



Impact Stories of AGRA's work in Malawi

2017 - 2021

**CATALYZING AND SUSTAINING INCLUSIVE AGRICULTURAL
TRANSFORMATION**

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List of Acronyms

ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation
AFAP	African Fertiliser and Agribusiness Partnership
AGRA	Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa
ASF	Area Specific Fertilizer
ASWAP	Agricultural Sector Wide Approach
AU	African Union
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CIAT	International Center for Tropical Agriculture
CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
DAES	Department of Agriculture Extension Services
DAO	District Agriculture Office
DAPS	Department of Agricultural Planning Services
DARS	Department of Agricultural Research Services
EGS	Early Generation Seed
FAM	Fertilizer Association of Malawi
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
AIP	Affordable Inputs Programme
FUM	Farmers' Union of Malawi
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
IDSST	Improving Delivery of Seed and Soil Fertility Technologies
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
IITA	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture
ISFM	Integrated soil fertility management
ISTA	International Seed Testing Association
LUANAR	Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources
MBS	Malawi Bureau of Standards
MOAIWD	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development
MUSECO	Multi Seeds Company Limited
MUSECO	Multi-seed Company
NAP	National Agricultural Policy
NASFAM	National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi
OPV	Open-pollinated Variety
PASS	Programme for Africa's Seed Systems
PIATA	Partnership for Inclusive Agricultural Transformation in Africa
RUMARK	Rural Market Development Trust
SADC	Southern Africa Development Corporation
SAPP	Sustainable Agriculture Production Program
SFFRM	Smallholder Farmers Fertilizer Revolving Fund
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SSTP	Scaling Seed and Technologies Partnership in Africa
SSU	Seed Services Unit
STAM	Seed Traders Association of Malawi
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

Malawi is one of AGRA's 11 target countries in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) and received support from development partners to catalyze and sustain inclusive agricultural transformation under the Partnership for Inclusive Agricultural Transformation in Africa (PIATA) and IFAD-AGRA partnership. PIATA is a 5-year strategic partnership between AGRA, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), The Rockefeller Foundation, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) that started in 2017 with a key focus on catalyzing and sustaining an inclusive agricultural transformation in Africa. On the other hand AGRA partnered IFAD to support IFAD funded programs in Malawi and other countries, Mozambique and Ethiopia. These partnerships have enable Malawi to set its course on the path of agricultural transformation enabling policy reforms and building institutions in seed and fertilizer subsectors which have directly impacted 102,000 farmers and another 300,000 farmers indirectly improving their status of food. For example:

- a) Through Creating an enabling environment for the business of Agriculture, AGRA has facilitated policy reforms in seed, fertilizer and agricultural markets through which a Seed and Fertilizer Policies were enacted harmonizing the outdated regulations with the COMESA regulations that guarantee farmer access to quality seeds and fertilizer.
- b) Through the Improved Delivery of Seed and Soil Technologies (IDSST), enabled the sustainability of government's IFAD-supported Sustainable Agriculture Program (SAP) by linking 109 community seed multiplication groups to seed companies, produced 634MT of EGS which has been injected into the seed system and capacitated 198 agrodealers distributing improved seed and fertilizer to farmers.
- c) The Fertilizer System work has developed and validated 5 area specific fertilizer recommendations, built the capacity of 11 hub agro-dealers who have employed 11 private extension workers connected to over 660 Community Agribusiness Advisors delivering over 100,000MT of seeds and fertilizers to over 76,000 farmers.

Key Lessons

Promotion of Public Private Partnership: SAPP has benefited from Multi-Seed Company (MUSECO) and RUMARK involvement in promoting Public Private Partnership in seed multiplication and distribution arrangements. MUSECO supplies basic seed to farmers under contract farming arrangements. In return, MUSECO also buys the certified seed which is produced by farmer groups. In this arrangement, the seed multiplying farmers have a readily available market. SAPP has also benefited from working with RUMARK at in all districts in agro-dealers perspective. RUMARK is building capacity of spoke agro-dealers and links them to hub agro-dealers. Through the partnership with RUMARK, district specific agro-dealer directories have been developed showing agro-dealer location, contacts and inputs that are being stocked for farmers to access. RUMARK has been training agro-dealers with skills in proper handling and storage of farm-inputs such as seeds and chemicals so that agro-dealers should also provide over the counter advisory services to farmers on the same.

Building the capacity of sector players and introduction of CAAs key to increasing farmer access to seeds and fertilizer technologies: VBAs/ Lead farmers were trained to assist in demand creation by setting up demonstrations and distribution of small packs to smallholder farmers in an effort to increase adoption of new crop technologies on offer on the market.

Knowledge and information sharing is key to support agricultural productivity among smallholder farmers: Farmers who are direct beneficiaries under this project benefited a lot from the knowledge and information sharing forums that were convened by RUMARK. Knowledge on Good Agricultural Practices for increased production of legumes and maize were shared among implementing partners, in collaboration with the Extension workers under the Ministry of Agriculture. Such information included, importance of using certified seed, Double row planting, recommended

plant populations and agronomic practices to be followed. Multi Seeds Company (MUSECO) provided the farmers with insight to new crop varieties which they are producing, both legumes and maize which farmers can access for their production. RUMARK utilized the platform to introduce the farmers with trained agro dealers as a way of creating business linkages. Farmers shared their practical experiences and gained new knowledge for adoption and practice

Focus on Business Environment for SMEs: Policy and institutional capacity work should be driven by constraints against the development of the business of Agriculture especially along the target value chains. Large numbers of SMEs have invested in Agriculture and make substantial contributions to enabling SHFs to have beneficial access to technologies as well as the supply of inputs and services. Enabling the expansion of number, business and investment of SMEs is “the” pillar of sustainability for agricultural transformation programs. Therefore, most of the support to policy and institutional capacity development, should be manly driven by the needs of SMEs to thrive.



Introduction

Country Overview

Malawi's economic growth is highly dependent on agriculture. Agriculture contributes about 27% to the country's GDP and generates over 80 percent of national export earnings. Over 83% live in rural areas depending on agriculture for their livelihoods. With Malawi's population growing (2.9%) annually and national poverty headcount standing at about 50%, Agriculture will remain key to the development of the country. Hence its prioritization in the nation's development strategy, the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III (MGDS III).

Malawi has a young growing population of about 18m of which 40% are youth. Urbanization is estimated at 16.5% with more people moving into towns to look for alternative sources of income after being disappointed by unrewarding proceeds from agriculture.

Malawi's agriculture is dominated by small-scale farming practicing subsistence farming on less than 1.2ha of land reliant on the one 3 months' rainy season. Productivity is estimated at 40% below potential yield. These are made worse by weak agricultural systems that fail to sustainably deliver quality products and services to farmers resulting to unstable production and forcing government's interventions through subsidies and food trade restrictions.

Smallholder farmers engage mostly in food crop production, such as maize, rice, cassava and Irish potatoes, but they are also the largest suppliers of tobacco – the country's large single export product. Maize is by the far the most dominant crop, occupying an estimated to 60-80% of the cultivated land by smallholders (USAID, 2019) and contributing 25% of total agricultural GDP (White, 2019). The reliance on maize-focused production is also reflected in the crop's importance for consumption: per capita maize consumption is the second highest worldwide (World Bank, 2018) – much of which (around 65%) comes from own production for self-sufficiency (World Bank, 2018).

AGRA in Malawi

Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) seeks to increase the productivity of smallholder farms for Agriculture Transformation in Africa. AGRA is focused on putting smallholder farmers at the center of the continent's growing economy by transforming agriculture from a solitary struggle to survive into farming as a business that thrives. As the sector that employs the majority of Africa's people, nearly all small-scale farmers, AGRA recognizes that developing smallholder agriculture into a productive, efficient, and sustainable system is essential to ensuring food security, lifting millions out of poverty, and driving equitable growth across the continent.



