



Irrigate Malawi

Magazine of the Shire Valley Transformation Programme: Issue 4, March, 2021

SVTP championing land tenure security in Chikwawa



Vice President Chilima conducts a supervisory visit to the SVTP



Minister of Agriculture conducts a monitoring visit to the SVTP



Chikwawa Physical Development Plan launched



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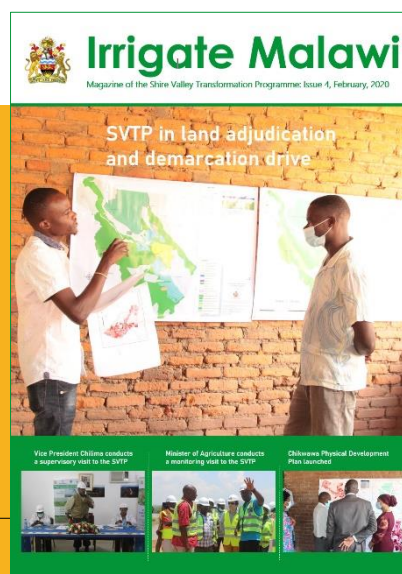
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Remarks from the SVTP Acting Project Coordinator Dr. Stanley Chakhumbila Khaila



I am pleased to present the fourth edition of the Shire Valley Transformation Programme newsletter!

This newsletter provides some highlights from the Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP).

The SVTP made progress in major construction works at the Intake and the first 6km of the Main Canal. The construction of the coffer dam and 13 drainage works has been completed. The Programme also continued excavation works on the Main Canal.

The Programme was honored to host the Vice President of the Republic of Malawi Right Honorable Dr. Saulos Klaus Chilima at the construction site on 14th December, 2020. The Vice President visited the Programme to supervise progress made since commencement of construction works in April, 2020. The Minister of Agriculture Honorable Lobin Lowe and the Parliamentary Committee on Government Assurances and Public Sector Reforms also conducted monitoring visits to the Programme site on 29th November, 2020 and 6th January, 2021 respectively to appreciate progress made and also to discuss challenges faced in order to ensure smooth implementation of the Programme. Minister of Lands Honorable Kezzie Msukwa visited Chikwawa on 19th November, 2020 to appreciate progress made by the Ministry of Lands in the land adjudication and demarcation exercise.

The Chikwawa District Council with support from the SVTP is conducting a land adjudication and demarcation exercise in collaboration with the Ministry of Lands and the Land Reform Implementation Unit. Surveys were conducted to establish ownership and to ascertain boundaries and sizes of different land parcels falling under the Programme. So far 20,002 land parcels have been adjudicated and demarcated.

In recognition that the country has been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Programme has intensified remedial measures to ensure that all workers on site are protected. This is being done by ensuring that all staff adhere to all set public health measures.

I am hopeful that you will find this newsletter informative!

Vice-President impressed with the SVTP

Story by: Alice Kaunda



(Left-Right) The Vice President making remarks during the briefing (L), touring the construction site (R)

The Vice President of the Republic of Malawi the Right Honorable Dr. Saulos Klaus Chilima expressed satisfaction with the progress of construction of the much-awaited Shire Valley Irrigation Scheme in Chikwawa that will see the transformation of smallholder farming into commercial.

Speaking when he visited the SVTP construction site in Chikwawa, the Vice President described the SVTP as a timely, transformative programme, one of its kind. He said,

“This investment will eventually bring industry here for agro-processing pretty much in line with our Malawi Agenda 2063. One of the pillars of the Agenda is agriculture commercialization and another is industrialization. This Programme is going in the right direction. We have been crying for a long time that we have a lot of water we are not utilizing. This is indeed best in class.”

In terms of progress, the Vice President reiterated Government support to smooth implementation of the Programme. He commended the Programme for progress made in the nine months since construction started.

“So far, the Programme does not have any issues so I will not create issues for them. We just wish them well. This is quite a timely, transformative Programme,” he said.

SVTP Project Coordinator, Dr. Stanley Chakhumbila Khaila emphasized the importance of collaboration between different sectors including transport, energy and water if the Programme is to succeed. He cited an example of the rehabilitation of the Bangula-Marka railway line which will greatly improve transportation of farm produce and processed products to markets within Malawi and Mozambique.

