**SVTP compensates communities, gives hope for a fresh start**

When the final route of the canal to be constructed in the Shire Valley was finally approved and announced, it was no secret that the canal would meander its way through forests, across rivers and streams, farming fields and even close to human settlements on its quest to provide irrigation water.

According to the World Bank and Malawi Government policies, all Project Affected Persons (PAPs), needed to be compensated for their losses to ensure that their livelihoods improve and that they are not turned into destitutes by the loss of their land.

In order to ensure that the compensation received was properly utilised, SVTP came up with a plan that ensured smooth administration of the compensation to the PAPs. The PAPs were first trained in Financial Literacy to ensure that they were prepared to handle large sums of money as most of them were getting such huge sums of money for the first time in their lives. The training also included a module on Gender Based Violence (GBV) to enlighten the PAPs on the dangers of GBV and how this can be prevented. Spouses were encouraged to attend the training together after which they made plans for their money.

After the training, all the PAPs were advised to open bank accounts at a bank of their choice. The PAPs received their compensations through these bank accounts. Paying out compensation money through bank accounts helped to reduce the red tape that, from experience clogs the system ending up with delayed payments and other challenges. The success was also attributed to the open door policy during the processing of the funds. PAPs and all concerned stakeholders were informed of the progress at every level of the funds processing and every PAP had the liberty to call the SVTP office to follow up on the progress. This created trust between the Project Management Team (PMT) and the PAPs and also quelled off any insinuations of corruption in the processing of the funds.

One major lesson learnt throughout the process was the importance of having a robust Grievance Redress Mechanism as most of the issues were resolved through the already established Grievance Redress Committees. The second lesson was the recognition of the need to provide special assistance in banking transactions to PAPs with special needs such as the illiterate and the elderly.

All in all, what has been observed is that most of the PAPs have used the funds to strengthen their businesses, buy other pieces of land and even constructing new structures including dwelling houses and business structures. What is pleasing is that there have not been major incidents of gender based violence, which is a clear sign that the training prior to the payment of the compensation was paying off.

“My wife and I sat down to plan how we were going to spend the compensation money following the training conducted by the project. We decided to buy new land using the money. I am so glad to say that we finally bought new land. It could have been unfortunate for us to use the money for other things rather than developing our household,” said Ganizani Thomu one of the PAPs.

The Government of Malawi has so far given out K1.25 Billion in compensation.