AGRA has operated in Malawi since 2009 implementing different programs in improved seed and market development where others 31 improved varieties, 6 local seed companies and about 1600

agro-dealers were developed. However, several gaps were identified that had potential to erode the gains achieved under the previous investments. The gaps included, Weak and outdated regulatory frameworks, Weak institutions to support agricultural transformation, small holder farmers' limited accessibility to markets, extension services and finance, Poor coordination and monitoring and evaluation which resulted into duplication of efforts and unharmonized extension message delivery, Vulnerability to climate change and Post-harvest losses



AGRA Malawi Strategy 2017-2021 and Theory of Change

Challenges facing Malawi's Agricultural Sector

In 2016 AGRA reviewed its strategy as it looked at how it could play more pivotal role in supporting the quest for agricultural transformation in Malawi and other countries. In the review AGRA acknowledged Malawi's achievements in food production which came about as a result of high government investments in the sector that supported uptake of improved seed and fertilizer use. However, these have failed to sustain agricultural development attracting more and more government intervention increasing pressure on already strained budget eventually crowding out private sector. Several challenges were identified that included:

- a) Over-reliance on government subsidized inputs that stifle effective demand among farmers for better inputs,
- b) Inconsistent yields due to insufficient and out-dated methods of extension,
- c) Lack of financial products and services to smallholder farmers, and,
- d) Insufficient connections to markets for selling of surplus production.
- e) Inconsistent regulatory frameworks with an updated National Agriculture Policy (2016) but no supporting regulatory frameworks.

These constraints to further growth of agriculture in Malawi are exacerbated high rates of inflation, high interest rates and currency depreciation impacting the ability of both the Government of Malawi and donor organizations to maintain historical levels of support to agriculture.

The constraints made Malawi susceptible to food deficits, with agricultural production going through cycles of feast and famine.

AGRA's Commitment to Malawi 2017-2021

With high population densities in rural areas, heavy reliance on smallholder agriculture, and limited additional arable land available for cultivation, Malawi remains in a highly precarious food security situation. To maintain current yield levels farmers are reliant on government support and favourable weather conditions. Insufficient development of input markets and connection to output markets impedes the sustainability of Malawi's agriculture system. Given these challenges, AGRA has identified seven areas of intervention that it will focus on delivering in Malawi:

1. **Support the delivery of increased extension services.** Current extension delivery in Malawi is estimated at 3,900 farmers for every extension worker. Further, it is estimated that 50% of agriculture extension posts are vacant due to a lack of government budget to pay workers and difficulty in finding talent to work in remote rural zones. Yet alternative methods for the delivery of extension have not been widely explored or developed. The result is that just 4% of farmers engaging with and using extension services. This has obvious knock-on effects which include incorrect seed use, high rates of soil erosion, and poor agronomic practices. Given these challenges, **AGRA will focus on energizing the delivery of extension through innovative approaches which include farmer field days, large numbers of small, on-farm demo's, distribution of *small packs* of seed and fertilizers, and village-based advisors (VBAs) to deliver extension services.** This will entail the delivery of extension through farmer organizations (FOs), input suppliers, and the agro-dealer network. AGRA will facilitate these interventions via business support, grants and the development of public-private partnerships that bring all relevant actors and stakeholders together. It is believed that improved delivery of extension will support Malawian smallholders to better utilize improved seeds and better manage their soils, thereby

ensuring sustained improvements in yield gains, even in the face of more volatile climatic conditions and potential lower levels of input support for the government

- 2. Support Mechanization.** Inadequate resources and lack of technical capacity has resulted in insufficient mechanization of agriculture production in Malawi. Mechanization as a service delivered through existing entities such as farmer organizations, agro-dealers has been limited, with the majority of mechanization being government driven and resourced. Alternate methods and opportunities for the delivery of mechanization have not been adequately explored. Developing and catalyzing these opportunities to improve mechanization and subsequent agronomic practices of smallholders is an area of high potential impact for AGRA. AGRA will develop public private partnerships for the delivery of improved mechanization. This will involve supporting apex farmer organizations, agro-dealers and Farmer Centres as the main conduits for the delivery of mechanization. AGRA will support capacity building of these organizations and facilitate partnerships with commercial sector actors.
- 3. Support for post-harvest management and market development.** Just 15% of smallholders in Malawi currently sell their produce through formal commercial channels. Smallholders are not sufficiently organized, nor do they grow adequate volumes or aggregate produce to be attractive to formal market players. Storage facilities are not located near to smallholders and too few organizations exist that offer value addition services. These challenges exist despite significant storage capacity – at 129,000 MT – and two commodity exchanges existing in Malawi. AGRA interventions will focus on improving storage and aggregation, value addition and smallholder connection to structured markets. AGRA will deliver these interventions through a combination of grants, convening's and commercialization funds with relevant partners.
- 4. Advice on opportunities and options to improve the financial sector.** Although 11% of total bank lending goes to agriculture in Malawi, the sector remains undeveloped. Total aggregate lending remains small and is primarily directed toward cash crops, with only 1% of farmers accessing credit from banks. Beyond credit, savings, insurance and transaction products remain under-developed and out of reach for most smallholder farmers and over half of the total population is financially excluded. With ongoing macro-economic challenges impeding the types of interventions that can be delivered in finance in the near term, AGRA activities will focus on providing guidance and advice to the financial sector on how offerings may be improved. These interventions will involve working with the financial sector on risk sharing as well as working on product design and delivery.
- 5. Policy efforts to improve private sector development.** The Government of Malawi acknowledged that, whilst successful at sparking improved production, the Farm Input Subsidy Programme is unsustainable, unaffordable in the medium and long run and impedes the development of demand driven input supply systems. Given this, AGRA committed to work with and assist the government on appropriate reforms that support a more private sector driven approach. In addition, AGRA will work with and support agro-dealers through the Agro-Dealer Association on the needs of these actors through changes in the FISP. AGRA will also support analysis and advocacy in policy areas that distort private sector development in the area of seeds, fertilizer and markets.
- 6. Support Crop Variety Development and Release.** The major constraint to productivity and marketing of staple crops is the lack of improved varieties of key staple crops other than maize, such as beans, rice, cassava, groundnut, and pigeon pea. The breeding of improved varieties will need to go hand-in-hand with farmer participation in variety selection to fast-track adoption. Moreover, building of farmer capacity in improved seed production for crops such as rice and groundnuts is effective and can be made more sustainable. In more developed seed system such as maize, the access of high quality foundation seed is crucial for efficient distribution.
- 7. Human and Institutional Capacity Development.** This will be conducted on a needs basis to unlock capacity gaps that could hinder the above interventions. AGRA capacity building ranges from farmer training to that of PhD students. Both the agricultural public and private sectors in Malawi still lack human and institutional capacity to drive out sustainable change. There are a

few specialist scientists that can develop technologies to solve small farmers problems. There are also very few skilled personnel in the agri-business value chains that can provide effective services in grain collection, postharvest handling and storage as well as input markets such as seed and fertilizer companies. Although Malawi has one of the fairly high adoption rates of improved varieties of maize the extension workers still lack skills for other crops and along the value chain. Re-tooling the extension systems in these skills will increase productivity of Malawian small holder farmers.

AGRA's interventions delivered in Malawi would be systemic in nature, supporting ecosystem development and catalysing investment in agriculture. Prioritization will be given to interventions that focus on the maize, rice, soya, beans and groundnut value chains. These crops are critical to Malawi's food security where opportunity for yield improvement exists. Preference will be given to the Northern and Central regions of Malawi. These regions are chosen due to need and high potential for impact.

The Theory of Change

The strategy and business plan for Malawi sought to help catalyze and sustain an inclusive agricultural transformation by building and strengthening the capacity of government and stakeholders to better coordinate and deliver services to farmers for improved productivity and increased incomes. AGRA Malawi streamlined its catalytic support to focus on 3 areas which are: (i) Policy and State Capability, (ii) Systems Development and, (iii) Partnerships

AGRA in Malawi is partnering government through the Ministry of Agriculture, private sector partners such as Seed Traders Association of Malawi, African Fertilizer Agribusiness Partnership (AFAP) and Agro-dealers to build a sustainable seed system well-regulated to deliver quality improved seed technologies to farmers. This publication contains some of the selected impact stories that have been achieved by AGRA through the 2017-2021 strategy.

