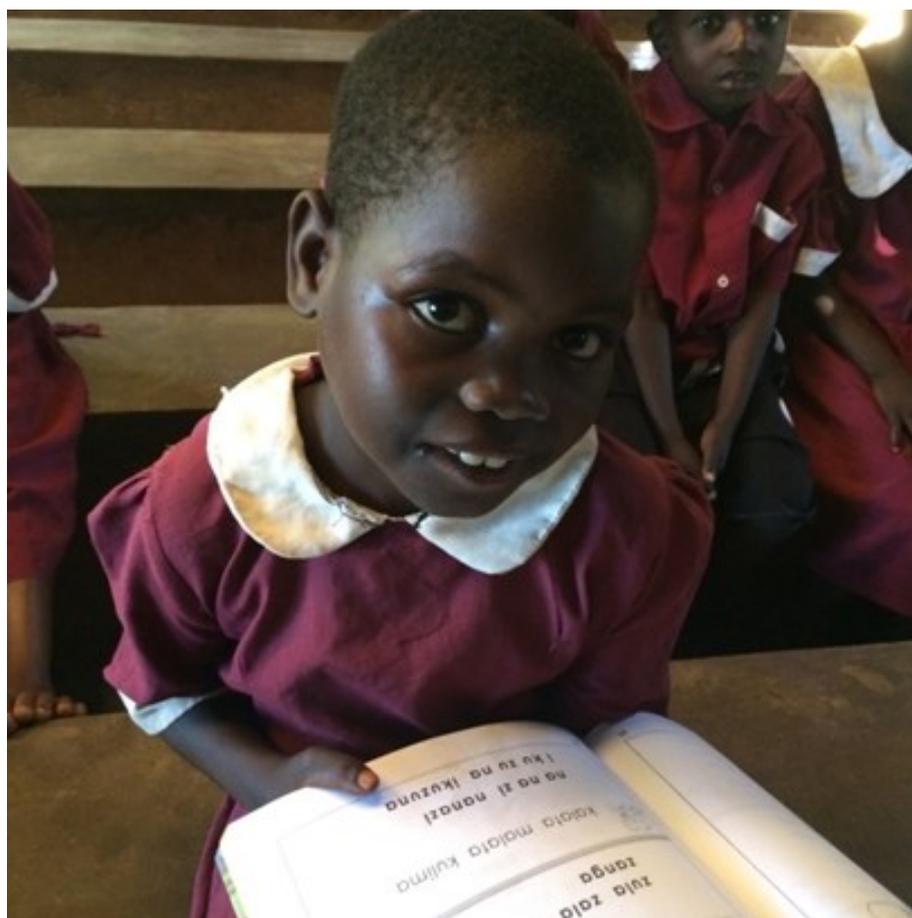
Stella came to school the next day and the day after, staying after class to continue learning the building blocks of reading as prescribed through the teacher training and scripted lesson plans that Swaleyi received through the EGRA. Stella learned how to hold a pencil and how to sound out words. Today, Stella's absenteeism is a thing of the past and she has begun to decode words and comprehend what she is reading. After 12 weeks, she even became a reading group leader in her class.



Stella Chibonga reads out loud in her classroom.

Development Objective 1: Social Development Improved • Children learn to read

“Before the EGRA, our Standard I students were not reading, even at the end of the year. Now there are many students in my class who are reading just like Stella—and we are barely halfway through the school year.”



Swaleyi is grateful to USAID and the EGRA in helping her learn effective methodologies for teaching her students how to read. “Before the EGRA, our Standard I [first grade] students were not reading, even at the end of the year,” she says. “Now there are many students in my class who are reading just like Stella—and we are barely halfway through the school year.”

Stella’s initial dilemma is not an isolated case. In Malawi’s education system, girls are less likely to access or remain in school. And although boys and girls begin school at the same skill level, by the end of primary school, boys achieve 10-points higher on average than girls on the Primary School Leaving Certificate exam, which suggests that girls gradually underachieve in the upper grades.

Ignoring gender inequality has serious consequences: Girls’ education is linked to having fewer children and therefore slower population growth. Education also empowers communities to combat gender-based violence and other forms of discrimination against women and girls. Programs like the EGRA

can help to stem this inequality by keeping girls like Stella in school.

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Communities take action • Partnership • Local solutions • Reading is fundamental

HELPING BABIES BREATHE IN MALAWI

A simple technology is saving newborns from a lack of oxygen, which accounts for 22 percent of neonatal deaths in Malawi.

By Abram Malumbira

Frontlines, May/June 2014



A healthy and happy baby Praise at 8 months.

Photos: SSDI-Services

Praise Maudzu had a difficult entry into the world in 2013. After a prolonged second stage of labor, his mother, Mtisunge Mbewe, finally delivered with the assistance of vacuum extraction—a procedure in which a skilled birth attendant attaches a plastic vacuum to the baby’s scalp to pull him out faster.

But Praise did not cry.

Instead, he lay on his mother’s abdomen, unable to move or breathe. He had asphyxia, a lack of oxygen that can cause permanent damage or even death. Praise’s mother remembers only fear during that moment: “After a difficult birth, my baby did not cry or move. I was very worried, having been told that the baby cries as soon as it is born.”

Helping Babies Breathe (HBB) is one of USAID’s key focus areas to save newborns and contribute to the goal of ending preventable child deaths under the global commitment, A Promise Renewed. HBB is one part of an essential newborn care package designed to significantly reduce neonatal mortality.

Geoffrey Dzuwa is one of only two nurse midwives at Santhe Health Center, serving a population of more than 40,000 in central Malawi’s Kasungu district, where Praise was born. He saved Praise’s life with HBB technology, a simple and easy to implement treatment for newborn asphyxia.

“I quickly and thoroughly dried the baby, then covered him with a dry towel to prevent hypothermia. I cleared the mouth and nostrils with a penguin sucker, rubbed his back gently to stimulate breathing and used an Ambu bag and mask to ventilate him, assessing his progress all along,” said Dzuwa. “The baby started breathing on his own after about five minutes of resuscitation with the Ambu bag and mask.”

The equipment is surprisingly simple: The penguin sucker is a handheld instrument designed to clear the baby’s airways by sucking out fluids in the mouth and nostrils, and an Ambu bag is a manual device that, when squeezed, forces air into a patient’s lungs.

Asphyxia can be caused by prematurity, a prolonged second stage of labor, maternal sedation, or a difficult breech delivery. It is the third major cause of neonatal deaths in Malawi, where the child mortality rate is 71 deaths per 1,000 live births. Neonatal deaths account for a quarter of the under-5 deaths, and asphyxia accounts for 22 percent of the neonatal deaths.

These numbers are sobering but USAID partner Support for Service Delivery Integration (SSDI-Services) gives health workers the tools to fight asphyxia. SSDI procures and distributes equipment like ambu bags and penguin suckers, trains staff and conducts newborn death audits in 15 targeted districts.

The results: from October 2012 to August 2013, the rate of successful resuscitation of asphyxiated babies rose from 33 percent to 93 percent. And in Kasungu district, where HBB is being deployed in all 27 health facilities, health workers have successfully resuscitated 97 percent of the 350 babies born with asphyxia.

“This progress is remarkable. It should be attributed to SSDI-Services’ comprehensive training program and provision of equipment,” says Evelyn Zimba, USAID maternal, neonatal and child health specialist. “The trainings are followed by ongoing coaching, mentoring and supportive supervision to improve health workers’ skills and confidence in their technique.”

Dzuwa could not have saved Praise’s life without these tools.

“After the HBB training, I became confident in handling newborns with birth asphyxia,” he said. “Using these new skills and equipment, I have managed to successfully resuscitate several babies at this facility. I feel very happy when I do this, knowing that those new lives will get their due chance at a long life. Our new skills and tools must be made available across Malawi and the developing world.”

One of those new lives is now a happy and healthy eight-month-old.

“I was very relieved when I heard my baby crying,” Mbewe recalled. “I decided to name him Praise, giving thanks that he was brought back.”



An Ambu bag, left, and a penguin sucker



Geoffrey Dzuwa demonstrates the use of an Ambu bag and a penguin sucker on a NeoNatalie, an inflatable newborn simulator.



Geoffrey Dzuwa demonstrates resuscitation of newborns.

Technology makes a difference • Science saves lives



Jofati Levison shows off his reading skills.

MALAWIAN VILLAGERS JOIN FORCES TO TEACH CHILDREN TO READ

Reading Fairs Exhibit Student Accomplishments

By Kevin Roberts, USAID/Malawi

Transforming Lives, July 2014

In the rural outskirts of Lilongwe, Malawi, a 9-year-old boy named Jofati Levison stands in front of a wall with giant letters written across it. David Kaphikire, a parent from the same village, stands next to him. A crowd gathers as Jofati takes a breath and begins to speak in a loud, clear voice.

Jofati is a student and Kaphikire is a parent in charge of an after-school reading group. They don't have PowerPoint, and they don't have the resources to buy a flip chart. But they do have a tall white wall and a nice big pen. By reading the words off the wall, Jofati demonstrates not only his own reading accomplishments, but the dedication of a community that uses every resource at its disposal to teach its children how to read.

Elsewhere in the village, teachers demonstrate lessons and students read texts, selected at random, to show off their new skills.

"We are so proud of our students for being able to read," declares Billiati Kwachakale, a teacher. "We are demonstrating for others what can be done."

Jofati was participating in a reading fair hosted by Kadyaulendo School in Lilongwe Rural West School District in December 2013. He is just one of the many children who have benefited from USAID's Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA). Parents and teachers have seen significant gains in their children's skills since EGRA started at the beginning of the school year in 2013.

Development Objective 1: Social Development Improved • Children learn to read

“I could not believe my ears and eyes,” said Rebecca Akifodi, a mother with three children attending Kadyaulendo, “My child who just started Standard I [first grade] was reading better than my child in Standard 4.” She added that, “I went to the school and saw that the EGRA was the reason my child was reading ... I wanted to find out how I could help the children who did not have the EGRA to learn how to read.”