About 223,000 farmers are expected to benefit from the Programme once completed. Utilization of the water for irrigation by farmers is expected to start in 2023.

Agriculture Minister, Parliamentary Committee touts the SVTP

Story by: Alice Kaunda

Minister of Agriculture Honorable Lobin Lowe, MP says government will ensure that the SVTP materializes to benefit smallholder farmers in the targeted districts of Chikwawa and Nsanje.

Honorable Lowe said this when he and his Deputy Honorable Agnes Nkusa Nkhoma, MP visited the SVTP construction site to monitor progress. He commended the strong collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture and other Programme implementing ministries and underscored the importance of monitoring key performance indicators at all levels to ensure that outputs are achieved.



SVTP's Engineer James Chikhungu briefing the Minister during the site tour

"I am impressed with the progress the Programme has made in the few months since construction work started. We have come this far because of collaborative efforts of all implementing partners. We will ensure that there are clear key performance indicators to monitor progress at each level. As a ministry we are committed to seeing this Programme materialize and transform the lives of farmers in the Shire Valley," he said.

Honorable Lowe further said once the Programme has been completed, Malawi will be transformed from a predominantly exporting country to a producing and exporting country.



Engineer Martin Chizalema from the SVTP briefing Parliamentary Committee members at the canal

The Parliamentary Committee on Government Assurances and Public Sector Reforms also undertook a monitoring visit to the SVTP. Speaking on behalf of the Committee during the site tour, the Chairperson of the Committee Honorable Noel Lipipa, MP lauded the Programme for the progress made in construction work despite the limitations brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are very satisfied with the progress the Programme has made this far despite the brief suspension of works due to COVID-19. We are happy that the Programme is on track. The Committee will lobby Parliament to continue supporting the Programme with the much-needed resources for it to be viable and to stay on track," he said.

The Committee also inquired about measures the Programme has put in place to ensure that people in the Programme area are protected from gender-based violence. The Programme has put in place a GBV Service Provider, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace to specifically manage all issues related to gender based violence and child protection.

Construction of the canal in pictures



- 1: Concrete paving of the canal in progress*
2-3: Some of the paved concrete sections of the canal
4: A bridge under construction across the canal
5-6: Box culverts under construction as part of drainage works
-

Construction of the Intake and Flume in Pictures

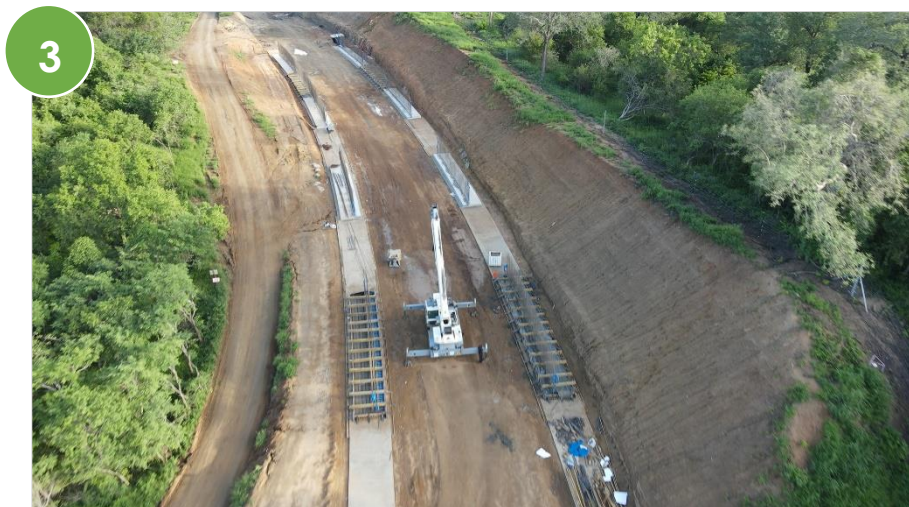


1: Construction of the cut-off wall at the intake

2: Excavations at the intake

3&4: Construction of the flume in progress

The SVTP from the Sky



*1&2: A backfilled box culvert (1), drainage works in progress (2)
3: The flume under construction*

Chikwawa District Physical Development Plan (CDPDP) and local land use plans launched

Story by: Alice Kaunda



Honorable Mia viewing some of the displayed maps

The Chikwawa District Council developed a Physical Development Plan and local land use plans with assistance of the Ministry of Lands in accordance with the Physical Planning Act of 2016.