Implementing partners

To deliver the stated interventions, AGRA has allocated a budget of USD 24 Million to be delivered over a five-year period. However due resource constraints only \$2,804,181 was made available for prioritized investments listed in Annex 1 below. The investments focused on:

- a) Facilitating policy reforms to enable the business of agriculture,
- b) Strengthening the seed system, and
- c) Strengthening the fertilizer system.

Implementing partners were strategically and competitively selected and included:

- Ministry of Agriculture through Departments of Agricultural Planning, Agricultural Research and Land Resource Conservation.
- African Fertilizer Agribusiness Partnerships (AFAP).
- Global Seeds.
- Multi Seeds Company (MUSECO).
- Rural Market Development Trust (RUMARK).
- Seed Traders Association of Malawi (STAM).
- Story Workshop Education Trust (SWET),
- Farmers Union of Malawi (FUM) and

- Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANet).

Early outcomes

Through focusing on these areas and crops the following outcome were anticipated:

- Increased yields of focus crops in focus regions.
- Increased number of farmers adopting appropriate seeds, using required fertilizer and undertaking improved agronomic practices at the farmer level.
- Increased number of farmers accessing mechanization services.
- Better managed and sustainable farm input subsidy program.

The figure below shows early outcomes from the investments:

Grant Name & Amount	Purpose of Grant	Targets	Achievements	Outcomes
Create an enabling environment for the business of agriculture (\$240,998) – DAPS & FUM	Fast-track enactment of frameworks for seed reforms	-Seed bill enacted -fertilizer regulations enacted -market reforms enacted	-Seed bill validated -fertilizer policy approved	-Fake seed and fertilizer sellers apprehended -
Production of DT Maize and rosette tolerant groundnut foundation seed for farmer resilience (\$221,200) – Global Seeds	Increasing production and availability of quality foundation seed of DT hybrid maize and rosette resistant groundnut	-120MT of Groundnut Basic Seed of Rosette resistant groundnut varieties produced and distributed -15MT of basic Seed of DT Hybrid Maize produced and distributed	-80MT of Groundnut Basic Seed produced and distributed -12.5MT of basic Seed of DT Hybrid Maize produced and distributed	-Increased production and uptake of certified seed
Production and Delivery of EGS for Improved Livelihoods of Smallholders farmers supported by IFAD under the SAPP project (\$205,889) – DARS & MUSECO	Increase availability of quality legume seed to IFAD-SAPP beneficiaries.	-21 MT of breeder, 31MT of pre-basic, 54 MT of basic, 500MT of certified legume seed produced for seed system	-101 SAPP farmer seed multiplication groups -558MT seed produced generating \$595,200	-Increased production and uptake of certified seed
Strengthening Seed and Other Farm Inputs Distribution Systems for Improved Food Security and Incomes of Smallholder Farmers in Malawi (\$135,207) – RUMARK	-strengthen capacity of hub and rural agro-dealers in 2 SAPP target districts to improve delivery of seeds	-10,000 smallholder farmers benefitting from agro dealer services - 80 startup agro dealers & 198 existing mapped	-86 New Agro dealers and 199 operational agro dealers mapped -657MT seed sold reaching 15000 farmers	-reduced distances for smallholder farmers to access improved technologies from 14Km to 10Km
Strengthening Malawi's Seed Sector (\$896,000) – SSU, CISANET & STAM	-increase farmer access to quality seed	-seed quality audit conducted -seed regulations implemented -Capacity built of seed players	-Procedures for licensing seed sellers developed -Seed players capacity built	-Fake seed and fertilizer sellers apprehended

What in our Results Framework was validated with these Grants



1. Increased staple crop productivity for smallholder farmers

- **101 SAPP farmer seed multiplication groups**
- **558MT seed produced generating \$595,200**



3. Increased capacity of small holder farming households and agricultural systems to better prepare for and adapt to shocks and stresses

- **80MT of Groundnut Basic Seed produced**
- **12.5MT of basic Seed of Drought Tolerant Hybrid Maize**



4. Strengthened continental, regional and government multi-sectoral coordination, and mutual accountability in the agricultural sector

- **Seed bill validated**
- **fertilizer policy approved**



Impact Stories

The Enablers: Agricultural Policy Reforms Increasing farmer access to improved quality seed through strengthening the Seed System

1. Reaping the Fruits of Improved Seed System

A key innovation in seed systems development has been promoting the use of early generation seed which includes breeder and foundation seed. As Malawian farmers become aware of the advantages of improved seed, the existing seed supply systems have proven less able to cope with the demand. The emerging private seed companies do not have research and product development programs of their own, but depend on publicly developed varieties. However, the limited quantities of seed produced by public seed agencies are insufficient to meet the needs of a lot of farmers. To address the gap AGRA has been providing farmer extension services through the emergence of a series of new, private sector led methods for informing large numbers of farmers about the value of adopting improved seed in practical and convincing ways. This included mounting demonstration plots in smallholder farmers' fields and on public sites frequently visited by farmers, plus the distribution of hundreds of thousands of packages of seed of improved varieties of maize and leguminous crops for testing by farmers on their own land. Building farmer awareness around the value of new seed, coupled with seed supply in local shops, has fuelled increased demand among farmers and created a new, private, demand-driven channel for the supply of seed and other inputs. AGRA recognized this shift and begun working with the private sector in setting the stage for improvements aimed at taking seed markets to scale.



Mr. Sandram Msokasoka (VBA) working in a demonstration field for Chiutsi farmers club in Mtosa EPA

One of the beneficiaries for AGRA's Strengthening Seed and other Farm Inputs Distribution systems for improved food security and incomes of smallholder farmers in Malawi project is Chiutsi Farmers Club, a group of farmers found in Benga Section from Mtosa Extension Planning Area (EPA). Its members are from Jesitala Village, Traditional Authority Mwadzama in Nkhotakota District. Through the AGRA project's VBA approach, well-established farmers club select lead farmers who represent them in their communities. In 2017, MUSECO identified Sandram

Msokasoka as a potential lead farmer. MUSECO provided certified seed to Chiutsi Farmers Club for a one acre land, on which the club cultivated CG-7 groundnuts and maize. The club harvested 300 Kgs of groundnuts and 1000 kgs of maize at the end of the season, compared to previous yields of 100Kgs and 510 Kgs for groundnuts and Maize, respectively. Following Sandram Sokasoka's success, MUSECO confirmed him as a Village Based Advisor (VBA). He has since received several trainings from MUSECO, including trainings on good agriculture practices, pesticide spraying and grain quality standards; which have helped him improve his farming techniques.

In 2018, Chiutsi Farmers Club increased acreage from one to two. The club cultivated one acre of maize and one acre of CG-7 groundnuts. The club adopted improved technologies; and its yields for that year increased to 550 Kgs for groundnuts and 2000 Kgs for maize. In 2019, a good number of about 98 (46 Female and 52 Male) members from Chiutsi Farmers Club grew certified seed in their individual farms and followed all the technologies that were adopted by the club. They produced a lot of maize and groundnuts that made Efilida Jailosi a host farmer and a member for Chiutsi farmers club, to generate enough proceeds to build a house. "I built my house and roofed it with iron sheets and still had enough food for my family. I am a proud woman and proud to be a beneficiary of the MUSECO interventions. May Allah bless MUSECO and their sponsors so that they can continue to guide us further to reach greater heights," said Efilida, Host farmer and MUSECO beneficiary. For the Jesitala community, where most houses are built with mud and roofed with thatch because of low income, it is a great achievement to have a house built and roofed with iron sheets. "This year I ploughed my two acres of maize and 2 acres of legumes, I have planted yellow maize seed and have also planted CG-7 groundnuts in double rows and applied the recommended fertilizer, today it is about 60 days old, and when I look at the farm, I am very satisfied; therefore, I cannot hide my story," Efilida says.