With EGRA’s guidance on community mobilization, Akifodi worked with school authorities to form after-school reading groups designed to help children acquire and practice reading skills.

“Children learned to read faster than they ever had before. The whole village was amazed,” said Charity Chadewa, the primary education adviser for the zone where Kadyaulendo School is located. Gesturing to a schoolgirl sitting nearby, she marveled, “Look at Elise Lenadi in Standard I—she can read fluently!”

Working together and without any outside resources, Chadewa, the parents and the teachers

invited the district education manager, teachers from other schools, village heads and community members from other villages, civil servants, parent-teacher associations, school management committees, mother groups and students to witness their children’s success. The reading fair was born.

After seeing children like Jofati at the fair, participants discussed how to ensure that every child attends school and learns to read. Each group made a list of action items related to their children’s learning for which they would assume responsibility. For example, one group decided that parents should be fined one chicken if they do not send their children to school.

“Part of our work plan was to encourage communities to have reading fairs,” said Zikani Kaunda, EGRA’s chief of party, “and we are now seeing schools like Kadyaulendo hosting them on their own. We are confident that this is just the beginning.”

“Children learned to read faster than they ever had before. The whole village was amazed.”



Mr. Kaphikire sharing teaching techniques with the village

The USAID/Malawi Early Grade Reading Activity is a three-year, \$24 million program implemented by RTI International in August 2013. It promotes quality early grade reading instruction, the production of high-quality reading and learning materials in Chichewa and English, improved policy for reading at the national and local levels, and building a community of reading within and outside the school setting. An evaluation is currently under way to measure the impact of this intervention and how household factors and other USAID/Malawi activities affect reading scores in participating schools.

Communities take action • Local solutions • Partnership



Martha, a first grader at Makombe Primary School in Malawi, takes the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to test her ability to read. / Photo: Christie Vilsack, USAID

Martha Learns to Read

Posted by Christie Vilsack on Tuesday, June 17th 2014 , <http://blog.usaid.gov/2014/06/martha-learns-to-read/>

“How will Martha’s life be different because she’s learning to read?” I asked Dr. Mike Nkhoma, a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Specialist in Malawi, as we were leaving the Mikombe Primary school. I had just watched this tiny first grade girl in a pink sweater struggle with the sounds that letters make in Chichewa, her national language.

Mikombe Primary is now funded by Malawi’s Early Grade Reading Activity, a government-backed program supported by USAID to improve reading for over a million Malawian children in 11 districts. This is an important commitment for a country that is the 17th poorest country on earth.

During my visit, I saw thousands of Malawian children in crowded classrooms and under trees. It’s not easy keeping hundreds of children focused and learning while they sit on the dirt or on cement shaping their letters with fingers in the air or with a nub of chalk on the floor. But their teachers have

been energized by recent training in techniques for teaching reading and classroom management. As a veteran teacher myself, I was impressed with the results of teacher training that the program provides during vacation time and on weekends.

Part of the training involves coaching from Primary Education Advisors who observe classes and make concrete recommendations. The advisors might suggest a song to transition between lessons or instruct the teacher in more clearly pronouncing letter sounds unfamiliar to them. Teachers also learn to use impromptu day-to-day assessments that give them real-time feedback on what’s working. Reading instruction is closely tied to the [Early Grade Reading Assessment](#), a test developed by USAID and used in the field globally to provide data to local ministries about learning outcomes.

So the U.S. is making an investment in Malawi—almost \$100 million dollars over five years. But how is this going to change day-to-day life for a girl like

Development Objective I: Social Development Improved • Children learn to read

Martha?

I asked Dr. Nkhoma about this. If Martha learns to read, he explained, she will be a more informed adult. If she goes into farming, which is likely because her village is surrounded by small corn fields, she will be able to learn about better agricultural practices. “If she can’t read, she’ll stick to the old ways of doing things,” says Dr. Nkhoma.

As a farmer, Martha might need credit, inputs, and price information—things that many smallholder farmers need but are unable to access. Women

“This one person sets an example for her daughters and her neighbors.”

Martha is one person. But as Dr. Nkhoma explains, “this one person sets an example for her daughters and her neighbors.

My father was the only person who had schooling in my whole community. He insisted that we had to go to school even if our friends weren’t going...When all the daughters in other families were getting married people laughed at my father for sending my sisters to school. My sisters ignored what people were saying...In the end the outcome of school was a better living. Parents whose children went to



A second-grade girl at Mphanje School in Malawi demonstrates skills learned through USAID’s Early Grade Reading Activity by reading aloud from her school textbook.

Photo: Oris Chimanya, USAID

constitute 70 percent of the agricultural labor force and produce 80 percent of household food but they have poorer access to extension services than men. Reading is the first step in narrowing this gap and preparing girls for productive farming careers.

Martha will probably be a mother someday. Malawi’s population is growing more rapidly than most other developing nations, and 47 percent of children under 5 are stunted. We know that women who know how to read choose to space their children, have fewer of them, and are better able to understand nutritional needs. The result: children of literate women have a better chance of living past five years old.

school are getting support from their children. The others saw this and said to my father, ‘I think you were doing the right thing.’ Then they wanted to send their children and grandchildren to school. It spreads out from one person and changes the community.”

When Dr. Nkhoma’s sisters were Martha’s age, they were the exception. At Martha’s school today, there are as many girls as boys attending through 4th grade. It’s our collective challenge to teach them to read and to keep them in school as long as possible. An investment in early grade reading means there’s hope for Martha and hope for Malawi.



Go Forth and Multiply...Responsibly

Religious Leaders Integrate Family Planning Messages into Sermons

By Phyllis Craun-Selka

It's a hot Saturday morning in Chinsapo, a squatter settlement on the outskirts of Lilongwe, Malawi. Pastor Brian Chafunya looks out over his flock at Nsewa Seventh Day Adventist Church, where over 300 congregants have gathered. He can't help but notice that the lines of stress and fatigue on these familiar faces grow deeper with each passing week.

Rapid population growth has put great strain on the Malawian economy. It has been exacerbated by climate change, which has led to drought, water scarcity, and lowered food production. As a result, many families are moving from rural areas to squatter settlements like Chinsapo in search of better lives and livelihoods. Unfortunately, many of them have arrived only to find overcrowded settlements, few job opportunities, and limited resources.

Pastor Chafunya has watched these changes with alarm. His congregation has grown rapidly, and more and more members are struggling to meet their families' most basic needs. As a pastor, Chafunya feels that he has a responsibility to help his flock make informed decisions about their lives. He has decided to give today's sermon on a controversial topic: family planning.

Chafunya has included messages about the benefits of family planning in his ministry since he was ordained in 1998. However, his sermon this morning is strikingly different. In the past, Chafunya limited his comments to general observations. This morning, he describes specific family planning options and speaks compellingly about the negative impacts of rapid population growth. He urges his flock to bear only as many children as they can realistically care for.

Development Objective 1: Social Development Improved • Communities take action

Chafunya's approach to this topic shifted in August 2013 when USAID, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, and Malawi's six major religious bodies trained 108 Christian and Muslim leaders in the integration of family planning into sermons and religious gatherings.

On the day of Chafunya's sermon, 22 other Seventh Day Adventist pastors spoke to their congregations about family planning. On the previous Friday, the message was heard in mosques across Malawi. And on the following Sunday, other Christians heard the message from their pastors, too. Altogether, they reached nearly 15,000 Malawians with family planning and population messages.

97 percent of Malawians belong to a religious tradition, and religious leaders are trusted members of their communities. By training them how to talk to their communities about family planning, USAID and its partners have empowered Malawians to take control of their reproductive choices and, by extension, their lives and livelihoods.

Since he began using this new approach, Chafunya has already noticed changes in his congregation. "My congregants have started openly discussing available family planning choices, and begun encouraging each other to adopt these choices to ensure they have only as many children as they can ably care for. The time for having children by chance, rather than by choice, is far gone."

"The time for having children by chance, rather than choice, is far gone."

“It’s more than a choice to me. It’s a responsibility.”

Our Choice Together: Kizito with wife, Triza holding their baby at their home



“Just Like Getting Circumcised At Home!”

Young Married Man’s Story of Getting Circumcision Through An Innovative “Door Step” Delivery Approach

By Joel Suzi

Thyolo, Malawi – When the outreach roadshow advertising free male circumcision services arrived in the village of Helimani, Kizito Liyasi was curious enough to attend an information session. A grocer with a wife and baby boy, Kizito was moved by a man’s personal decision to be circumcised as part of a comprehensive strategy to prevent the spread of HIV. He headed home to discuss the free health service with his wife.

Along the way, he met several male friends who dissuaded him from undergoing the procedure, arguing that he didn’t need to be

circumcised because he was married. Kizito’s wife, Triza, saw it differently, sharing with him the health benefits of circumcision that a local nurse had explained to her. A group education session at the nearby Ntambanyama Community-Based Organization provided further information for the 20-something father. Together, he and his wife decided that medical male circumcision was right for their family. “I was convinced I needed to do this,” he says.

Kizito is among the 3,416 men who were circumcised during the three-week long Jhpiego – led Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC) campaign in Thyolo

District that ended April 5. The campaign was implemented under the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program (MCHIP) in collaboration with the Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM), Malawi Ministry of Health (MoH), Thyolo DHO and BRIDGE II Project. Members of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) played a key role in the implementation of the campaign at the community level. Apart from mobilizing and referring clients for VMMC services, they provided their offices to be used for VMMC services. And some members (at Nkusa CBO) prepared food for

Development Objective I: Social Development Improved • Keeping families healthy



Kizito listening attentively during a group education session



Kizito getting HIV test before going to the circumcision surgical procedure

service providers.