The plan will guide orderly and progressive development of land in the district while taking into consideration social and economic development aspects of all sector activities and projects. The CDPDP and accompanying local land use plans have been prepared as part of the Shire Valley Transformation Programme whose focus includes securing land tenure.



Honorable Mia speaking during the launch

Speaking during the handover ceremony, Deputy Minister of Lands Honorable Abida Mia underscored the importance of orderly and proper land management to the development of the district and the country as a whole.

“Land is an important resource for social-economic development. This Physical Development Plan will assist in bringing about collaboration of development activities by different players in the district.

This will assist in ensuring that there is order

in the way land is used in the district especially for development. Specifically, for the Shire Valley Transformation Programme, the plan will assist with opening up land for irrigation and agro-processing. This will attract investors to the district and to the whole country,” she said.

Chief Director in the Ministry of Local Government Dr Esmie Kainja said the plan is a great boost to government’s decentralization drive which gives power to councils to implement development projects.

“The handover of this Physical Development Plan proves that councils have the capacity to manage huge projects contrary to the belief that is there that councils have no capacity. This ceremony attests to that. It is very possible for ministries to devolve powers to councils. I would therefore like to urge the council to implement this physical development plan to guide development in the district. As a ministry we are committed to provide support,” she said.

Speaking on behalf of Chikwawa District Council, Chairman of the Council, Councilor Gerald Bede said: “As a Council we feel so privileged to have this plan which will provide guidance in the way land should be utilized in Chikwawa District. We will work with different stakeholders and communities in the district to ensure that we achieve its set objectives. We are looking forward to benefit from the irrigation scheme currently being constructed by the Shire Valley Transformation Programme. The project will bring a lot of development hence need for proper utilization of land. This development plan is a big push towards achieving development in the district.”



Counselor Bede receiving the CDPDP from Honorable Mia

The Chikwawa Physical Development Plan was developed using a participatory approach and in consultation with community members and other stakeholders in the district.

The Plan is the first comprehensive physical development plan to be prepared for Chikwawa District under the land reform programme activities of which among others is to assist in piloting the implementation of new land laws before rolling out nation-wide.

Following the launch of the Physical Development Plan, the Chikwawa District Council is formulating an Urban Structure Plan which seeks to regulate how residential, industrial and other development areas should be developed. Through the Plan, major market areas in the district including Dyeratu, Nchalo and Ngabu will be transformed into towns. Through the Plan, the Council has allocated a site for the construction of a new market at Dyeratu whose construction is currently underway. There are also plans to relocate the district hospital to a new site as it is close to the Shire River. The Plan also includes improvement of roads and construction of a community stadium among other things.

20,002 land parcels adjudicated and demarcated in Chikwawa

Story by: Alice Kaunda

Land has become a scarce resource in Malawi as the population continues to increase rapidly. As a matter of priority, the Government of Malawi revised the Land Act in 2016 to give ownership of land to the citizens unlike in the past when all land was vested in the presidency.

In order to secure land for the smallholder farmers, all land currently being used will be adjudicated and demarcated under the Shire Valley Transformation Programme. Farmers will have records (name of the owner, size of the land, map, photo of the owner, etc.) of their land parcels as evidence of ownership. They will be requested to consolidate their land and form large farms for commercial farming either as registered business entities or cooperatives. Those who will have consolidated their land, will use the land as share capital in the consolidated farming business. Customary estate titles will be issued to certify land ownership to the groups that will have consolidated their land.

The SVTP through the Ministry of Lands and the Land Reform Implementation Unit have adjudicated and demarcated 20,002 land parcels so far in the Phase-I implementation area of the project on behalf of the Chikwawa District Council. Chikwawa is one of the districts in the country where the new Land Laws are being piloted.

The Minister of Lands, Honorable Kezzie Msukwa together with his Deputy Honorable Abida Mia visited Chikwawa to monitor progress of the customary land demarcation and adjudication exercise being conducted in the district. This process of customary land demarcation and adjudication will give people in the district full ownership of the land.



Honorable Msukwa interacting with land owners

Speaking during the visit, Honorable Msukwa underscored the importance of the process to the success of the SVTP and to all future developments to be undertaken in the district.