Moving forward, Chiutsi Farmers Club would like to be a Farmer Field School which will be transferring acquired best farming practices to other smallholder farmers in the community to strengthen their capacity and increase their farms' yields.

2. VBAs Accelerate Adoption of Improved Agricultural Technologies

For the past two years, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have reached out to many smallholder farmers across Malawi with improved technologies and access to markets to facilitate and catalyze agriculture transformation and consequently enhance food and nutrition security. Both AGRA and IFAD have been supporting projects, among others, that have been promoting the production and delivery of Early Generation and Certified Seed for Improved Livelihoods of Smallholders in the farming communities supported by IFAD under the SAPP project in Malawi. The majority of such farmers, who, have benefited from such interventions are located in remote areas. Crop yields of most smallholder farmers in various locations of Malawi have been very low because farmers use inappropriate crop varieties, inappropriate fertilizers, and poor agronomic practices.

This is worsened by ineffective public extension service delivery. Currently there is about one Government Extension Officer to 3,000 farmers which means few farmers are visited and trained on improved crop varieties and how to improve agronomic practices. On top of that, lack of awareness has made farmers to travel long distances to access the appropriate farm inputs. It is against this background that AGRA has been working with different partners in Malawi to introduce a private



Mr. Lyford Kasiya (VBA) showing a groundnuts demonstration plot for Chikondi farmers club in Ukwé EPA

sector-led extension approach, which involves the identification and training of Village Based Advisors (VBAs) to demonstrate improved crop varieties, fertilizer blends, and to practically teach farmers Good Agronomic Practices (GAPs).

Lyford Kasiya from Mphandaoyo Village T/A Kabudula is one of the Village based advisors (VBAs) who is offering his services to some of the farmer groups such as Chikondi Farmers' club in Ukwé EPA, which is found in Lilongwe west. Lyford has been a VBA in this area for three years where he has been engaging fellow farmers in seed production and adoption of other improved agricultural

technologies. Lyford has gained popularity in encouraging farmers to plant unshelled groundnuts. “I always advise farmers to plant groundnuts seed which has been unshelled up until a farmer is ready to plant it in his farm”, explained Lyford. Farmers store unshelled groundnuts and when they are ready to plant the seed, they shell it using their hands so that the seed is not damaged during shelling. When the groundnut seed is kept unshelled, the actual seed is kept safe, a practice that promotes the germination rate of groundnuts. “Apart from encouraging farmers to plant groundnuts seed which has been kept unshelled, I also advise farmers from Chikondi farmers club to plant their groundnuts using the double rows method of planting.” Added Kasiya the VBA. Double rows method of planting enables farmers to produce a lot of yields on a small piece of land.



Weckson Sambo (Host farmer) and Lyford Kasiya (VBA) working in a Soybean demonstration field

Through various partners, AGRA has over the past two years, identified and trained different VBAs, who have assisted to directly reach over 3000 (1200 females, 1800 males) smallholder farmers with promoted interventions in a specified area. Seed and fertilizer Companies have been working hand in hand with VBAs by providing inputs for their demonstration farms, which have proved to be effective and rapidly creating demand for seeds and fertilizers. Different seed and fertilizer companies are embracing this system as part of introducing their products to smallholder farmers that increases their sales.

This enhances AGRA to support the seed system as it provides the necessary structural design to facilitate access to seed and other agro inputs through downstream agro inputs distribution system. As a result of their efforts to demonstrate improved maize and legume varieties, and to teach farmers about Good Agronomic Practices (GAPs), 18 VBAs (12 Male, 6 Female) have started to graduate to become agro-dealers or agents of Agro-dealers to supply inputs to farmers.

3. The Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLAs) Enhance Access to Inputs

The Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) approach implemented by Community Agribusiness Advisors (CAAs) has ensured that smallholders who do not have access to formal banking services are able to save and borrow to purchase agricultural inputs and increase productivity. For the past two years CAAs in Malingunde have formed 8 vibrant VSLAs with a membership of 145 (89 Female and 56 Male) beneficiaries where 65 of the beneficiaries are youths. The groups received training in savings management, bookkeeping, leadership, and group formalization. CAAs received training on the VSLA management and they in turn trained members of VSLAs in recordkeeping and other activities that take place to ensure that the groups are sustainable after the exit of the project. Limbani Potifala, a CAA and Malawi School Certificate of Education

(MSCE) holder, received training as a VSLA volunteer to support four VSLAs with 145 beneficiaries. One of the roles of Potifala is to link his VSLAs to Agro dealers for easy access of inputs.

Limbani has successfully linked two groups (Ngowe VSLA in Kansikidzi Section and Mikango 2 VSLA from Msera Section) to HK Agrodealer in Mitundu Trading Center in 2018/2019 fiscal year. The two groups had a total savings of MWK 1,532,000.00 (\$1,652.06) for Ngowe VSLA, and MK 682,000.00 (\$869) for Mikango 2 VSLA). The instrumental role Potifala played by liaising with both the Agrodealer and the groups to mobilize funds for savings earned him the admiration of making the VSLAs registered to be cooperatives.



Limani Potifala (CAA) standing in front of a maize demonstration field for Ngowe farmers club in Mitundu EPA

“I am grateful for the training I received from Rural Market Development Trust (RUMARK). The skill set I received through their trainings and activities enabled me to be active, many years after completing my secondary education. I am also glad that the VSLA groups have seen the need to register as cooperatives so that they can easily enroll in the formal banking sector to access credit and other facilities.” Said Limbani, a CAA and RUMARK training beneficiary.

“This season (2020/21) I have managed to link all the 8 (5 belonging to women and 3 belonging to both women and male) VSLAs under my reach to private seed companies and managed to get a seed loan of MWK 6,750,000.00 (\$8,600.81) to be paid by the 8 VSLAs.” Added Limbani

Currently, Limbani Potifala is in the process of merging and registering the eight VSLAs to be a registered cooperative which will increase farmer’s opportunities of accessing loans from financial institutions and input suppliers. Through this intervention farmers livelihoods have improved, as they are able to get certified seed and other inputs easily. Many input suppliers have trust in the VSLAs and they are always ready to give them input loan. Limbani has mobilized 10 (7 Male 3 Female) Agrodealers in Mitundu Area to work hand in hand with different VSLAs he is facilitating and has also shared his experiences on VSLA linkages to financial institutions. Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) through RUMARK is currently using VSLA approach for smallholders to purchase improved inputs to increase yields and income. New groups are still being established and necessary guidance is provided by CAAs to make group members (smallholder farmers) economically empowered.

During the period, the project which was supported by AGRA under the IFAD-AGRA IDSST partnership has facilitated various trainings and has supported 12 CAAs (8 Male, 4 Female) in Mitundu Extension Planning Area (EPA). A number of rural agro dealers who have benefited from this initiative have improved the agro dealer density and tremendously reduced the distances covered by farmers from about 20 km to less than 6 km since their shops are located within the respective farming communities. The crowding in of CAAs in the downstream inputs distribution system is thus bearing fruits. The CAA model also includes business linkages between retail agro-dealers and existing CAAs as well as the hub agro-dealers to strengthen the inputs supply chain. This enables hub agrodealers to give inputs on suppliers’ credit to retailers, and the latter do the same to CAAs.

4. Chilewo Traders Increase Sales and Revenues Through Community Input Promotions

Community Input promotions are events organized by Agro dealers who are trained by Rural Market Development (RUMARK) to increase farmers' access to improved inputs by bringing input dealers to the communities. This is usually done when the farmers' Village Savings and Loans Associations are sharing out their savings. Chilewo Traders is one of the agrodealers who has been implementing this initiative under technical expertise from RUMARK, a partner of Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).