Kizito is older than most of the clients who participated in the services held at Thyolo District Hospital, Malamulo Mission Hospital, and Nkusa and Ntambanyama Community Based Organization (CBO) centers. But, as he rightly stated, age shouldn't be a factor in choosing VMMC. "It is not about how old you are; as for me it is about focusing on the high benefits of circumcision. It's never too late for my hygiene and safety. It's just the right time. I can protect

my wife from cervical cancer. It's more than a choice to me. It's a responsibility," says Kizito, who queued up for services with the younger clients and talked with them during the group education sessions.

For Kizito, the convenience of getting the service at the local Ntambanyama CBO, an outreach site near to his home and a place that is not a regular health facility, added to his motivation. "It is like the hospital came to my village. I couldn't ask for more with the

service available for free. I knew I could easily walk a short distance back home after the procedure. In a way, you can say it is like I have been circumcised at home," explains Kizito.

The campaign's innovative and comprehensive approach to circumcision and the input by his wife jointly influenced Kizito. The group education sessions he attended dispelled myths about circumcision he had heard and educated him on VMMC's health benefits. "All my life I had never thought about getting circumcised. What for? It was not part of my culture and religion," says Kizito, adding that stories and hearsay linked circumcision to sexual pleasure and certain cultures and religious sects.

But the conversation with his wife proved most persuasive. To Kizito's surprise, Triza had no reservations. She was happy to encourage him and even shared her knowledge about the benefits of male circumcision:

But the conversation with his wife proved most persuasive. To Kizito's surprise, Triza had no reservations. She was happy to encourage him and even shared her knowledge about the benefits of male circumcision: "During one of my antenatal visits, the nurse at the hospital was teaching us about cervical cancer. She mentioned that male circumcision helps reduce the chance for cervical cancer as well

as penile cancer and, most importantly, HIV...I never told my husband then because I was not sure how he would take it. He might have been angry with me. I was also worried about agreeing to pay around 1500 Kwacha for the service at Malamulo (Hospital) while we are struggling to get other daily necessities in our home. Now that he initiated the issue himself and that the service is being offered freely and near, I encouraged him to go for it for the safety of our family.”

Kizito Liyasi’s successful participation in the VMMC campaign in Thyolo is a testimony to a married man’s motivation in choosing circumcision, family decision-making and a uniquely-organized campaign to deliver services, most significantly, at community-based outreach service points in the catchment areas of the static sites. With most of the villages located far from the hospital-based sites, the community-based outreach sites made it more convenient for most clients and created a local excitement about the campaign. This innovative approach also helped to reduce chances of high client turnover at a single site, which could likely affect quality output of the providers.

The “doorstep delivery” setup to deliver circumcision services through community-based temporary sites proved the clincher for Kizito who

likened it to “getting circumcised at home” – a convenient, innovative and intimate approach that significantly led to the campaign exceeding the initial projected target of 1,500 – and providing comprehensive circumcision services to more than 3,000 males in just 17 days.

This program was funded by the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID’s) Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program (MCHIP), under Cooperative Agreement #GHS-A-00-08-00002-000.



Kizito getting through the circumcision procedure.

Local Community Initiatives Lead to Regeneration of Native Woodlands in Malawi

By Phyllis Craun-Selka

In Nkhamayamaji Village, a village in the border zone of Nyika National Park, a traditional leader persuaded people to stop cutting trees and allow natural regeneration to take place on the hill above the village. When they weren't cut and hacked so frequently, the resilient miombo woodland trees sprouted back from roots and stumps, and now, fifteen years later, the hillside above Nkhamayamaji is a thick young woodland.

Before, when the slope was mostly bare, said the village chairman, water would rush down into the village in the rainy season, carrying sediment, cutting gullies in fields, and sometimes even washing out houses. Now that doesn't happen – the water soaks into the woodland on the hill, and fills up the wells down in the village later. Another reason people were persuaded to protect the woodland above the village, he said, was because of all the wild products they could get from it without having to go into the national park. He mentioned firewood, thatching

grass, poles for building houses and tobacco-drying sheds, mushrooms, wild fruits, and traditional medicines.

Nkhamayamaji Village had started its miombo woodland restoration and conservation through traditional village leadership and grassroots initiative. The USAID Kulera Biodiversity Project has identified these successful models of woodland regeneration in the border zones of the protected areas where it is working, and tried to support and replicate them through strengthening Village Natural Resources Management Committees, exchange visits, promotion of fuel-efficient cooking stoves, conservation agriculture, and tree planting programs. The Kulera Project has been implemented since 2010 by Total Land Care, a Malawi-based non-governmental organization, along with other partners.

A few days later we talked to people in Mphalamando Village, in the Nkhotakota District.



Men of Nkhamayamaji Village with regenerating village woodland above them



Meeting in Mphalamando Village, Nkhotakota District

Development Objective I: Social Development Improved • Communities take action

Their village is less than a kilometer from the boundary of the Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve. In 2008, the village made a decision to allow native woodland



to regenerate on its own customary land, because for years village woman had been caught and arrested for gathering firewood and other non-timber forest products inside the Wildlife Reserve by guards from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife. Finally, after an especially unpleasant encounter, the community decided that in order to protect their women, they would restore an area of native woodland on their own land. With the consent of the chief, help from the Department of Forestry, and the support of the Kulera Project, they have made a part of their village land a designated “Village Forest Area.” Thanks to the resilient miombo biodiversity, it is rapidly becoming a source of wood, mushrooms, wild fruits, traditional medicines, and other products once again. It is also providing ecosystem services, including allowing water to infiltrate the ground during the rainy season, feeding the water

table that is tapped by village wells during the dry season.

It is most often women who gather firewood, cook food, and fetch water. They also gather mushrooms, wild fruits, and traditional medicines. Women’s productive roles in supporting their families put them in direct contact with the ecosystem products and services they use for family subsistence and income. At the same time, women in these villages are key to defending the natural forests from which they



derive these essential livelihood resources. Projects that seek to conserve biodiversity should recognize women as allies and leaders in forest management, and make special efforts to work with them and recognize their important roles.

Near Mulanje Mountain in southeastern Malawi we drove to Nantali Village on a rough dirt track leading toward the mountain. The USAID-funded MOBILISE Project, which stands for “Mountain Biodiversity Increases Livelihood Security,” is being implemented here by the Mulanje Mountain Conservation

Trust (MMCT), along with other partners. The head of the village here was a woman, and her leadership, backed up by that of the headman of the local group of villages, and the even-more-powerful traditional leader, the chief or “traditional authority,” had protected the woodlands in the Forest Reserve above the village since 2008. At that time, a wave of illegal charcoal-making was sweeping into the area from the northeast, threatening to clear the trees above them. They resisted, and chased away the charcoal makers. The old miombo woodland in the Mulanje Mountain Forest Reserve here presents a striking contrast to the clear-cut slopes above a neighboring village whose leaders and members did not resist the illegal charcoal makers.

Leadership at the village level, and the voices of women, are essential to successful woodland conservation in the communities around Malawi’s protected areas.



MALAWIAN FARMERS HELP EACH OTHER DURING DROUGHT

Homegrown food assistance saves those in need

During the 2012-2013 growing season, many farmers in Malawi were affected by extended drought. But the Mtumbwe farmers of Balaka district were thriving, successfully selling their crops to the U.N. World Food Program (WFP), earning profits as never before.

The Mtumbwe farmers are a group of 125 smallholders who receive support from a USAID food assistance program run by a Catholic Relief Services-led consortium.

For many years, these farmers had grown pigeon peas, mostly for their own households. In times of surplus, the extra peas would go to waste because the farmers were unable to sell them, lacking access to a market. During the 2012-2013 lean season, WFP alerted the food assistance program that pigeon peas were needed as part of a relief effort. After the program taught them new farming and marketing methods, the Mtumbwe farmers combined their production and, for the first time, collectively sold 13.8 metric tons of pigeon peas to WFP.



Rhoda Liwani and Frank Zagwa are helping other Malawians in need.

Photo: Sarah Rawson, U.N. World Food Program

“The most exciting thing about the sale to WFP was that we were able to earn a fair market price of 120 kwacha a kilogram. In the past, other buyers would offer only 60 kwacha a kilogram and we would have to accept it because we didn’t know other buyers or the market prices. We had never experienced a buyer who had offered a fair price,” explained Frank Zagwa, the local farming and marketing adviser of the group.

“With better proceeds, I was able to budget for my household spending and expand my farming,” said Rhoda Liwani, a chairwoman of the Mtumwe farmers group. “Previously, when I was selling as an individual, it was hard to find markets and I only earned small amounts of money, which made it difficult to plan for the future.”

“With better proceeds, I was able to budget for my household spending and expand my farming,” said Rhoda Liwani, a chairwoman of the Mtumwe farmers group. “Previously, when I was selling as an individual, it was hard to find markets and I only earned small amounts of money, which made it difficult to plan for the future.”

The sale to WFP motivated Liwani and her group to collectively sell other crops. Over the past year, the group has increased the production volume and collective sales of chilies, groundnuts and cow peas. They hope to sell to WFP in the future and are considering formally linking with WFP’s Purchase for Progress initiative. This will allow them to sell to WFP through a direct contract and participate in bids for smallholder farmers only in addition to making public sales through the Agriculture Commodity Exchange for Africa.

With unprecedented market access through WFP, the Mtumbwe farmers and their families can provide for themselves and are not among those needing food assistance under WFP’s relief response this year. In fact, their entire Traditional Authority, similar to a U.S. township, is not receiving assistance, indicative of the ripple effects improved incomes and market activity have on the wider community.

Farmers like Liwani and Zagwa are now able to help fellow Malawians like Eneti Wilson, a smallholder farmer who cares for her five children and husband in Mchinji district. Her village was hit by prolonged dry spells in the 2012-2013 growing season that

devastated her crops.