“Land demarcation and adjudication provides maximum security to land owners as no one can come and encroach that land. This is in line with the new Land Act (2016). This will ensure that land is passed on to generations. Not even government or private investors can grab that land,” he said.



Ms. Judith Richard

One community member, Judith Richard of Maganga village said she feels confident that her land has been secured from future boundary wrangles and encroachment.

“At first we were worried that the government would take our land away. Through awareness meetings, I have learnt that it is important to have our land surveyed and registered to ensure full ownership for our children and even future generations. No one will come and claim ownership or even encroach my land as I and my family will have a certificate to show ownership. This will also make it easy to consolidate land for commercial farming,” she said.

It is expected that at least 20 large farmers each measuring 500 hectares will be established during the first phase of the Programme.

SVTP engages land owners on commercial agriculture

Story by: Alice Kaunda



Mr. Masebo speaking during one of the village outreach campaigns

The SVTP conducted 49 village outreach campaigns focusing on land consolidation and the formation of Smallholder Owned Commercial Farming Enterprises (SOCFEs). These campaigns were aimed at raising awareness to land owners on the importance of land consolidation, commercial farming, types of business entities farmers can register and types of farming models to make an informed decision. 11,162 landowners comprising 4,566 men and 6,596 women attended the meetings.

Representatives from Phata Cooperative were invited to share their experience in land consolidation and commercial farming. The representatives shared how they consolidated land for commercial farming and how they addressed challenges from the process, farm management, marketing, sharing of dividends etc.

Following the campaigns, all land owners expressed interest to consolidate their land and engage into commercial farming.

Commenting on the campaigns, the SVTP Agriculture Commercialization and Development Specialist Mr. Adrian Masebo expressed satisfaction with the feedback from the farmers on the anticipated land consolidation and commercial farming.

There are four farm business models farmers will use in their farming ventures.

- ✓ Agribusiness model where a farm manager (can be a company or an individual) is employed to manage the estate;
- ✓ Smallholder Agribusiness model where farmers manage the entity on their own;
- ✓ Leased farms model where part of the farm is leased to individuals and entities to generate revenue; and,
- ✓ Joint venture (JV) with an agribusiness entity that covers all farm production for the supply of commodity or industrial crops.

Some of these models are being used by some cooperatives within Chikwawa including Phata, Kasinthula and KAMA.

Chikwawa District pledges support to the SVTP

Story by: Alice Kaunda

The chiefs looked in awe as machines moved to and from the construction site. Men and women clad in work suits could be seen busy excavating the site and constructing drainage works, evidence that the construction of the much-awaited Shire Valley Irrigation Scheme has commenced. To these chiefs, a long-time tale of the construction of the irrigation scheme in the Shire Valley had materialized.

The SVTP engaged the Chikwawa District Consultative Committee with an aim of sharing progress of the Programme and challenges to be addressed with support from the District. The Committee comprises of representatives of the District Council including councilors, stakeholders at district level including the private sector, police, representatives of NGOs and traditional leaders. The District Executive Committee is the Secretariat of the Consultative Committee.



(Left-Right) Senior Chief Ngabu giving input during the meeting (L), the Committee interacting with project staff on site

Specialists from the Programme made presentations on progress under different components and challenges faced by the Programme. Committee members had an opportunity to ask questions and solicit responses from the specialists and the representative of the contractor.

Members also toured the construction site to appreciate progress. Speaking during the visit, Senior Chief Ngabu who represented the Chairperson of the Committee Paramount Chief Lundu, expressed satisfaction with the developments on the ground.

“As traditional leaders we will engage our communities to instill in them the spirit of ownership of this project. This will help people to guard the resources on site jealously. For example, they will be able to report any suspicious activities like theft of materials from the site. We have agreed to form a taskforce to look at issues of security of materials so that the project does not stop due to lack of materials. We will also engage our communities to avoid cutting down of trees as this has potential to cause siltation of the canal in future,” he said.

Chairperson of the Chikwawa District Council, Councilor Gerald Bede echoed comments made by Senior Chief Ngabu.

“Coming to witness the development on the ground today, has given me hope that farmers in this district are going to be transformed indeed. As a Council, we will provide support both to the contractor and the project team to ensure smooth implementation of the project. This is our project,” he said. The Programme regularly engages the District Consultative Committee however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic physical meetings have been put on hold until the situation improves.