Ms. Matilda Chitete's daughter inside Chilewo Traders Shop at Dwangwa Trading Center

Owned and operated by Matilda Chitete, a 71 year old woman from Chinunkha Village, Traditional Authority Mwaumbamba in Chitipa District, Chilewo traders is an input dealer operating business with farmers around Dwangwa Township in Nkhoswe. Until Matilda was trained by RUMARK in a project known as Strengthening Seed and other Farm Inputs Distribution systems for improved food security and incomes of smallholder farmers in Malawi project, she did not withstand competition from other agrodealers. The project which was supported by AGRA under

the IFAD-AGRA IDSST partnership, introduced Chilewo Traders to farmers in nine remote communities where the VSLAs organized savings' sharing events. Through this linkage and different trainings from RUMARK, Chilewo traders has gained recognition and its business share has increased in Dwangwa.



Matilda Chitete's daughter showing SEEDCO seed stock sold at Chilewo Traders in Dwangwa

Chilewo Traders has been participating in community input promotion events in different parts of Dwangwa. Over four hundred (400) smallholder farmers, mostly women, use part of their savings to purchase inputs (seeds, herbicides, and sprayers) during each of the promotions. After participating in the input promotion event, Matilda's daily sales, which averaged one hundred thousand kwacha (MWK100, 000) (\$127.42) per day in 2018, increased to an average of two hundred thousand kwacha [MWK 200,000(\$254.84)] per day in 2019, representing an increase of 50%. Through expertise acquired from RUMARK, she now covers over

10 additional communities in the district and reaches out to about 1,000 (540 Female and 460 Male) farmers with inputs including fertilizer, seeds, agrochemicals, and insecticides. Ms. Matilda excitingly narrates: "The community input promotion facilitated by RUMARK is very good. Within two days I

made MWK 400,000 (\$ 509.68) of profit from the promotion and since then, the Community Agribusiness Advisors (CAAs) made a follow up to my shop to buy more inputs. My sales have increased with the number of people visiting my shop. A lot of private seed companies are now trusting me and I have managed to receive consignments from SEEDCO, DEMETA and MONSANTO, I am very happy and wish to thank RUMARK for identifying me."

To further improve her relationship with farmers and increase sales, Chilewo Traders bought 5 hectares of land where part of the land is used as a demonstration site for maize and other legume crops to train about 600 (360 Female, 240 Male) smallholder farmers in good agricultural practices and the use of improved seed around Dwangwa in Nkhotakota District. In 2020/21 growing season, Chilewo Traders has been supporting farmers clubs such as Chigunda and Kaongozi in Dwangwa and she is expecting to support more through the CAA Model.

5. CAAs Playing Vital Role in Assisting Farmers in VSLA Groups to Access Improved Inputs

Formal banks do not usually reach out to smallholder farmers due to high transaction costs and high risks they incur when dealing with them. Among other things, smallholder farmers do not usually keep adequate records of earnings and spending from past farming and thus banks are hesitant to lend them funds fearing that farmers will not raise enough revenue to repay the loans.

As part of ensuring that smallholder farmers have access to finance, Sydney Khando, owner of Kasungu Market Resource Center (KMRC), is promoting Village Savings and Loans (VSLAs) for smallholder farmers to easily access finance and consequently purchase improved inputs. KMRC is a hub agrodealer who has received capacity strengthening support from AFAP under AGRA's Strengthening Fertilizer Systems in Malawi. In 2019/20 growing season, KMRC with assistance from 42 (33 Male and 9 Female) Community Agribusiness Advisors (CAAs) formed 12 VSLA groups with membership of 180 (121 Female and 59 Male) beneficiaries. The groups have been trained in record keeping, savings management, group dynamics and leadership. Beneficiaries of the VSLAs have experienced the benefits through this arrangement. Smallholder farmers affirm that they can now afford to buy inputs for agriculture production. "We are now able to manage our funds more effectively and manage to procure improved inputs which we have always deemed expensive," Janet Katundu, a smallholder farmer in the area of Traditional Authority (T/A) Mpoma narrated.



A stock for Kasungu Market Resource Center at one of its shop at Kasungu Boma

"We have managed to save one million nine hundred and fifty thousand kwacha (MWK 1,950,000.00) (\$2,484.67) to invest in the recommended agricultural production practices we had seen through Global Seed and MUSECO field demonstrations," remarked a member of Veyo VSLA Group, T/A Mpoma in Chatoloma Kasungu. During the share-out (the period where funds contributed are disbursed) in 2020, KMRC Agrodealer facilitated a community input promotion event where representatives from KMRC promoted their products to the community members. The

farmers purchased seeds produced by Global Seeds, MUSECCO and other Private Seed companies, instead of using recycled seeds from the previous growing season. "We have also learnt the

importance of planting legume crops using double row method of planting, which has increased the quantity of our production,” said Mary, a member of Veyo VSLA.

Smallholder farmers expressed their joy during input promotion where they used their VSLA savings to purchase certified seeds. According to Lingilirani Phiri another member for Veyo VSLA, through proceeds from her VSLA savings, she invested in farm input and land for production. She doubled the size of her farm, from one acre in 2018 to two acres in 2020, and is expecting to expand to three acres in the next farming season. “Using part of my savings, I bought certified seeds, and patronized new technologies like the use of inoculant and Aflasafe. I could hire the service of a spray service provider. I expect a total of MWK1,400,000.00 (\$1,783.86) from 80 bags of maize and 30 bags of Groundnuts compared to the usual MWK540,000.00 (\$688.06) from 30 bags of maize and 12 bags of Groundnuts that I have been producing.” Said Lingilirani.

Besides its contribution to increasing agriculture production, the money saved or loans secured from VSLAs are used to pay for educational bills of beneficiaries’ children as well as other social needs. KMCR is currently setting up new groups and continue to use the VSLA approach for smallholders to purchase production inputs to increase their yields and income.

Increasing Farmer Access to Quality Fertilizer Technologies through Strengthening the Fertilizer System

1. Community Agribusiness Advisors (CAAs) for Improved Inputs Distribution and Farmer Organizations

Located in Southern Africa, Malawi is landlocked, sharing its borders with Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania. World Bank estimates the country’s population at 18.6 million. Malawi has a fast growing and young population, high dependency ratios and widespread and deep poverty. Economically, Malawi is highly dependent on agriculture. However, most of her agricultural production is carried out by smallholder farmers who usually practice subsistence farming and they continue to face low productivity. Among others, smallholder farmers’ productivity continues to dwindle due to low access to improved inputs, use of traditional methods of farming as well as low access to better extension services. The ratio of government extension workers to smallholder farmers hovers around 1:3,000 against the recommended ratio of 1:500. This thus threatens the livelihood of Malawi’s smallholder farmers who constitute 80% of Malawi’s population.



CAAs in hub agro-dealer branded T-shirts posing with a private extension worker in front of a hub agro-dealer shop in Nathenje, Lilongwe

To reduce the negative effects that smallholder farmers may face due to low access to improved inputs as well as extension services, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has been supporting its partners including African Fertilizer Agribusiness Partnership (AFAP) who have established and strengthened CAAs in different communities through private extension workers attached to hub agro-dealers. CAAs have been vital in linking smallholder farmers to hub agro-dealers who sell improved inputs and offer over the counter

extension messages. In the model which is well integrated into the Lead Farmer model, each CAA who is like a master Lead farmer has five (5) lead farmers and each lead farmer has an average of twenty (20) follower farmers.

“We are equipped with knowledge in fertilizer use as well as other inputs following good agronomic practices which we teach other farmers in our communities. We do awareness activities that provide knowledge to farmers in terms of which inputs our agro dealer stock and the benefits of using those inputs,” contended Samuel Joseph, a CAA who is based in Kaluzi Village, T/A Mazengera Lilongwe.