“With no rain, my crops dried out, and when harvest time began in April, I had nothing,” said Wilson, 29. “I couldn’t even buy a pail of maize

“Before, we could only have one meal a day. Now I can prepare delicious food for my family three times a day.”

because the money I earned [doing informal agriculture work] was so little.”

With support from USAID, in October 2013, Wilson and her family started receiving WFP food assistance. “Before, we could only have one meal a day. We chose to eat at night in order to have energy in the morning to go work. Now I can prepare delicious food for my family three times a day. We are healthy as you can see,” she said breaking into laughter.

Wilson is also receiving assistance through WFP partner CADECOM. WFP has linked resilience-building activities by CADECOM—such as learning new agricultural development techniques and saving money through village savings and loan groups—to the emergency response to help beneficiaries move off humanitarian assistance in the future.

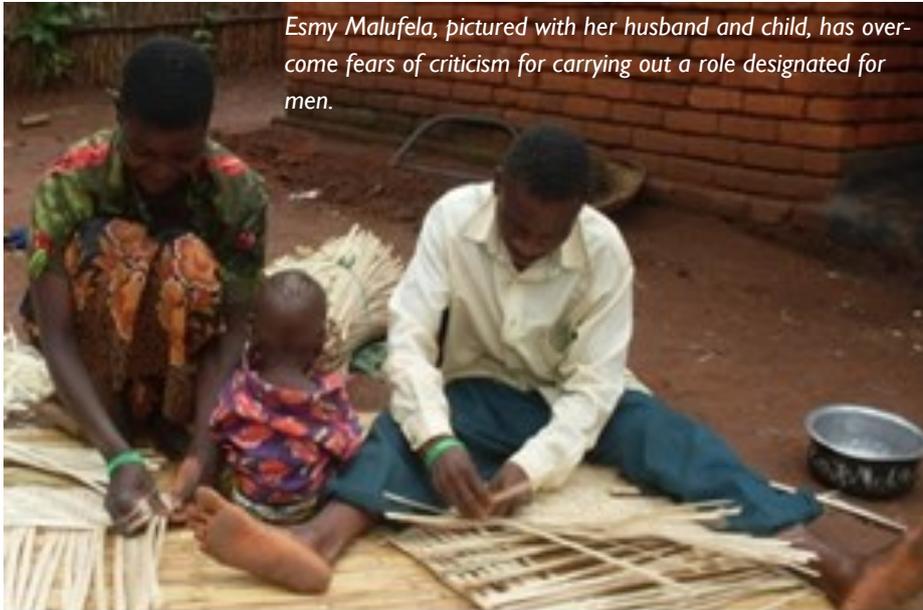
Wilson and her family are part of nearly 1.9 million Malawians WFP and USAID are assisting this year through [these efforts](#).

BASKET WEAVERS BREAK THROUGH GENDER NORMS IN MALAWI

Families discard stereotypes to gain peace and income

By Martin Mtika, USAID/Malawi

Transforming Lives, February 2014



Esmy Malufela, pictured with her husband and child, has overcome fears of criticism for carrying out a role designated for men.

It is rare to find a woman in Malawi weaving baskets, a task considered only for men. Esmy Malufela, who lives in Njoloma village in the Chikumbu Traditional Authority of Mulanje district, is one of those rare women.

Malufela has four children with her husband Duncan. She has been weaving baskets for a number of years without most of her community's knowledge. She picked up weaving by watching her father and enjoyed the peaceful craft. The few villagers who saw her weaving ridiculed her for performing the work of men. Even her husband was not supportive.

The money that Malufela realized from sales of the few baskets that she wove in hiding was not enough to provide even the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and health care for her young family. Her

husband's income from farming was also insufficient, so the Malufelas and their children suffered every year during Malawi's hunger season, from August to March, when maize reserves run out.

Then Malufela attended training in late 2012 on the African Transformation toolkit, a behavior change tool that promotes gender equity, participatory development, and community action. The toolkit, created by USAID implementing partner Johns Hopkins University, envisions a tolerant society where men and women mutually respect each other, are able to critically examine gender norms and inequities, and participate in equitable decision making and resource allocation.

"I used to be afraid of what people might say or think about me when they see me weaving the baskets, but

after the African Transformation training, all fears vanished," said Malufela.

Both women and men who attended the training, including Malufela's husband, clearly grasped that both genders can carry out roles that have been culturally restricted to just one sex. In addition, the community is learning that the economic empowerment of women empowers an entire family.

Funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through USAID, the toolkit helps individuals, families and communities explore and challenge gender norms and social roles, reinforce those that have a positive impact, and change those that affect them negatively. The programs and approaches help show entire communities that gender norms do not have to remain static, but can change to the benefit of all.

Malufela is happy that the training also inspired her husband to help her weave the baskets. "Together we weave more baskets than she could weave alone," says Duncan. "My wife has also inspired other women to venture into the basket weaving business."

Their new combined efforts have yielded many more baskets and increased profits. As a result, the Malufelas built a brick house, bought a bicycle, and can support their children in school.

*Development Objective II: Sustainable Livelihoods Increased • Local Solutions
Increasing incomes • Overcoming social barriers • Innovative ideas*

Chikondi Damiano, now 2 years old, was protected from mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

Photo: Tawanda Shumba, Jhpiego



FOR THE LOVE OF A CHILD: One Woman's Story Emblematic of a Country's Progress

By B. Ryan Phelps, Anteneh Worku and Ritu Singh

Frontlines, May/June 2014

Your Voice, a continuing FrontLines feature, offers personal observations from USAID staff and development voices. B. Ryan Phelps is a D.C.-based medical officer specializing in prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and pediatric HIV for USAID/Washington; Anteneh Worku is the strategic information adviser for USAID/Malawi; and Ritu Singh is the HIV/AIDS team lead for USAID/Malawi.

You have probably never been to the Kwamwankulu Village in Malawi, 20 kilometers south of the capital Lilongwe. Despite Kwamwankulu's anonymity, with its long, red-dirt roads and baobab trees, many, including Milica Damiano, call the village home.

Two years ago, Damiano was five months pregnant and making her first prenatal visit to the Nathenje Health Center, a facility supported by USAID through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR. The baby had a strong heartbeat and was growing well. Damiano, on the other hand, was feeling sick, a condition she attributed to the pregnancy itself.

As part of the health checkup, Damiano received an HIV rapid test and discovered that she was HIV-positive. She quickly began taking antiretrovirals (ARVs)—medicine that prevents the virus from replicating and helps restore the immune system—and was advised to bring her husband, Chasowa, in for testing. He tested positive as well and, over the following four months, they both took ARVs daily. As their strength grew, so did Damiano's waistline.

Damiano is one of the approximately 600,000 women in Malawi who get pregnant every year and seek prenatal

care. Many of these women receive care through USAID's Support for Service Delivery Integration (SSDI)-Services project. Started in 2011, SSDI's goal is to prevent new pediatric HIV infections as well as improve family planning, malaria prevention, nutrition and neonatal resuscitation services for new mothers. The project is a partnership between Jhpiego, Save the Children, CARE and Plan International.

Each day, nearly 1,000 children become newly infected with HIV globally. Under-resourced countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, are especially hard hit, while the number of new HIV infections and related deaths among children in well-resourced settings are near zero. Worldwide, many pregnant women remain unaware of their HIV status, and many that are known to be positive do not receive drugs to prevent transmission of the virus and protect the health of the mother.

When HIV-infected mothers do not receive ARVs, up to four of every 10 babies are infected. When antiretroviral drugs are used to protect the mother and baby, however, HIV transmission can be reduced to less than 5 percent, and maternal mortality can be reduced as these drugs also restore the mother's immune system. As babies are known to die more often when their mothers are sick or deceased, protecting the health of

Development Objective II: Sustainable Livelihoods Increased • Keeping families healthy •

mothers remains critical for all children in the family, regardless of HIV status. Over the past decade, with USAID support, over two dozen countries have made significant progress in rolling out programs to stop new pediatric HIV infections. As a result, the prevalence of HIV infection and the number of new pediatric infections has declined.

In 2011, Malawi's Ministry of Health adapted World Health Organization guidelines in an effort to further minimize new pediatric HIV infections and keep Malawian mothers alive and healthy. With USAID and PEPFAR support, Malawi has significantly scaled up its HIV treatment program and is on its way to achieve an AIDS-free generation. Between October 2012 and September 2013, over 100,000 people were started on lifesaving HIV treatment.

This new strategy, known as "Option B+," offers life-long HIV treatment to all pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV. Malawi's national HIV treatment program, which offers HIV services and drugs free of charge, pursued Option B+ for one primary reason—its simplicity. Option B+ offers an easy-to-understand, one-size-fits-all approach that enables women to initiate and

remain on lifesaving treatment.

Since the beginning of nationwide implementation in July 2011, Option B+ in Malawi has led to a large increase in those receiving treatment, with a nearly eight-fold increase in the number of pregnant women being enrolled in HIV treatment as of September 2012. With these documented successes, Option B+ is now a critical element of a larger national strategy in which Malawi's HIV treatment and antenatal programs are fully integrated and ARVs are administered by nurses at primary care facilities where both HIV-infected and uninfected pregnant women access services.

Today, approximately 60 percent of the 5,000 HIV-positive women in Malawi getting pregnant every month receive ARVs. Facilities like the Nthenje Health Center are able to support HIV testing for over 400,000 Malawians each quarter. Option B+, after showing such promising results in Malawi, has been adopted by WHO and is now being implemented in over 10 countries in and beyond sub-Saharan Africa.

As for Damiano, four months after her first prenatal visit, she returned to the Nthenje Health Center to give birth to her son. Together, they attended regular follow-up visits, with Chasowa when he was able. The baby received both Nevirapine and Bactrim to protect him from becoming infected with HIV and guard against opportunistic infections. Damiano and her husband continue to thrive on ARVs. Their son, named Chikondi, which means "love" in Chichewa, is now 2 years old ... and HIV-free.