Community Engagement



(Left-Right) Contractor engagement with the Area Development Committee (L), community sensitization meeting on rock blasting by contractor



(Left-Right) training for project affected persons who bought livestock from their compensation proceeds (L), demonstrating methods of goat tethering during a training at Tambo Centre in Supuni GRC



(Left-Right) training in fish pond construction and fisheries management at Kashoni Village, T/A Chapananga in Chikwawa (L), joint meeting between a community in T/A Mbenje and Mwabvi Wildlife Reserve on joint wildlife

Construction workers sensitized on GBV, Workers Committee established

Story by: Dan Chisoni



An awareness meeting on GBV in progress

As cases of Gender Based Violence (GBV) continue to make headlines at national level, it has been observed that these cases may occur anywhere. It is perceived that any rising labor influx and employment opportunities within a particular area can yield various social afflictions, gender-based violence (GBV) inclusive.

The Contractor for the construction of the Shire Valley Irrigation Scheme, Conduril, has employed over 400 people. There are prospects that the company will employ more, news that delights the local community. But as communities look at social economic benefits from the project, there is also a risk of rising cases of GBV. A proactive intervention is therefore necessary.

It is against this backdrop that the SVTP GBV Service Provider Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace-Chikwawa has been conducting outreach campaigns targeting construction workers on GBV issues.

Conduril having realized the importance of issues of GBV and child protection mobilized workers for these special sessions.

So far two sessions have been undertaken. One session was an awareness meeting involving all workers at the same time and the other a tool box talk where construction workers were divided into smaller groups.

Speaking during one of the sessions, Team Leader for the Service Provider, Fr. Mathews Semba advised workers to break the silence and persistently report GBV cases and refrain from perpetrating the same.

“The fight against GBV begins with speaking out once victimized. We want you to report any case and refrain from perpetrating abuse. The money you are getting should be used to develop yourselves and your families and not indulging in practices that will jeopardize your lives and those of people in this area,” he said.



(Top: CCJP officials and representatives from Conduril conducting outreach on GBV to construction workers (Bottom Left-Right) Training for Workers Committee Executive in progress (L), Members of the Committee with CCJP and District Labour Office officials (R)

A Workers Committee has been established to handle all labour and GBV related issues. The contractor and the Service Provider facilitated the election of 12-member executive committee which was trained by the Service Provider and the District Labour Office on their role. The contractor also trained them on grievance reporting. A workplan and a constitution was developed to guide the committee's operations.

One of the executive members, Mr. Laston Andsen described the training as worthwhile and very enriching.

“We have been equipped with the much-needed knowledge to detect GBV cases and labour rights violations. We are now aware of the steps we can take if such cases arise.”

The engagement with the construction workers was complemented by a series of mobile van sensitizations to the surrounding communities. 93 community volunteers (GBV Champions) including 53 men and 40 women from the five traditional authorities have been trained in GBV surveillance and reporting in the bid to scale up community-based efforts in the fight against GBV. Two champions were identified from each village and given a mobile phone to enable them to report cases of GBV to the One-Stop Centre and the Service Provider.

The Programme will continue engaging different stakeholders including construction workers and communities to ensure GBV detection, prevention and mitigation.

SVTP revamps One-Stop Centre

Story by: Dan Chisoni

The SVTP GBV Service Provider CCJP intensified efforts to revamp the Chikwawa District One-Stop Centre which serves as place where GBV survivors find all necessary support. At the One-Stop Centre, survivors can access services from the District Health Office, Social welfare, Gender Office, Education Office, Police and the Judiciary, all in one place.

Through the Service Provider, the Programme has strengthened coordination between different stakeholders in GBV case handling including the Police, District Social Welfare Office, and the District Health Office. Monthly meetings are held by the stakeholders and the Service Provider to discuss and share data on reported cases. Alerts are provided whenever there are urgent GBV cases to be handled. This coordination has restored the utilization of the facility which among other things provide medical examination and counselling to survivors. The One-stop initially lacked coordination among relevant stakeholders and community awareness of its existence.

The Programme undertook some maintenance works at the facility, including replacement of damaged room locks, window pens and lockable cabinets among others. This secured a total revamp of the facility.