Among some of the awareness creation activities hosted by CAAs include mother demonstrations for good agronomic practices, use of improved seed and quality fertilizer plus other inputs which the farmers can access from the hub agro-dealer which the CAAs are linked to. The demonstration acts as a learning point for follower farmers and others in the community and the CAAs hold field days at land preparation, vegetative stage of the crop and maturity.



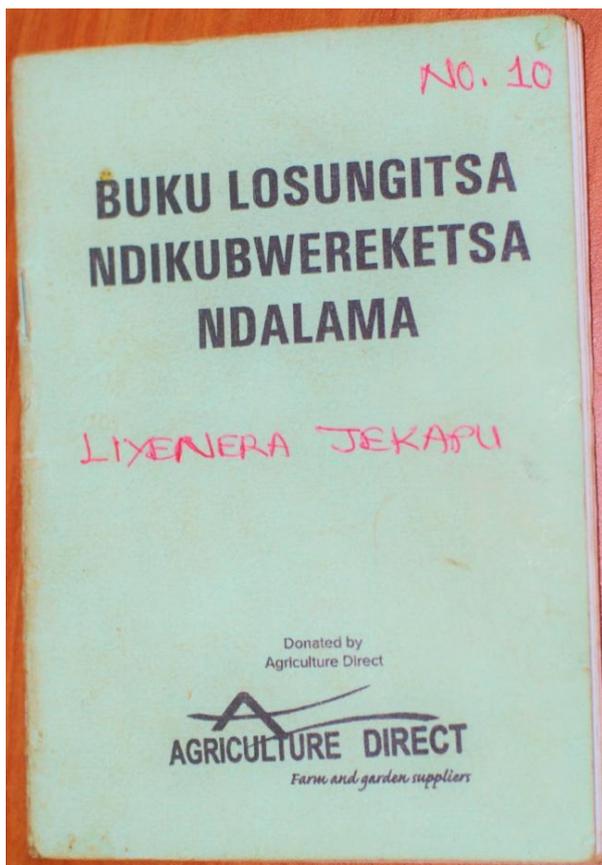
A CAA sharing insights on a field day in Dedza

Beyond awareness creation on improved inputs, CAAs host baby demonstrations to showcase good agricultural practices for other farmers to borrow a leaf. The CAAs also form clubs/groups through which smallholder farmers procure improved inputs from agrodealers. “We form clubs/groups and record inputs that each of the members wants to buy and we procure in bulk from the agrodealer we work with. The agrodealer usually gives us discount on the inputs we buy as a group and they also give us free transport to our communities,” contended a CAA of Machite club, T/A Mazengera Lilongwe.

Through the groups created, CAAs encourage each farmer to save money to procure bags of fertilizer as well as improved seeds for the next growing season. “Most farmers cannot afford to pay for inputs at once, thus we encourage a culture of saving through groups/clubs,” said one CAA in Mwanza. Through groups/clubs formed by CAAs, many smallholder farmers are able to access improved inputs. For instance, forty three (35 Male, 8 Female) CAAs in Nathenje have managed to reach out to four thousand three hundred (4,300) farmers who have benefited from their distribution of improved inputs in 2019/20 growing season alone. Out of these smallholder farmers, two hundred and fifteen (215) organized farmer groups have been formed to facilitate easy access to improved inputs. John Sipikwa is one of the farmers in Nathenje, Lilongwe who was used to buy small amounts of inputs from vendors but later managed to buy bags of fertilizer and improved seeds through groups/clubs formed by CAAs. “I have never known buying bags of fertilizers in my life. Timangodziwa kugula feteleza ndi mbewu yoyezetsa ife koma pano zimenezo ndi mbili yakale. I am expecting bumper yields from my field this year through buying improved inputs in groups. Thanks to our CAAs who do not get tired of helping us,” alleged Sipikwa.

2. Promoting Distribution of Improved Inputs Through VSLAs

In Malawi poverty is more widespread in rural areas. Such rural economies are characterized by long time spans between input and output of the agricultural production, uncertainty and weather dependency, making the ability to smooth consumption, to access credit, and to employ risk coping strategies very important. Over the last few decades there has been a significant increase in access to financial services through the growth of the microfinance industry. However, these institutions often underserve rural communities.

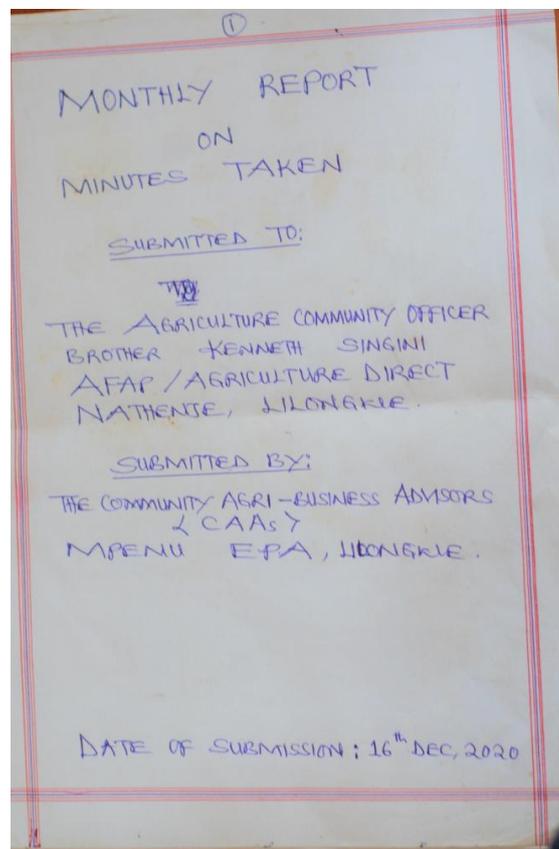


These gaps therefore, tend to be filled by community level arrangements, such as Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), which are groups of people who pool their savings in order to have a source of lending funds. VSLA groups combine a variety of services normally provided by the formal financial market, including savings accounts, access to loans, and insurance. In order to provide credit and insurance to its members, VSLAs need to raise sufficient amounts of savings, which is guaranteed through compulsory minimum contributions.

Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has been promoting VSLAs in different communities through its partners. VSLAs have been promoted to aide easy access to improved inputs and to facilitate easy input distribution. Different hub agrodealers, through the private extension workers and CAAs have facilitated formation and formalization of VSLAs in communities in collaboration with CAAs for farmers to buy improved inputs easily. Two hundred and fifteen (215) of VSLAs have been established in Nathenje alone to facilitate easy inputs distribution. "I conduct monitoring of VSLAs every month end to make sure that they are making significant progress," said Kenneth Singini, private extension worker for Agri-Inputs agrodealers. "Every VSLA is given

booklets, folders and reporting forms to keep records easily. This helps them to see how much progress they are making," added Singini.

The VSLAs are equipped with financial management skills and record keeping skills to account for all the monies they are able to save. Machite club of Kaluzi Vilage, T/A Mazengera is one of the VSLAs that is under this initiative. The club sales shares to its members at five hundred kwacha (\$641.00) per share. In 2020/21 growing season, the club managed to buy improved inputs worth eight hundred and sixty four thousand seven hundred and fifty kwacha (\$1,102.99) which were distributed to the members according to how much they saved. Currently, Machite VSLA has already started preparing for 2021/22 growing season by saving eight hundred and sixty five thousand kwacha (\$1,108.91) for a period of six (6) weeks. Takondwa club is another VSLA that managed to save one million five hundred thousand kwacha (\$1,613.27) and procured improved inputs for its members in the current growing season. The club has now managed to save one million three hundred thousand (\$1,658.17) in twenty four (24) weeks in preparation for the next growing season. Umodzi club of Gondwa Village, T/A Mazengera is another VSLA that has managed to save nine hundred and fifty seven thousand kwacha (\$1,226.15) for the next growing season.



