

Project Title: Feed the Future Agricultural Diversification Activity

Project period: 2018-2019

Project Brief

Through the Agricultural Diversification Project, Youth Net and Counselling (YONECO) was one of the implementing partners taking a lead in youth entrepreneurship with financial and technical support from USAID through Feed the Future Malawi. The project sought to sustainably reduce poverty and stunting in children from Blantyre Rural; Balaka; Dedza; Machinga; Mchinji; Mangochi; Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu districts. YONECO implemented the project interventions in Balaka Machinga, Chikweo, Mchinji, and Ntcheu districts in Ulongwe, Chikweo, Zulu and Sharpe valley EPAs respectively. The project targeted two youth clubs and **20** individual youth farmers per district.

The project strived to increase the competitiveness of high-value, nutrient-rich value chains through support for agricultural enterprises and increased access to markets and finance. In addition to this, the project promoted inclusive and sustainable growth of Malawi's agricultural sector; improves the nutritional status of women and under five children. This is being achieved through a proven nutrition-sensitive approach of layering agriculture and nutrition behavior change interventions in rural communities.

The project tried to address the following challenges experienced by Malawian youth; poor access to markets, club members were not aware on the use of Inoculant in maximizing their farm produce. post-harvest losses due to lack of skills and PICS bags, lack of irrigation equipment's hence there no utilization of the land which club members had, limited opportunities for youth to access loans from money lending institutions due to lack of collateral and finally, women not taking part in decision making positions such as chairpersons in VDCs, ADCs, CBOs, youth clubs among others.

3.0 Project Goal

The overall goal of the project is to contribute to a reduction of rural poverty and malnutrition sustainably in Ntcheu, Balaka, Machinga and Mchinji districts by December, 2021

Project Objectives

- Access to Finance for Agriculture among youth increased in Ntcheu, Balaka, Machinga and Mchinji districts by December, 2021

- Access to Markets Increased in Ntcheu, Balaka, Machinga and Mchinji districts by December, 2021
- Organizational and Technical Capacity of Agricultural Enterprises increased in Ntcheu, Balaka, Machinga and Mchinji districts by December, 2021
- Production of Targeted Commodities Increased in Ntcheu, Balaka, Machinga and Mchinji districts by December, 2021
- Nutrition-Related Behaviors among women and children improved in Ntcheu, Balaka, Machinga and Mchinji districts by December, 2021
- Women's Empowerment Advanced in Ntcheu, Balaka, Machinga and Mchinji districts by December, 2021
- Capacity of Local Agriculture and Nutrition Civil Society Organizations increased in Ntcheu, Balaka, Machinga and Mchinji districts by December, 2021

Project Outcomes

- Inclusive growth of Agriculture incomes and employment
- Resiliency of small holder farming systems strengthened
- Nutritional status of women and children improved
- Women empowered

Key Successes:

- Youth club members are economically empowered through production and selling of soy milk, Tofu, Okara.
- Through VSL capital injection most youth are managing big businesses such as shops and that through profits they managed to buy livestock such as goats, pigs and chickens as their IGA. On the same, Benson Issa aged 26 from Kampani village TA Chikweo in Machinga district has managed to buy a sewing machine at 42,000.00 after he sold his local chickens
- Through community sensitization on importance of reporting GBV cases to relevant authorities some community members immediately started reporting cases of child marriages
- Following the introduction of animal farming during inception of the project, most youth farmers are operating livestock businesses as a way of generating income.
- Through capacity building on leadership some women were included in decision making positions and they are able to make decisions as expected.
- Youth club members are able to put into practice actions which relate to adaptation of climate change i.e. in Balaka, Namanolo youth club members managed to plant 120 Nimo trees at Namanolo clinic (60) and Namanolo Primary School (60) while Timvetse in Machinga district has planted 352 Grecedia and 30 trees of Cassia.