(Left-Right) The rehabilitated One-Stop Centre

The One-Stop Centre not only serves communities within the SVTP impact area but the whole district. For instance, in October 2020 a rape case involving a 14-year-old girl (outside the SVTP impact area) was reported to the One-Stop Centre through a tip-off to the Service Provider. Stakeholders under the facility acted with urgency to assist the girl to get all the necessary assistance. The girl was quickly ferried to the One-Stop Centre for medical examination and treatment while the police arrested the culprit. The girl was then admitted at Chikwawa District Hospital for further treatment. NGOs in the district also assisted with food and other items. The Minister of Gender visited the girl in hospital and strongly condemned such malpractices. The survivor was relocated to another place outside the district as a safety measure.

The urgent coordination in handling the rape case was made possible through the One-Stop Centre.

SVTP in a COVID-19 prevention drive

Story by: Alice Kaunda

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected progress of development initiatives in Malawi and the SVTP has not been spared. Preventive measures have been put in place to ensure that all stakeholders involved in the project are safe and protected.

The Blantyre District Health Office was engaged by the SVTP to conduct an information session to sensitize staff on COVID-19. An action plan was developed highlighting precautionary measures to be undertaken to avoid the spread of the virus and to manage cases where necessary. The plan emphasizes practices to be followed to mitigate the spread of the virus including hand washing, wearing masks, disinfection of offices, social distancing and reporting any signs of illness among others.

As a way of raising awareness on the pandemic, the Programme used the public address van to sensitize people on the disease since physical meetings could not be done. Three types of radio jingles from the Ministry of Health were customized to the SVTP and aired on GAKA and Capital radio stations. Posters and fliers were designed and printed and posted along the construction site to bring awareness to construction workers and the community at large, on prevention and what could be done when in contact with suspected cases of COVID 19. Messages were also shared on SVTP social media pages.

The Programme emphasizes hand washing, social distancing and wearing of masks at the construction site to ensure that workers are protected from the spread of Corona virus.

The SVTP construction site was closed for 3 weeks after registering 11 cases of Covid-19 in 2020.

The Programme will continue to work with all stakeholders including the contractor on prevention of the spread of the virus.



Top: Staff from Blantyre District Health Office training SVTP staff on COVID-19

Middle: One of the posters on COVID at the construction site

Down: Construction workers wearing masks

SVTP preserves cultural heritage

The Monuments Relics Act Malawi requires that all development initiatives must ensure that from planning stages to implementation, all monuments and relics are protected. In compliance with the Act, the SVTP engaged the Department of Monuments and Museums to conduct a cultural heritage impact assessment. The SVTP canal currently under construction will pass through some areas that have a rich cultural heritage hence need to rescue cultural materials for preservation. 19 archeological sites have been identified in the phase 1 area of the Programme. Excavated materials are being analyzed at the Department's laboratory in Nguludi.

“What this irrigation project has done is what all developers ought to do,” said Dr. Oris Malijani, Principal Geo-Archeologist responsible for research in the Department of Museums and Monuments.

Read the full story: <https://svtp.gov.mw/2021/01/23/svtp-preserves-cultural-heritage/>



(Top-Bottom: Excavations in progress

.... some SVTP Quick Facts



1,329 people compensated
MK 1.3 Billion paid in
compensations



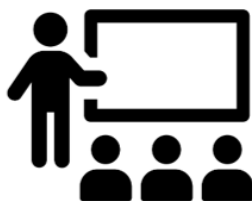
20,002 land parcels
dermacated and
adjudicated in project area



19 archeological sites
identified and excavated
including
1 active shrine



410 people employed
(382 locals, 28 expatriates)
(373 male, 32 female)
239 from Chikwawa
143 from other districts



Gender based violence prevention
One-stop centre revamped
A workers union established
Workers sensitized on GBV

Bringing fish closer to home

Story by: Gospel Mwalwanda

Despite her advanced age, Margret Sabe vowed to avail herself at the fish ponds whenever there is work to be done there. Sabe is a member of a group in Nsanje that has set up a fish farm on the east bank of the Shire River, and says the initiative has reduced the number of human deaths from crocodile attacks in the area. The fish farm has provided an alternative source of fish. This has further helped the locals to generate income and conserve the environment.