The VSLAs are linked to agrodealers that sale improved inputs in their areas through Community Agribusiness Advisors (CAAs). CAAs assist these VSLAs with information on which inputs agrodelaers are stocking. When the VSLAs choose the inputs they want to buy, the CAAs link the VSLAs to agrodealers in order to buy in bulk and be given discount. “We aggregate the inputs that all VSLA members want and we tell the agrodealer on which inputs are being demanded. The agrodealer offers the groups a discount for buying in bulk and they transport the inputs to the villages,” disclosed one CAA in Lilongwe. From this arrangement, the VSLAs access improved inputs easily and they do not suffer transaction costs as the agrodealer brings the inputs in the villages. Stellia Magombo is a smallholder farmer who has benefited from this arrangement of input distribution. “I used to struggle in finding money to buy inputs.

Our VSLA has made it easy for me to access improved inputs through my savings. I don’t incur transport costs anymore. The CAAs facilitate transportation of inputs to our households whilst we are home,” said Stellia. Stellia is but one of the smallholder farmers that have been able to access improved inputs through VSLAs that are linked to agrodealers through CAAs. Input distributon is now made easy through this arrangement. Most smallholder farmers of T/A Mazengera area are expected to harvest bumper yields through this initiative.

3. Public Private Partnerships Key to Development and Commercialization of Soil Health Technologies: a Case of New Area Specific Fertilizer Blends in Malawi

Malawi’s economy is highly dependent on agriculture. However, the fertilizer system which is an important component in agriculture is less developed due to among other things; lack of area specific blends, policy environment not being conducive for fertilizer blending business, registration of new fertilizer blends requiring three years of crop testing which is too long for a private investor, fertilizer quality control being very weak because the laws are currently not in place. Additionally, fertilizer mapping in Malawi stalled due to lack of partnerships since government was the only entity conducting this exercise. Looking at these gaps, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) partnered with IFAD to support SAPP, an IFAD supported investment in Malawi, to finalize the soil mapping exercise and developing fertilizer recommendations among other activities.



Gomani talking about ASFBs during a field day in Dedza

As part of its interventions, AGRA convened key stakeholders involved in the soil mapping exercise in Malawi where a National Soil Mapping Taskforce was formed to spearhead and escalate the exercise ensuring completion and having fertilizer recommendations. The Taskforce, currently headed by Department of Land Resource Conservation through Gilbert Kupunda (Deputy Director) comprise key stakeholders from Department of Agriculture Research Services (DARS), Department of Land Resource Conservation (DLRC), Department of Agriculture Extension Services (DAES), Fertilizer

Association of Malawi, Malawi Fertilizer Company, OPTICHEM and AGRA as a secretariat. “Through the partnerships, we have a protocol for fertilizer trials that we are using to validate new area specific fertilizer formulations for Maize production in Malawi, Said Franklin Gomani, Land Resource Conservation Officer for Dedza Agriculture during one of our field visits ‘On the other hand, AGRA’s partner, African Fertilizer and Agribusiness Partnership (AFAP), is strengthening capacity of the fertilizer association of Malawi. In the same vein, Story Workshop Education Trust (SWET), another AGRA’s partner, raises awareness among stakeholders of the developed appropriate area specific

fertilizers. “We have been conducting community dialogues, road shows as well as radio programs on promotion of new fertilizer blends,” said Ambele Kayuni, Director of Programs for SWET

Through AGRA’s interventions which included spearheading partnerships with private sector players, soil mapping and analysis has been finalized; five area specific fertilizers have been developed and are under validation. Private companies such as Malawi Fertilizer Company, Export Trading Group (ETG) and YARA have committed one tonne each to be used in area specific fertilizer validation.



Area Specific fertilizer trial in Demera EPA, Lilongwe

The area specific fertilizer trials has been conducted in Karonga, Rumphu, Mzimba in the Northern region and Kasungu, Nkhotakota, Lilongwe and Dedza in the Central region as well as Balaka, Chiradzulu, Mwanza and Nsanje in the South. The districts were selected based on their agro-ecological zones and are representing all the agro-ecological zones across the country which will ensure that all developed Area Specific Fertilizer Blends (ASFBs) are

well validated and marketed to all farmers across the country. “Once the ASFBs are validated, Malawi is expected to have Maize bumper yields because this fertilizer will answer the soil needs of each area,” said James Kadaya, Assistant Land Resource Conservation Officer for Balaka Agriculture.

4. Creating Demand Through Private Extension Workers

Established in 2009, Agri-Direct agrodealer has been selling various agro-inputs to a diverse number of other agrodealers and farmers in Lilongwe. Founded and run by Robert Gomonda, former director of research at ICRISAT, Agri-Direct Agrodealer has been making positive strides to the extent of making an average of MK 1 billion turnover (\$ 1, 274, 185.64) in a year. The business specializes in fertilizer and other inputs distribution beyond transportation and selling construction materials in all its 4 outlets which are located in Area 47, Kanengo and Nathenje.



Kenneth Singini, a private extension worker for Agri-Input Agrodealers

With funding from Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) through African Fertilizer Agribusiness Partnership (AFAP) in strengthening fertilizer systems through promotion of appropriate fertilizers project, Agri-Direct Agrodealer employed two private extension workers to operate in the areas of Likuni and Nathenje. AFAP has been supporting Agri-Direct with funds that have been used to cater for salaries, administrative and travel costs of the private extension workers to reach more farmers in the community.

Kenneth Singini is a private extension worker who was employed by Agri-Direct agrodealer

to man the Nathenje area. “Ever since I was employed, there has been an increased demand for inputs at Agri-Direct shops,” narrated Kenneth. Kenneth further disclosed that Agri-Direct Nathenje shop alone has managed to sale an extra of ten (10) tonnes of fertilizer and five (5) tonnes of seed this growing season through his initiatives. “I have been visiting different farmers to market products of Agri-Direct. Now, many farmers know Agri-Direct and they know that it is an answer to their quest of using reliable inputs,” added Kenneth. “I have noticed a great demand through our private extension worker. Even if the project phases out, I am going to maintain him,” said Robert Gomonda when he was asked to comment about the gains made through private extension worker.

Mawindo Enterprises is another agro-dealer that has registered exceptional gains through demand created by private extension workers. Specialised in selling farm inputs, the enterprise has outlets in Lobi, Kabwazi, Kaphuka, Linthipe, Chafumbwa and Chimbiya. “Through AFAP, we have been able to



Maize and Soybean demonstration site by Mawindo Enterprises

mount demonstration plots and this has helped to create demand since farmers learn how improved inputs perform against their traditional inputs and ways of farming,” Said Mawindo, owner of Mawindo Enterprises. “Our private extension worker organizes field days in collaboration with government agriculture officials to raise awareness on improved inputs we stock as well as Good Agricultural Practices (GAPS). Our enterprise was rumoured to be selling fake products but this has changed though our private extension worker, “added Mawindo.

Collina Msongole, a private extension worker working with Mawindo Enterprises under AFAP, disclosed that beyond hosting demonstration plots hosted by Mawindo as an agrodealer, she facilitated demonstration plots that Community Agribusiness Advisors (CAAs) hosted in communities. “Most communities are far from each other and we thought of using CAAs to host extra demonstration plots for other farmers to learn new ways of farming,” disclosed Collina. “Most farmers now have trust in inputs sold by Mawindo Enterprises. I receive calls almost on a daily basis from CAAs asking for stock availability and demand for Mawindo Enterprises has increased,” she added. For the first time since Mawindo started agro-dealing, they registered over twenty million [MK 20, 000, 000.00 (\$25, 483.7127)] of sales from seed in two (2) consecutive days this growing season despite participating in Affordable Inputs Programme (AIP), courtesy of the demand created by Collina.



Collina Msongole interacting with farmers during a field day

“We have never reached this mark. Demand for our inputs has greatly increased,” said Mawindo.

Fajo Investments has also attributed an increase in demand for their inputs arising from private extension workers. “Our business is growing. We managed to register a turnover of one hundred and fifty million (MK 150, 000, 000.00), a forty percent (40%) increase in our turnover through this initiative,” revealed Samuel Mkwate, owner of Fajo investments.