- Through use of inoculant Mchinji and Machinga has made the youth farmers to produce bumper yield of soya and groundnuts;
- Most youth farmers have established backyard gardens as one way of improving their nutrition status and this resulted into savings of expenditures;
- After selling of 35 bags of soya in 2018, Rebirth youth club in Mchinji district bought 10 small pigs as of December, 2019 there were 43 pigs



Mchinji Farmers feeding their Pigs



Handing over of soy kit and youth producing soy milk and community leaders appreciating the taste of the soy milk

SUCCESS STORY

INOCULANT' BRINGING HOPE TO FARMERS IN MCHINJI DISTRICT

YONECO in Mchinji district is working with two youth clubs namely Rebirth and Geleva in T/A Zulu. Through the project, youth club members as well as individual farmers have been trained in the use of inoculant for boosting yields especially Soya and Ground nuts. With support from the Agricultural Extension Officer YONECO embarked on a verification exercise for the participants to the soy kit training where officers took advantage of the same to monitor how individual farmers as well as youth club members have benefited from the inoculant they have received.

Even though there has been low rainfall this year, most of the farmers who planted Soya using inoculant are happy with the results as compared to the farmers who planted Soya without inoculant. Speaking to one individual farmer from Gereva, Joyce William who used Inoculant, she explained that she is a first time soya farmer but she is happy with the results since she has produced a lot as compared to other farmers who planted her soya without inoculant.

“I was very worried if my soya will come out due to the shortage of rains this year but am happy now seeing how my soya is thriving in my garden due to inoculant,” said Joyce William when she was interacting with the Extension Officer.

Interestingly, Joyce was selected as the outstanding youth individual farmer in the project by youths through technical support from Zulu EPA Agricultural Extension Worker hence being awarded the opportunity to undergo the Soy Kit training.



Picture Above shows, Joyce William (Geleva Individual Farmer) (in the middle) interacting with YONECO Field Officer Agricultural Extension Officer for Zulu EPA

IRRIGATION FARMING BENEFITS FAMILIES IN TA CHIKWEO

After realizing that rain fed agriculture cannot be relied upon, Mrs. Alekazawo embarked on irrigation farming, little did she know, she is now making more money like never before. The young woman, aged 28 comes from GVH Mpunga T/A Chikwewo in Machinga district. She is an individual farmer under Mtendere Youth Club who are implementing Agri-business activities. She has a backyard garden close to her house where she grows different vegetables after being sensitized by YONECO Field Officer.

Mrs Alekezawo is now swimming in money as she has started selling the vegetables at Chikweo trading centre. On daily basis she sales K2, 500.00. According to the young farmer, her family no longer begs for money to buy relish or basic commodities but she is using the proceeds from the sales to buy what she want.

With the profit, the young farmer has also managed to buy a she goat at K25, 000. She is optimistic that very soon she will have a considerable number of goats.



Mrs. Alekazawo in her garden and posing with her goats

TIME TO PROVE THAT KNOWLEDGE IS POWER



Youth in Ntcheu have been engaged in different projects which ended up in information sharing. It was very difficult to capture the success and have support from chiefs because such information sharing would target specific people like the youth. Other community members were left behind and were not able to appreciate the impact the youth through such project are bringing in the community. In dealing with the

community perception on young people, YONECO through AG-Div project provided capacity building to youth members from Umodzi Youth Club, Timvane and Individual Farmers on how they can use Soy kit in the production of milk and other nutrition food. After the training, chiefs and members from the community of GVH Agabu in Shape Valley EPA TA Ganya had high expectation from the youth on how the skills and knowledge will be used.

In proving that knowledge is power and that has really invested in them, they get organized and arranged to produce milk during Soy Kit handover and Micro grants distribution which YONECO with financial support from the project organized. The youth demonstrated and proved in the presence of chiefs and District Key Project stakeholders from trade, Irrigation and the office of the District Youth Office. They followed all steps using the skills which were invested in them during the training and they produce milk from soy beans using soy kit. The doubt which was in the mind of chiefs and some community members was removed.

Chiefs were asked to view the product to appreciate that in them there is skills and knowledge in using soy kit in production industry. Later chiefs were shared tumblers of milk to drink and appreciate how the youth have prepared to venture into production and sales of soy beans product. Afterwards, GVH Agabu who led the chiefs in milk drinking said that he will be drinking milk tea which he was not expecting to be happening in his area. The youth were encouraged to utilize the skills and the knowledge they were equipped through the project.