Damiano recently shared her story at a Jhpiego anniversary celebration in Malawi. "I am very grateful to the service providers at Nthenje Health Center for having enrolled me into the PMTCT [prevention of mother-to-child transmission] program," she said. "It is through the interventions of the program that my son was born HIV-negative and is still HIV-negative up to now."

Catherine Gotani-Hara, Malawi's minister of health, was also at the event. "I would like to applaud Milica Damiano for coming out in the open to talk about her story," she said. "This story will encourage other women and men who do not have the courage to go and get tested...Milica, you are very, very brave."



Milica Damiano with son, Chikondi, at Jhpiego's 40th anniversary celebration in Lilongwe, Malawi, March 2014

Photo: Frank Mazizi Photography



Sara checks her cell phone for pricing information

Photo: ACDI/VOCA Malawi

SARA GETS THE MESSAGE: Texts Plant Profits for Malawi Farmers

By Vince Langdon-Morris

Frontlines, July/August 2012

At the end of the year in Malawi, the “planting” rains arrive. Families get to work swinging hoes, clearing land, weeding and planting maize, beans, soy and tobacco. By March, if rainfall is sufficient, the parched landscape transforms into an emerald ocean of ripening crops that by mid-year are safely in store. This is when speculative grain traders arrive.

Farmers everywhere need cash to pay loans, school fees, medical bills and other expenses such as agricultural inputs. Traders know this and rural farmers usually succumb, selling their crops well below market value. Later, traders sell these grains in bulk, posting significant profits for themselves.

Challenging this system that leaves farmers with little profit has been difficult without access to widespread, reliable market information and alternative outlets. Modern cellular communications

and widespread cell phone ownership, however, are beginning to provide windows of opportunity across Africa. Texting has exploded in many African countries as an important tool that bypasses lack of traditional infrastructure and links providers of products and services to their customers.

Sara Maunda is one of a growing number of farmers doing just that— taking charge of marketing their own crops and keeping more profit for themselves with the help of market information. With training from USAID/Malawi’s Market Linkages Initiative, she registered to receive regular market information updates on her cell phone from Esoko, a Ghanaian company with a franchise in Malawi. The “E” stands for electronic, and *soko* is Swahili for market.

USAID/Malawi started the project with Esoko in 2011 to equip farmers, who have little bargaining power, with a tool that provides them with current market information, which helps them to receive a

•*Development Objective II: Sustainable Livelihoods Increased* • *Increasing incomes*

fairer price for their crops. Currently, the Market Linkages Initiative uses Esoko to collect prices from markets around Malawi. Local enumerators upload prices onto the system via their cell phones and, after approval, the prices are automatically sent out to registered users via SMS. To date, the service has been provided free of charge by the project. Starting in July 2012, the Agricultural Commodities Exchange for Africa (ACE) will take over Esoko price alerts commercially.

“Maunda trusted both her instincts and the text messages.”

Five Times the Vendor's Offer

So far, the mobile messages have provided farmers information they needed to sell 2,500 metric tons of grain valued at \$750,000—with much more expected from 2012's harvest. Maunda was one of those farmers who reaped the benefits from receiving an Esoko text. Her story illustrates the value that timely information can have.

“In June 2011, a grain trader arrived at my gate offering me 30 kwacha per kilo for my peanuts,” Maunda said. “My SMS from Esoko told me that the price was more than four times the trader's price. When I showed him, he said, ‘These people are lying to you—you will go very far and find that you have lost money.’”

Maunda trusted both her instincts and the text messages. She and four neighbors rented a pick-up truck in Madisi, the nearest town, and headed south to Lilongwe, 80 kilometers away, to sell their

groundnut crop themselves.

“The market price there was five times the vendor's offer. My share of the sale cleared 24,000 kwacha (\$130) after all expenses. If I had sold to the vendor at my village I would have made only 4,500 kwacha (\$27),” she said.

Agriculture is the driver of the Malawian economy, fueled largely by poor smallholder farmers. With the steady decline of tobacco production, the main cash crop and export earner, alternative crops are needed to drive future growth. Like so many countries, Malawi also has to grapple with the challenges of a degrading natural resource base, climate change, a growing population, widespread poverty, undernutrition and disease.

“ACE offers a structured and transparent place where traders big and small can interact and access markets on a more level, fair and open playing field,” says Cybil Sigler, economic growth team leader at USAID's mission in Malawi. In the larger scheme of things, ACE and the Market Linkages Initiative support Malawi's Feed the Future strategy by linking smallholder farmers to markets that will eventually lead to improved quality and higher prices for the produce they sell.

Crop as Collateral

In July 2012, when ACE agents begin collecting market information from 17 markets across Malawi, they will also advertise “warehouse receipts” to farmers and farmer organizations. The new product will allow farmers to deposit their crops into storage and use them as collateral to access financing. Farmers will also take advantage of higher prices for their crops later in the season when the market is not flush from the harvest. As ACE expands and more households begin to use such services, incomes are expected to follow suit.



Perera: We thank USAID for teaching us that good nutrition is important for a pregnant woman. Photo: Oris Chimenya,

Husbands Join Wives in Maternal Care

By Oris Chimenya, USAID/Malawi

March 2014

July Perera did not believe his ears when community trainers told him that it was possible for a man to join his wife at the ante-natal clinic. He was sure that this was a job for women only.

To him, a man going to the hospital with his wife was a myth. Growing up, he never saw men go to the ante-natal clinic with their wives. Therefore, like most husbands in his community, he did not want to take his wife to the clinic.

“I was shy, very shy. I thought there is no need for us men to go to the clinic with our wives. Even my colleagues in this village do not do that,” said Perera. “Another thing is that on nutrition, our parents used to tell us that when a woman is pregnant, she should not take eggs. But we thank USAID for teaching us that eggs are good nutrition and important for a pregnant woman.”

Perera is in his early 50s. He did not finish secondary

school education and has never been introduced to gender issues. Both his mother and father were subsistence farmers. He had hardly heard anything from his parents about gender equality, let alone male involvement in maternal and child health issues.

Therefore, when the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) introduced the Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement (WALA) program in his district, it was perfectly designed for communities like Perera’s.

WALA is built on the idea of integration, linking together activities such as conservation agriculture (zero-tillage farming), irrigation, agribusiness, maternal and child health and nutrition, and disaster risk reduction.

USAID believes that this innovative approach will lead to more sustainable results. The integration of the programs has helped participating households benefit from many interventions. WALA operates in Balaka,

Chikwawa, Chiradzulu, Machinga, Mulanje, Nsanje, Thyolo and Zomba districts. Perera hails from Group Village Headman Nsomo in Traditional Authority Ngabu's area in Chikwawa, a 90-minute drive south of Blantyre. He is one of the 215,000 people who have benefitted from the WALA program.

The change that USAID's WALA program has brought to Perera and his fellow villagers is vast and enduring. The communities are now more food secure, have income from microcredit schemes, have seen fewer diseases due to adoption of good sanitation practices, and are better prepared to face unexpected disasters.

Perera speaks with vigor about how he took care of his wife when she was pregnant, owing to what he learned through the maternal and child health activities.

"At first I was very shy... But now I escort my wife to the clinic. I am getting used to that, and the attendants at the clinic receive us very well," Perera said with pride.

He is the only male care group volunteer in the entire traditional authority, devoting part of his time to talking to fathers and mothers about maternal and child health and nutrition. Perera said he does not face any challenges in serving as a male care group volunteer and keeps encouraging other men to join him.

Perera is no longer reluctant to speak about the way his life has improved as a result of the USAID-funded program. It is evident that with the change in his mindset, he is ready to influence men in his community to participate as well, thereby multiplying the benefits of the program.

"Because of WALA, we now know how to manage our watershed area. We work together to protect our fields against running water by constructing dams. We make

sure that every family is involved in the process," Perera said.

Perera does not only take part in the Maternal and Child Health program activities. He also participates in the Village Savings and Loans (VSL), a community micro-credit scheme, in which members save money and give loans to each other from the savings. The VSLs make profits through interest charged on loans. Members use loans for daily home use, paying school fees for their children, and buying farm inputs such as subsidized fertilizer.

Group Village Headman Nsomo has 85 VSL groups, with a total membership of 1,870 people (1,402 women and 468 men). The value of the members' cumulative savings is over MK 2 million (about U.S. \$4,800), while the amount given out to VSL members in the form of loans is MK 2,971,344 (over U.S. \$7,000).

WALA has helped increase the food security of households through increasing adoption of drought resilient farming practices. Some participants now have reliable access to food year-round.

Households participating in the project have increased adoption of drought resilient farming practices and improved asset management through savings and loans. Households in non-project areas continue to resort to negative coping strategies such as selling some of their household property in order to buy food.

The USAID-funded WALA project is coming to an end in July 2014, after running for five years. The good news is that the beneficiaries have been empowered to shine beyond the lifespan of WALA. After all, in local vernacular, *wala* means "shine" – and all of the participants are shining with USAID.



COLLECTIVE SAVING: Over 100,000 households now participate in and benefit from VSL.



LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION: Over 7,000 farmers are now in livestock production to improve their lives.

Improving nutrition • Integration • Men's and women's reproductive health

BEEKEEPERS IN MALAWI PRESERVE THE ENVIRONMENT, EARN INCOME

Protecting natural resources pays off in more ways than one

By Catherine Kazmirski, USAID/Malawi

Transforming Lives, July 2014

On the edge of the Zomba plateau in southern Malawi, just as the land begins to slope up into an imposing peak, is a pretty patch of land covered with indigenous forests. Past the grass and into the trees there are signs of a careful intervention: a small irrigation canal and a meticulously kept stone wall. A few hundred bees are buzzing.

Lucius Simon is a beekeeper and irrigation farmer in the Lingoni watershed who is enthusiastic about his bees. “The number of hives are growing and providing income for me and my village,” he says. “More and more people are watching the bees now.”