6. Youths are Embracing VBA Model to Provide Agricultural Products and Services to their Communities

The Village-Based Advisors approach is improving productivity by promoting good farming practices among smallholder farmers, with the larger goal of increasing their food security and resilience to environmental shocks. The intervention identifies keen, hardworking farmers at the village level and develops them into agro-entrepreneurs, called Village-based Advisors who provide inputs (such as improved seed), services (extension services) and advice on good farming practices to their community. These interventions offers the double benefit of creating rural employment opportunities and building a sustainable system for delivering agricultural technologies. Francis Majoni was just any other person in Champanikiza village, Traditional Authority Chiseka in Lilongwe where everyone would grow crops without following Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) due to low access to extension service in the area.



Francis showcasing his demonstration plot

improved food security and incomes of smallholder farmers in Malawi, the project which was supported by AGRA under the IFAD-AGRA IDSST partnership, introduced various interventions through MUSECO and Global Seed Company with an aim of enhancing the improved seed system in this area, where Majoni and forty three others formed Chingoli farmers club to start adopting the improved technologies. Majoni was chosen as a leader and later approved as a VBA. Since then, he has been showcasing good agricultural practices to Chingoli farmers' club through a demonstration plot that he hosts within the village.

The coming of the project in this area changed many people from subsistence to commercial farming. Farmers in Champanikiza village started growing early generation seeds that made them to start harvesting bumper yields. "Through the project, we were introduced on how to plant groundnuts using double rows in order to have a lot of yields within a small piece of land. The technology will really improve our livelihoods as on the same land where we used to have 4 bags of groundnuts worthy MWK80,000 (\$101.94) in the past we are now harvesting more than 10 bags that enables us to get an amount of not less than MWK 100, 000 (\$127.42)," said Majoni. He added that since their club started being involved in seed production, no one buys seeds from vendors. Majoni is just one of other farmers who have come out successfully after AGRA's project brought an impact to many farmers across the country through its successful interventions.

Dropping out of school at a tender age due to financial challenges, forced him to engage fully into agricultural activities. Residing at the heart of Agricultural activities in Mitundu made him exposed to agriculture and thus he treated it as the only source of his income. Mitundu Extension Planning Area (EPA) is one of the biggest EPA in Lilongwe District where extension workers are very few to reach each and every farmer making a large portion of farmers not accessing extension services.

The Strengthening Seed and other Farm Inputs Distribution systems for

7. Increasing Crop Productivity Through the Composition of Inorganic and Organic Manure

The importance of fertile soils and the need to understand the suitable application rate of both organic and inorganic manure, time, and site selection among smallholder farmers needs to be enhanced. It is against this background that AGRA under the IFAD-AGRA IDSST partnership supported an intervention that introduced activities that made farmers to understand the use of Mbeya manure which is the mixture of both inorganic and organic manure as one way of promoting soil fertility management. The intervention has been implemented through AFAP and RUMARK that have been making sure that comprehensive organic and inorganic manure recommendations should be gradually replaced by site-specific recommendations. It should be noted that, the composition of organic and inorganic manure has multiple benefits of balancing the supply of nutrients due to increased chemical and microbial activities in the soil. The composition of organic and inorganic manure promotes the decomposition of harmful elements, soil structure improvements and root development. It also increases soil's ability to keep moisture.



Mazengera showing maize cultivated using Mbeya manure

One of the farmer groups that has been engaged in the intervention is Chiwondo farmers club chaired by William Mazengera. The Club is from Chiondo village, T/A Chadza in Lilongwe. The club has benefited a lot through its members' participation in this intervention. "We have been doing farming as a source of income, but the high cost of agro-inputs more especially fertilizer has always been a worry, but we had no option. The coming in of RUMARK and AFAP with Mbeya manure making has simplified everything." Said William Mazengera. He added that the field officers have been emphasizing that Mbeya manure is designed to improve soil health,

increase yields, and ultimately boost incomes. "At the time, we were applying inorganic fertilizer, the crop stand was not quite impressive but look how maize is growing in my one acre field." explained Mazengera.

A female smallholder farmer, Alineti Fransisco from Chiwondo Village T/A Chadza is also a beneficiary of this initiative. She has been facing challenges to procure inorganic fertilizer and subsequently failing to feed her family. After hearing that RUMARK in partnership with AFAP has introduced a farmers' club to equip farmers with agricultural technical expertise to help them know how to harvest more, she thought it wise to join this group. This is where she learnt technologies such as making Mbeya manure using locally available resources from agricultural residues such as groundnuts shells, husks, and animal dung and planting unshelled groundnuts in a double row. After using Mbeya manure in 2019, Alineti's crops in her one acre Maize and two acres groundnuts and soybean fields, brought smile unto her face making her one of the highly admired women in Chiwondo Village because of achieving the ability of having food throughout the year. Alineti managed to realize MWK500, 000.00 (\$637.75) in 2019 as compared to the previous years when he could realize money less than \$350 as she was not using Mbeya manure.

Alineti has managed to build a house for her family through low cost farming. "I am a happy person today, look I have managed to build a beautiful house. This has been achieved after imparted with improved agricultural technologies by RUMARK and AFAP field officers. I am so indebted to them," she Said. Standing on her house, you could tell that she was really grateful for the success she brought to her family. Alineti has shown that women in her society can do great things if only given possible expertise to achieve their dreams. Today the family of Alineti is no longer sleeping in a leaking

house but rather their lives have completely changed to another level. This is an indication that women can be empowered financially if proper extension services can be offered to them effectively.

Lessons

Promotion of Public Private Partnership: SAPP has benefited from Multi-Seed Company (MUSECO) and RUMARK involvement in promoting Public Private Partnership in seed multiplication and distribution arrangements. MUSECO supplies basic seed to farmers under contract farming arrangements. In return, MUSECO also buys the certified seed which is produced by farmer groups. In this arrangement, the seed multiplying farmers have a readily available market. SAPP has also benefited from working with RUMARK at in all districts in agro-dealers perspective. RUMARK is building capacity of spoke agro-dealers and links them to hub agro-dealers. Through the partnership with RUMARK, district specific agro-dealer directories have been developed showing agro-dealer location, contacts and inputs that are being stocked for farmers to access. RUMARK has been training agro-dealers with skills in proper handling and storage of farm-inputs such as seeds and chemicals so that agro-dealers should also provide over the counter advisory services to farmers on the same.

Building the capacity of sector players and introduction of CAAs key to increasing farmer access to seeds and fertilizer technologies: VBAs/ Lead farmers were trained to assist in demand creation by setting up demonstrations and distribution of small packs to smallholder farmers in an effort to increase adoption of new crop technologies on offer on the market.

Knowledge and information sharing is key to support agricultural productivity among smallholder farmers: Farmers who are direct beneficiaries under this project benefited a lot from the knowledge and information sharing forums that were convened by RUMARK. Knowledge on Good Agricultural Practices for increased production of legumes and maize were shared among implementing partners, in collaboration with the Extension workers under the Ministry of Agriculture. Such information included, importance of using certified seed, Double row planting, recommended plant populations and agronomic practices to be followed. Multi Seeds Company (MUSECO) provided the farmers with insight to new crop varieties which they are producing, both legumes and maize which farmers can access for their production. RUMARK utilized the platform to introduce the farmers with trained agro dealers as a way of creating business linkages. Farmers shared their practical experiences and gained new knowledge for adoption and practice

Focus on Business Environment for SMEs: Policy and institutional capacity work should be driven by constraints against the development of the business of Agriculture especially along the target value chains. Large numbers of SMEs have invested in Agriculture and make substantial contributions to enabling SHFs to have beneficial access to technologies as well as the supply of inputs and services. Enabling the expansion of number, business and investment of SMEs is “the” pillar of sustainability for agricultural transformation programs. Therefore, most of the support to policy and institutional capacity development, should be manly driven by the needs of SMEs to thrive.



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