



Malawi

Improving Lives Through Gardening

Eliza Positani, wife and mother of five children, is revelling in her bumper harvest this year. Her family is enjoying the wide variety of vegetables she serves at mealtime - cabbage, tomatoes, okra, sweet potato, onion, rape, pumpkin leaves, and occasionally even fish.

"We get income from our garden which we use to buy fish," Eliza explains. "We used to eat vegetables only once a week, and that was if we had the money."

From growing only maize, which is drought-prone, Eliza has progressed to producing all of the nutritious vegetables above as well as groundnuts. Crop diversification has become a reality for Eliza and her family.

At the age of 25, Eliza has endured a life of hardship, including the loss of a child, and it shows on her face. She lives in a dry, dusty village called Nguluwento located 15 kilometers from Lilongwe, the capital city. Until recently, her family was never certain where their next meal would come from.

Eliza understands the expression "every cloud has a silver lining." In her case, it was the ill health of her three-year-old son Thokozani that led her on a journey toward a better life for her whole family.

Not long ago, Thokozani became malnourished and was taken by his worried mother to the Nutrition Rehabilitation Unit at Likuni Hospital in Lilongwe.

The Nutrition Rehabilitation Unit admits around 150 children like Thokozani every month during the lean period between October and April. Hospital staff attributes these high malnutrition rates to poor food intake, illness, infection, HIV and AIDS, and a telling lack of education in food utilization techniques.

With this in mind, Likuni Hospital embarked upon a demonstration garden project for the parents of malnourished children. The project is supported by the United Nations Food

and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in conjunction with Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM) and Dan Church Aid (DCA). This seemed an appropriate approach considering the high illiteracy rates of parents.

While her son received treatment at the hospital, Eliza was receiving training on better horticulture practices and ways to improve nutrition. One important lesson was methods of producing composite manure, which is a cheap way of maintaining soil fertility. Cooking demonstrations were also held, to show participants ways to prepare a wider variety of foods, and to encourage more diversified and nutritious diets.

When Eliza left the hospital with Thokozani, in addition to leaving with new knowledge and information on gardening and nutrition, she was given the practical tools to put her education to work.

She took vegetable seeds, a hoe, and a watering can back to her village and, with the help of her husband Chirwa, initiated both a community garden and a private garden in her own backyard. She implemented all the recommended agricultural practices she was taught, and today both gardens are weed-free and flourishing.

The Likuni Hospital demonstration garden project serves 96 villages spread over an area of 250 square kilometers. It reaches more than 16,800 households. Since starting the project, re-admission rates at the Nutritional Rehabilitation Unit have dropped significantly from 34% to 6% -- a clear testimony to the success of the concept as well as to the commitment and hard work of people like Eliza.



The Positanis work alongside other villagers in their community vegetable garden.



Eliza Positani and her husband Chirwa relaxing with a fully recovered Thokozani.

FAO would like to thank the following Cooperating Partners for currently supporting their emergency and rehabilitation work in Malawi:

South Africa, Spain, and the United States of America

Malawi at a Glance

Total land area: 11.78 million hectares
(Lake Malawi covers 2.3 million hectares)

Arable land: 34%

Area under rain-fed ag., 4.4 million hectares

Area of land under irrigation: 62,000 hectares
(48,000 hectares under estate farming, 14,000 hectares under smallholder farming)

Agriculture sector contribution to GDP: 35-40%

Main food crops and areas grown:

Maize throughout the country

Rice Karonga, Machinga, Mangochi, Nkhata Bay, Nkhatakota, Phalombe, Rumphu, Salima, and Zomba Districts

Cassava Dedza, Dowa, Kasungu, Lilongwe, Machinga Mulanje, Mzimba, Nkhatakota, Nkhata Bay, and Rumphu Districts.

Sorghum The Lower Districts (Chikwawa and Nsanje)

Pulses throughout the country

Groundnuts plateau areas; lake shore areas of Balaka, Mangochi, Nkhatakota, and Salima; Shire valley: Phalombe.

Yield of main food crops:

Maize 3,146,398 Metric Tonnes

Rice 106,797 Metric tonnes

Cassava 3,082,997 Metric Tonnes

Sorghum 61,350 Metric Tonnes

Pulses 41,946 Metric Tonnes

Groundnuts 254,188 Metric Tonnes

Sweet Potato 2,057,234 Metric Tonnes

Millet 29,450 Metric Tonnes

Main cash crops and areas grown:

Tobacco Lilongwe, Dowa, Nsanje, Dedza, Mzimba South, Rumphu, Kasungu, Zomba, Mangochi, Phalombe and Mchinji.

Wheat Dedza, Ntcheu, Vipha Plateau, Mchinji, Neno, Misuku Hills.

Cotton Shire Valley, Phalombe plain, Machinga, Mangochi West and Lake Shore (Salima, Nkhatakota and Karonga)

Fertilizer usage: 250,000 metric tones

Yield of main cash crops:

Tobacco 116,164,000 Metric tonnes

Wheat 2,552 Metric Tonnes

Cotton 59,052 Metric Tonnes

Number of livestock in country:

(source: Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security)

Chickens 20,518,050

Goats 2,491,826

Cattle 833,569

Pigs 720,728

Sheep 179,661

Total population: 12,884,000 (est. population was 9.9 million in last census in 1998)

Average family size: 5

Average land area per family: 1.5 hectares

HIV/AIDS infection rates: 15% of the population

Number of AIDS orphans: 500,000

FAO in Malawi

Achieving food security for all is at the heart of FAO efforts; to make sure people have regular access to enough high-quality food to leave active, healthy lives. To this end, the following activities are being implemented by FAO in Malawi:

- ❖ Enhancing Food Security & Developing Sustainable Rural Livelihoods
- ❖ Avian Influenza preparedness.
- ❖ Support small scale fish farming enterprises Promoting & Improve F&N Security of Orphans & HIV/AIDS affected Children
- ❖ Enhancing FS in Cassava based farm systems (Malawi & Zambia) Enhancing Livelihoods and Food and Nutrition Security in Vulnerable SADC countries
- ❖ Surveillance and control of Epidemic Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) and Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP) in Southern Africa
- ❖ Agricultural Input Support for Crop Diversification to Affected Smallholder Farmers in Kasungu,
- ❖ Promoting diversification of production and consumption for household food security and nutrition Ntchisi and Dowa District of Malawi

Malawi's economy is based on agriculture. The country exports tobacco, tea, sugar, cotton, and coffee. With global anti-smoking campaigns on the rise, the price of tobacco – the country's main cash crop – has been declining each year, having a negative impact on the livelihoods of tobacco farmers.

FAO's implementing partners in Malawi are: UN Agencies - WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA. Government - Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development, Ministry of Health, Department of Fisheries, Department of Forestry, and Bunda College of Agriculture (University of Malawi). NGOs - Catholic Development Commission (CADECOM), Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA), Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief (CPAR), Malawi Enterprise Zone Association (MALEZA), Management Sciences for Health (MSH), Connect Hope International/PRDO, Emmanuel International (EI), World Vision International.

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