When USAID’s Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement project was introduced in the area in 2012, before any bees lived in the forest reserve, Simon began working with the project on ways to preserve Malawi’s natural resources while generating income. That’s when he saw an opportunity.

“I built one beehive and put wax in it to attract the bees. The bees came. Now people cannot set the forest on fire or cut down the trees because we all benefit from assets in the forest,” says Simon.

He sells half a liter of his honey for 1,500 Malawian kwacha, or about \$3.75. At harvest, which happens three times a year, each hive produces 15 liters of honey. That means an additional income of about \$113 per year in a country where the average annual income is \$270.

Malawians traditionally rely heavily on charcoal as a source of fuel. Indiscriminate burning of trees to make charcoal has devastated the indigenous forests and decreased the soil quality in neighboring farmland. Unfortunately, cutting back on charcoal

use often means depriving families of their livelihoods.

The USAID Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement project, which began in 2009 and ends in July 2014, was designed to address situations like these throughout Malawi. Instead of focusing solely on one sector, an activity in one community includes interventions in multiple areas: health and nutrition, economic growth, and agriculture and environment. In the Lingoni watershed, the activity needed to provide an alternate source of income, promote sustainable and productive agricultural practices, and preserve natural resources. It’s a tall order, but Simon’s beehives are proof that it can be done.

Over the past three years, the number of beekeepers in this watershed has grown to 11 men and one woman, all irrigation farmers and participants in one of the project’s Village Savings and Loans groups. The self-selected group of about 20 community members is a kind of mini-bank.

Group members agree on an interest rate at the beginning of the year and can take out loans as they need. At the end of the year, the group divides the profits that the interest has generated between its members. So when it’s time to add a new beehive, which costs 5,000 Malawian kwacha, or about \$12, Simon takes out a loan, buys the needed supplies, and then pays the Village Savings and Loans group back with interest. The group plans to continue buying hives via loans until each beekeeper has his or her own. They’re almost there: The group started with six hives. They now have 11.

The USAID project’s integrated approach has given Simon a new career, more abundant crops and a good return on investment. The forests are preserved and, it seems, the bees are happy, too.

Development Objective II: Sustainable Livelihoods Increased • Increasing incomes

Lucius Simon shows off one of his beehives in the Lingoni watershed.

Photo: Catherine Kazmirski



“Now people cannot set the forest on fire or cut down the trees because we all benefit from assets in the forest.”

Coordination Counts: Fostering Mobile Money in Malawi

A blog by Chris Chibwana, Private Sector Specialist, USAID/Malawi on Tuesday, September 24th 2013

One year ago, USAID joined the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Citi, Ford Foundation, Omidyar Network, United Nations Capital Development Fund and Visa Inc. to launch the Better Than Cash Alliance.

This summer, the Government of Malawi joined those organizations in their work to lift millions out of poverty through electronic payments. Citing opportunities for transparency and reduced costs, the Government will begin by shifting \$3 million of its existing payment streams away from cash. That may sound modest, but it's a truly dramatic shift for Malawi.

Just a few days ago on September 13, Malawi Budget Director Paul Mphwiyo was shot because of his leadership to fight graft in the public sector by replacing cash payments with electronic, and thus transparent, payment methods. It is a sobering but incredibly important reminder of just how much this work matters.

When I first learned about mobile money, many people were working on it in Malawi but no one was doing it well. The mobile network operators, banks, government, and donors were focused on their own incentives rather than supporting the ecosystem in a coordinated way that would accelerate the creation of products Malawians could use. But to me coordination was critically important because I believe mobile money can have significant impact on the people we target in our programs in agriculture, education, health, and governance.

In Malawi, roads don't reach many areas and are often in rough shape. Poor access to electricity and low incomes make brick-and-mortar banking too expensive to deliver to rural areas. However in just

10 years, more than half of Malawi has obtained access to a mobile network. In this expansion, we saw an opportunity for reaching financially excluded groups. But Malawi isn't a country where we could immediately start using mobile money. So what did we do?

We started simple. We started with a demand assessment. This helped us understand the local champions, people's needs, and how USAID could help bring mobile money to scale.

Our stakeholders were interested in mobile money, but they were fragmented, and no one could do it on their own. So we created a working group of mobile network operators, banks, the government, and donors. The working group allowed us to hear and understand each other. Through the group, we are solving common challenges and compromising where incentives conflict. For example, mobile network operator Airtel used this foundation to launch its mobile money platform in 2012 with its competitor TNM following in 2013.



A customer checks the details of a text message received after transferring funds via mobile money.

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Though we are a small country, and maybe because we are a small country, we have made great progress since we started. We've learned a lot, and I want to share a few of these lessons. I hope they will help any champion in any country or organization to think about supporting mobile money in your country.

- **Plan for sustainability:** We don't want the working group to depend on donor funding or leadership, so we've institutionalized it as a subcommittee under the National Payments Council to encourage local ownership. By doing so, we are convinced it will continue to exist beyond USAID's involvement.
- **Maximize coordination:** USAID's ability to convene different partners taps into one of its unique strengths. For example, the World Bank is working on an access to finance project and targeting financial regulations. With the working group, USAID has also helped them understand the regulatory challenges with mobile money, and they're taking on policy work that

they're best positioned to do.

- **Prove your case:** Mobile money is still a young technology. Many people haven't used it and don't see its value, so USAID is helping organizations transition from cash to electronic payments. When they see increases in accountability and find cost and time savings, we gain adopters that help us get to scale.

So, what's next? This technology could be expanded to help government fulfill its obligations to pay civil servants in a timely manner by giving it a simple vehicle for payroll transaction; it could help public utilities increase the proportion of customers who pay their bills on time; and it can provide a mechanism for simplifying the management and operation of social cash transfer programs. Most importantly, though, it can provide the means for millions of poor Malawians to participate more fully in the economic life of the country. Sometimes, revolutions start small.

Sometimes, revolutions start small.



BETTER TREATMENT: Children such as this one in Rumphi are now getting better treatment because there are drugs for most illnesses, such as pneumonia, which threatens their lives. Photos: Oris Chimenya

Hospitals, Health Centres Now Have Enough Drugs

By Oris Chimenya USAID/Malawi

A recent media field trip to assess the impact of the Emergency Drug Program (EDP) reveals that hospitals in the Northern Region of Malawi have adequate drugs, making them well positioned to effectively serve more patients.

I was privileged to be part of a team of journalists from both public and private media houses who recently visited three district hospitals and about five health centers to find evidence of the impact of the EDP.

The Governments of the United Kingdom, Norway, and Germany have given the Government of Malawi a grant of US\$ 33 million for the procurement of essential medicines and supplies to complement procurements undertaken by the Central Medical Stores Trust (CMST) until June this year.

The medical kits are being procured by UNICEF and distributed to Government and CHAM health facilities by USAID through John Snow International (JSI) DELIVER Project.

Patients and members of the community are noticing the difference in terms of the treatment they used to receive before the program started and the one they are receiving now with the program in gear.

Officials at one of the health centres in Karonga, Kaporo Health Centre, said the drug shortage hit the facility hard especially in October, November and December 2011 prior to the beginning of the program.

He said initially, the facility would just refer patients to Karonga District Hospital about 20 kilometers away although they even knew there were no drugs even at the district referral hospital.

“We sent other patients home because we could not even afford malaria drugs. We thank the development partners for assisting us with these drugs,” said Charles Mhone, a medical assistant in charge of the health centre.

Development Objective II: Sustainable Livelihoods Increased

A medical officer at Lura Health Centre in Rumphu, Emmanuel Chasesa, said most people in his area used to depending on traditional medicine, but now that they know there are drugs, they are coming to get modern medical care.

In almost all of the district hospitals the media team travelled to, doctors, pharmacy technicians and patients bore witness to how the drugs program has assisted the people.

Another medical practitioner, complained when he heard the news that the program was phasing out in June this year.

“We ask the donors to extend the cut-off point. We are not sure the CMST will be fully capitalized and in a position to serve the nation by June this year,” noted a senior medical assistant, Zox

Kamanga from Chintechche Rural Hospital in Nkhata Bay district.

The EDP drugs program is being provided in response to a request from the Government of Malawi for support to address widespread shortages of essential drugs in health centers and to ensure that the downward trend in morbidity and mortality among children and pregnant women is maintained.

The project is also intended to prevent the health gains Malawi has made in recent years from being undermined by the unavailability of essential medicines and supplies in its primary health care facilities.

As we went to press, the CMST was still finalizing the construction of its major warehouse to be used for drug storage.

A Pharmacy Technician displays a Paracetamol container during the media field visit. Patients are no longer sent back home.

Photo: Oris Chimenya



Improving Seed Supply to Boost Nutrition and Incomes in Malawi

By Phyllis Craun-Selka, April 25, 2013

<http://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/improving-seed-supply-boost-nutrition-and-incomes-malawi>

In Malawi, undernutrition is a serious problem and a major contributor to the country's other poor health statistics, including rates of maternal mortality, infant mortality, and stunting and anemia in children.

One of the barriers to good nutrition starts before any crops can be grown or harvested.

High-quality seeds that farmers can use to grow enough healthy, nutritious crops are in short supply year after year, leaving farm associations, unions and extension agents without the inputs they need to help ensure a good harvest.

A Feed the Future project focused on integrating nutrition into local value chains has partnered with the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) to help address this problem by developing a new and higher-performing soybean variety called "Tikolore," which means "let us harvest" in the local language. Soybean plants grown from Tikolore seeds mature more quickly, yield more beans, are resistant to a disease known as "soybean rust" and can be stored for longer periods of time compared to other soybean varieties. Since soybeans are high in protein and other nutrients, improving the performance and availability of soybean crops is one

step toward fighting stunting among children under five years of age in Malawi.

Since Tikolore was officially released in Malawi in 2011, Feed the Future has been working to get the new seed variety into the hands of more farmers and their families. In partnership with the Clinton Development Initiative, Feed the Future and IITA supported the multiplication of Tikolore soybeans at Mpherero Anchor Farm, an experimental farm near the Zambian border.

Once harvested, these seeds will establish the foundation for a new Soybean Seed Revolving Fund, aimed at improving seed availability in Malawi. The fund will enable farmers to store improved seed supplies and sell them when prices are advantageous, rather than having to sell or dispose of them immediately after harvest when prices are low. This arrangement will both boost farmer incomes and help disseminate the superior soybean variety in Malawi so that it can be sold and consumed more widely.

The revolving fund was recently launched at Mpherero Anchor Farm during a field visit attended by stakeholders from all across Malawi's soybean value chain. Smallholder seed producers, private



Development Objective II: Sustainable Livelihoods Increased • Increasing Incomes

Demand for soybeans in Malawi is rising fast



Photo: Phyllis Craun-Selka, USAID/Malawi

seed companies, farmer organizations, agricultural extension officers and development practitioners all gathered to learn about the properties and best practices for growing Tikolore from the farm managers, who are producing the basic seeds, and IITA, which bred the original variety. By connecting smallholder farmers with the private sector seed companies who have the capacity to produce certified Tikolore seeds at scale, Feed the Future expects to see this improved variety reach farmers across Malawi within the next six months to a year. Demand for soybeans in Malawi is rising fast, and the current crop of basic Tikolore seed is expected

to add at least 32,000 tons of soybean grains to the market in the coming seasons. This supply increase will not only improve availability of soybeans for private sector manufacturers, but also ease the demand for imported soybeans once Malawians are able to more easily grow and purchase this nutritious crop domestically.



“Sharing Out” to Move Out of Poverty in Malawi

Savings and loan groups allow villagers to grow income and businesses while feeding families.

By Jessica Hartl

The mood was high as three village savings and loan (VSL) groups gathered in Zaloengera village, Malawi, for their end-of-year “share out,” the time of year each individual receives their earnings as a VSL shareholder. Group members were excited to be receiving their money—with interest.

Only three years ago, many of the VSL participants couldn’t dream of saving a few Kwacha, the official currency of Malawi, much less starting their own small business or expanding their crop production enough to sell to major buyers.

In 2009, that all changed when USAID/Malawi designed a development food assistance program implemented by a consortium led by Catholic Relief Services (CRS). The program tackles food insecurity through a

variety of interventions, including VSLs, by challenging the notion that the poorest individuals can’t help themselves out of hunger and poverty. In a country where over 60 percent of the population lives on less than \$1.25 a day and is affected by recurrent natural disasters as well as poor harvests, this was hard to imagine.

While not new to the international development community, the idea of a VSL group, and particularly the concept of saving, was foreign to

the communities where CRS and its partners were working. Families in these villages typically had barely enough to scrape by, and often felt obligated to give any savings to a relative or neighbor in need. In addition, those families able to borrow from money lenders had to do so at interest rates as high as 50 percent in some cases.

Many communities were skeptical of the VSL at first. How could they save money when they hardly had any to begin with?

The VSL caters to those who don’t have many resources. By putting in a small amount, even pennies, weekly or biweekly into the group’s savings box, the accumulated savings and interest over the course of a year adds up.

“Often in rural villages in Malawi, community members feel they must give any extra savings to a relative or neighbor in need to help pay for



Lines Katchile celebrates her sharing out.

How VSLs Work

In the VSL model, clusters of 15 to 20 marginalized women and men form themselves into groups and make regular saving deposits into a communal village bank, with no external resources or capital provided. The collective money is loaned out to VSL members on an individual basis, allowing participants to use the lump sums as capital to invest in small business enterprises, buy seeds or purchase food and other household needs. The loans are then paid back to the group at an agreed upon interest rate, thereby allowing members to earn interest on their savings. VSLs are just one intervention among many in this CRS program, with an aim to address food insecurity holistically, not just with food.

Development Objective II: Sustainable Livelihoods Increased



a funeral, for school fees, etcetera. The VSL program provides our beneficiaries with a socially acceptable venue through which to save money that cannot be easily accessed when a relative or neighbor comes by to borrow money,” said Bahati Kalera with Project Concern International, a consortium partner.

funeral, for school fees, etc. The VSL program provides our beneficiaries with a socially acceptable venue through which to save money that cannot be easily accessed when a relative or neighbor comes by to borrow money,” said Bahati Kalera with Project Concern International, a consortium partner.

In 2013, the 51 members of three VSL groups in Zaloengera village managed to save 1.1 million Kwacha, about \$2,650, for an average of \$52 per person. For families who had never saved before, this helped them move beyond living day to day, and begin to invest in their futures.

Lines Katchile, 31, is now taking control of her family’s future through a VSL group. Katchile, who lives in Jumbe village, is married with five children. She had no savings prior to joining her VSL group, and was considered to be one of the poorest in her community. Her farmer husband owns a small fish-selling business, but even his income combined with hers from casual labor was not enough to consistently feed the family and provide a steady source of income.

In 2012, Katchile took some of her family’s limited earnings and invested it in a VSL group after hearing from others of its benefits. During her first six months in the VSL group, she saved about 25,000 Kwacha, or \$60. These initial earnings were enough to buy iron

sheets to roof her house and a few other household items. During 2013, she saved 75,000 Kwacha, or \$180. How did she do it?

As a contributing member to her VSL, Katchile received two loans over the last year and a half. Her first loan covered the cost of two goats for a new breeding business. Her second loan enabled her to purchase two more goats. After breeding resulted in two kids, Katchile has enough goats to keep at least one pair for breeding and sell the others for income.

“One of the most important things I gained is time management, because I do not have to do casual labor,” said Katchile. In fact, her VSL savings allowed her to develop three new sources of income: a small sugar cane business, a small liquor brewing business, and her goat breeding business. She believes the businesses will provide her a steady income as she continues to grow them, allowing her to better provide for her family.

VSL groups have taken off in Malawi as they help people build a better life for themselves and their families. While the consortium initially designed the VSL groups only for USAID program beneficiaries, in 2011, it began allowing non-beneficiaries in the communities to join. Today, as much as 15 percent of VSL members are estimated to be not directly affiliated with the program.

Across all VSL groups started by consortium partners, members have saved a cumulative total of \$1.6 million since 2010, growing from the initial 696 groups to 7,400 groups today. That’s more than 92,710 Malawians—65,470 women and 27,240 men—saving on a regular basis. Katchile is just one of the many vulnerable women the VSLs have empowered to better provide food and care to their families.

As a VSL group becomes more closely knit, each of its members grows more invested in its growth and success, meaning they then can help each other to ensure every loan repayment is made. CRS and its partners are also working to ensure these groups will continue past June 2014 when their program closes. Members are encouraged to take advantage of the group economies of scale to expand their individual income-generating activities.

Better Access to Credit In Malawi

Published on 22 July 2014 <http://www.wfp.org/countries/malawi/stories/better-access-to-credit-in-malawi>

WFP requires tens of thousands of metric tonnes of food each year to run food assistance programmes in Malawi. Where possible, commodities are purchased locally through the [Purchase for Progress \(P4P\)](#) initiative – benefitting Malawian farmers, bolstering the national economy and promoting the development of structured market demand.

In [partnership with the Agricultural Commodity Exchange for Africa \(ACE\)](#), WFP uses what is known as the Warehouse Receipt System as one way to facilitate market access for smallholders.

This is how it works: farmers deposit maize in WFP-certificated warehouses where it is stored, cleaned, graded and protected against pests. In return, the supplier obtains a receipt, which can be used at any time to reclaim the commodities or to act as collateral to obtain a bank loan. These receipts mean that farmers can put money in their pockets immediately after the harvest, while their commodities remain in a warehouse for safekeeping until market prices go up.

“To me, the most interesting part of system is the access to credit and the ability to sell to big buyers like WFP,” says Alice Kachere of Lilongwe district, a smallholder who made a sale to WFP this year thanks to the WRS.

By the end of August 2013, Alice had deposited her surplus bags of maize, plus additional maize she had bought from local vendors, into a nearby WRS-certified warehouse. Her total deposit climbed to 65 metric tonnes of maize, earning her a receipt worth MWK6.7 million (approx. US\$ 17,000).

“I felt very proud,” says Alice who was able to access a loan for the first time in her life. “I put the money towards aggregating more maize and preparing my own small farming business.”

Alice says that, for women in Malawi, it is difficult to access credit as they rarely have the required collateral such as a title deed – either this does not exist or it is in the name of a man.

The access to credit and to markets provided by WRS is particularly significant for women, who comprise 42% of P4P farmers in Malawi. Women often face higher barriers to engage the formal agricultural market due to a ‘gender gap’ in agricultural production, resulting in women having less access to and control over productive resources than men.

In early 2014, using a cash [contribution from USAID](#), WFP purchased all of Alice’s maize from the warehouse receipt system for distribution as part of its 2013/14 seasonal relief operation in Malawi. Alice was therefore also able to help less fortunate Malawians who were facing hunger in areas of food shortage while she herself remained debt-free.



Alice (centre left) with neighbourhood women helping her bag maize from her recent harvest. Photo: WFP/Sarah Rawson



A Tasankha discussion group session at Likwenu, T/A Mkula in Machinga district

COMMUNITIES FIGHT HIV AND AIDS IN MALAWI

Couples fight disease with communication.

By Grace Nachiola, U.S. State Department

Effective couple communication is essential for a healthy family and a cheerful community. Lack of open communication, particularly around issues of sexuality, is a key reason men and women look outside the home for other partners, increasing their risk of contracting HIV and passing it to their partner.

Christopher and Ndazona Kachingwe of Ng'ombe in Machinga used to experience problems in their family. When USAID's Bridge II project was introduced in the area in 2009, they both started attending the Bridge II Village Discussion group sessions on sexual networks called "Tasankha". Through the discussions, the couple was introduced to marriage counselling which encouraged them to go for HIV testing.

"Faith-based marriage counselling under Bridge II encouraged me to go for HIV testing. People from my community discouraged us from going for marriage counselling. They argued that there was nothing new we could learn," said Ndazona. USAID's Bridge II is a five-year project implemented in 11 districts, running from 2009 - 2014. Funded by the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through USAID, it is designed to promote

normative behavior change and increase HIV preventative behavior among the adult population in Malawi.

In the last year alone, almost 60,000 people accessed HIV testing and counselling (HTC), condoms, family planning, and voluntary medical male circumcision. Moreover, 3,500 men and nearly 7,500 women received HTC during Open Days sessions, during which local clinics were open to the public specifically for this purpose. At the beginning of the project, 1,397 men and couples reported accessing health services. Today, the number is an astounding 25,770.

Bridge II worked with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to strengthen their overall capacity to plan and implement comprehensive prevention programs. At the district level, Bridge II helped build capacity of District AIDS Coordinating Committees to design and coordinate community mobilization strategies. At the national level, government, NGOs, and private sector partners attended educational workshops and working groups, and helped develop national awareness campaigns, interactive radio programs, and quality toolkits.

Development Objective II: Sustainable Livelihoods Increased

The activities were far-reaching but locally-based. Bridge II provided counseling for couples, linked people to hospitals, and engaged people living with HIV (PLHIV) through radio campaigns and open discussions. The result: couples like Christopher and Ndazona are happy and healthy.

Over the past five years, support groups for people living with HIV and AIDS in Malawi have remained an important avenue through which people discuss and develop strategies for coping with effects of the disease on their families and communities. Bridge II took advantage of the rising visibility and popularity of support groups by partnering with the National Association of People Living with HIV and AIDS in Malawi (NAPHAM) to implement transformative activities with PLHIV. NAPHAM support groups were introduced to a number of Bridge II transformative tools: the Planting Our Tree of Hope toolkit, the Tasankha Discussion Guide and the Journey of Hope toolkit. Pertinent issues affecting PLHIV are addressed in these guides. This information is life-saving: people discovered that there is life after being diagnosed with HIV.

Alice, a business woman in Mbalame Village T/A Mpama, Chiradzulu district, is one person who initially lost hope after receiving a HIV positive diagnosis. After attending various activities under the USAID-

Bridge II project, Alice has turned into an entrepreneur—and a happy person.

“When I was diagnosed with HIV, I was helpless. I stopped doing any meaningful activities in my life. I even stopped sending my children to school because I thought their education will no longer benefit me in any way. I thought I would die. But through the Journey of Hope toolkit, I realized there is hope for the future. I joined a village saving group where I managed to raise money to start my own business through which I have built two houses. I now send my children to school and we are all happy,” said Alice.

Bridge II has changed ed people’s behaviors and norms for the better. Their communities are better places to live. Issues of discrimination and stigma are a thing of the past. Mary of Mtenje village, T/A Machinjiri in Blantyre rural speaks for her community—and many others—when she says: “I used to bad mouth and pass judgment on people who were HIV positive based on their appearance until I learned about HIV and AIDS. Now I am no longer discriminatory against anyone and I understand that an HIV test is the only way a person can know their status.”

“When I was diagnosed with HIV, I was helpless....I thought I would die. But through the Journey of Hope toolkit, I realized there is hope for the future.”



The people of Mbeluwa are proud of their joint efforts to increase their nutrition and food security.

IN DROUGHT-PRONE MALAWI, SHINING LIGHTS OF HOPE

Nearly 200,000 people in the country's arid south are learning how to make the best use of tough terrain and restore their communities.

By Phyllis Craun-Selka, USAID/Malawi

Frontlines, January/February 2013

By November 2012, it is well into the long hunger season in Malawi—and it's getting longer every year. During the seven months from August to March, most farmers have already eaten or been forced to sell what few crops they were able to eke out from parched land. They usually sell at such low prices that they have no choice but to also sell off family assets to buy food, and still worry about how to pay for other necessities like school fees. Prices inch up and people take desperate measures to stay alive. Emergency food aid is needed nearly every year.

Malawi is somewhat smaller than the state of Pennsylvania and yet its land area supports 14 million people. Unfortunately, this southern African country has been largely deforested due to copious amounts of wood needed for firing the burnt bricks used in almost every building's construction, for charcoal used in each meal's cooking fires, and in clearing the land for farming.

Global climate change has complicated the problem. Much of southern Malawi can no longer count on traditional rain cycles. Some districts, such as Machinga in the Southern Region, live under rain shadows—areas on the leeward side of the mountains where winds push the dry heat upward and force promising rain clouds away from crops, extending drought season after season.

In a country where more than half the population lives below the poverty line, the Southern Region has the highest percentage of poor households. Malawians are mainly farmers, and with 85 percent of the population depending upon rain-fed agriculture, these recurring seasons of drought make it harder for people to feed their families—nearly one-quarter of Malawians don't meet their daily food needs.

In light of these realities, it would be easy to see the situation as hopeless. But in eight southern districts, approximately 200,000 people, or six percent of those living there, are learning new ways of managing their livelihoods and changing their agricultural practices. They are leading others to follow their examples to restore their drought-stricken communities, with help from USAID.

USAID/Malawi's \$81 million, five-year food assistance program, Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement (WALA), "provides little in the way of inputs besides treadle pumps and a few other tools, but a lot in terms of techniques shared with farmers," says USAID Food for Peace Officer Emmanuel Ngulube.

The small foot-powered pumps pull water from nearby rivers and streams to irrigate the land. Even more important than tools and techniques, is the message of

the program. "WALA does not just stand for Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement, but in Chichewa it means light; it stands for showing the way," Ngulube said. "The program is aimed at showing people the light so they can exercise their own stewardship of the land, and renew their confidence and resourcefulness to deal with drought as it affects all aspects of daily life."

Using the lessons from USAID conservation experts, rural communities learn to dig trenches that catch rain so that it seeps into the ground. They also plant indigenous trees that hold water in the soil. "We have flowing water in the stream longer into the dry season than we used to," Julia Nachisale told visitors in Chikwawa as she washed her family's laundry.

Motorizing, Diversifying and Scaring Away Hippos

After a failed rain-fed maize season, several communities bordering the Shire River that runs south from Lake Malawi are clamoring for more treadle pumps as they watch the

river's water flow to their young crops. One resourceful woman in Balaka, Ezelyn Kazamira, even figured out how to motorize her irrigation pump using her dividend from the USAID-sponsored Village Savings and Loan program, where members come together to pool their income each month and take turns borrowing against the lump sum.

Kazamira purchased a motorized pump to continuously pull water up and irrigate her land. Not only has this increased the area she uses to grow her maize, but others have seen her improved crops and have rented her motor, which has added more income to her household.

Lead farmers like John Biro in Machinga are diversifying their crops to include different vegetables and drought-resistant crops like pigeon peas, bananas, chilies and fresh maize because they yield more income and are more nutritious, especially for children. The 38-year-old, who is married with four children, conserves water for his family's crops through mulching and mixing chicken manure with water to fertilize their fields when government fertilizer doesn't

make it to remote areas. An early adopter of conservation agriculture, Biro is crucial to the program's success.

Says program manager William Kawenda: "As his successes repeatedly draw the attention of his neighbors, he has become a role model for others to follow."

In Machinga, community members have devised a strategy to deal with the invading hippos that know exactly when the maize is ripe for eating—on a shift basis, one person spends each night in a hut by the field with the task of scaring the hippos away.

Community-led Learning and Sustainability

The people in Mbeluwa in Zomba district, where the program has been running since 2009, are proud of what they have achieved together. The Mbeluwa community has constructed a gravity irrigation scheme, bringing water down from Zomba Mountain to nourish their thirsty crops. They have also constructed a night water-storage catchment that doubles as a 50-by-50

In Balaka, the chief's daughter, Flossie Kahinduka, demonstrates a simple hand-washing technique that is making the incidence of diarrhea and cholera plumm-

Treadle pumps allow the people of Southern Malawi to use their own foot power to pull water from the Shire River to irrigate their crops.

John Biro uses innovative means, such as mulch mixed with chicken manure, to fertilize his maize when no government fertilizer is available.



foot fish pond.

Nutrition goes with good hygiene. In Balaka, the chief's daughter, Flossie Kahinduka, demonstrates a simple hand-washing technique beside their toilet that is making incidence of diarrhea and cholera plummet. The WALA program's peer training has sensitized community members on the importance of nutrition and hygiene.

Volunteer health promoters follow recipes using locally grown produce to help stretch their meager maize supplies. They teach their neighbors with flipcharts explaining the dos and don'ts of healthy living.

"This is one of the best ways of learning," says Rhoda, whose last name has been withheld for privacy reasons. "We didn't know the connection between good sanitation and [health]. We used to wash wherever we found water, even in a cooking pot. But now we know the link to illness and that is why we built our hand-washing system."

Through these efforts, a significant proportion of the people in southern Malawi are using WALA ideas to generate signs of "hopeful light" in an area where drought threatens to snuff out hope for the future. With their determination to conserve water, diversify crops, generate income, and improve health and sanitation, the people of southern Malawi will steadily reduce the hunger season that currently looms throughout the year as they dedicate their energies to improving life as a whole.

BUILDING RESILIENCE TO NATURAL DISASTERS

Malawi is prone to natural disasters like drought and floods, leading to food insecurity in many parts of the country. USAID, through the U.S. Government Feed the Future initiative, is supporting early warning systems that improve the quantity, quality and timeliness of information, and predict food security and vulnerability threats. The early warning systems monitor and assess environmental and socio-economic hazards that affect market price trends, nutrition and cross-border trade.