Margret Sabe at one of the ponds

“This is why I am always here when told to come although I am aged,” the mother of eight said, referring to the Kadansana Fish Farm to which she belongs.

The fish farm is in the area of Group Village Headman (GVH) Chipondeneni, Traditional Authority Mlolo in Nsanje. It is a community initiative aimed at improving lives of its members’ households while at the same time conserving the environment. Kadansana Fish Farm is one of several fisheries groups, people in Chikwawa and Nsanje have established to stop their dependence on the Shire River as a source of fish and income.

The Shire flows through Elephant Marsh in Chikwawa and Nsanje as it heads southwards to Mozambique and into the Indian Ocean. It has for years been a source of livelihood for most of the inhabitants of the two districts. However, overfishing and bad fishing practices in the river have led to the reduction of catches, prompting locals to turn to fish farming as an alternative source of fish and a way to make money. But the people needed a push to bring their dream to fruition and as luck would have it, they got it from one of the country’s biggest development projects-Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP).

The SVTP comprises a component on conservation with funding from GEF, intended to lessen the impact on the environment at all stages of the project’s implementation. GEF has contributed \$5.5 million to cater for wildlife issues and environmental conservation in Lengwe National Park, Majete and Mwabvi Wildlife Reserves, Elephant Marsh and Matandwe Forest Reserve.

SVTP Natural Resource Management Coordinator Daulos Mauambeta said the component was vital for catchment management and conservation of natural resources that are along the route of the canal, which will cover slightly more than 100 Km upon completion.

“We don’t want siltation in the canal. If this will happen, the canal will not be effective,” Mauambeta, said in an interview.

He said: “We appeal to everyone to get involved in catchment management so that the intended irrigation project can achieve its objective.”

And it is under the natural resources sub-component that Kadansana Fish Farm received assistance from SVTP to build 5 additional ponds to boost production of fish, which is the main source of animal protein in Malawi. Four ponds were prior constructed under the Shire River Basin Management Programme. So far Kadansana Fish Farm has 9 fish ponds.

“We used to rely on the Shire River as our source of fish. We didn’t know one could do fish farming as a business. We are wiser now,” said Peter Muguduzeni, Secretary for Kadansana Fish Farm.



One of the new fish ponds at Kadansana Fish Farm

To derive maximum benefits from fish farming, the locals are practicing integrated farming, growing rice and fish together in the same ponds. This is called Rice-Fish Culture. One fish harvest earned the farmers nearly half a million Kwacha. The locals used part of the money to buy essential goods for their households.

“We are healthy because the fish is within reach and we eat it whenever we want,” Muguduzeni said at a development meeting in the area of GVH Chipondeni.

The fisheries sector contributes more than 70 per cent of the dietary animal protein intake of Malawians and 40 per cent of the total protein supply, according to Malawi’s Annual Economic Report 2020. The report, produced by the Department of Economic Planning and Development, says there are an estimated 15,465 fish farmers in the country, of whom 61.51 are males while 38.49 are females.

Malawi has 10,007 fish ponds with a total pond area of 251.59 hectares. Per capita fish consumption is at 8.72kg per year, which is below 13-15kg recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Laban Silli, District Fisheries Officer for Nsanje underscored the importance of having fish ponds in Nsanje and Chikwawa to ease pressure exerted on the Shire River due to overfishing.

“Despite the fact that there is the Shire River which is the source of fish for the locals, catches are dwindling due to overfishing resulting from over population,” Silli told this writer.

He said government was making effort to promote aquaculture using pond-based fish farming in an effort to end hunger, reduce malnutrition and create jobs for the local communities.

The fishing industry is also a major source of employment, currently employing about 60,636 people. Additionally, it indirectly employs more than half a million people, and supports more than 1.6 million.

Another fish farm group that is also benefitting from the presence of the 14-year SVTP is at Phala Irrigation Scheme in the area of GVH Nantusi, T/A Makhuwira, in Chikwawa. The group consists of 110 farmers who are engaged in different agricultural activities at the scheme and decided to integrate the activities with fish farming. The group started fish farming in October 2019. The farmers' appeal for assistance towards the construction of ponds initially received no response, until SVTP came along. SVTP showed interest and provided, among other items, materials for construction of fish ponds, training, fingerlings, feed and harvesting nets through the GEF component.

The fish farm at Phala Irrigation Scheme recently had its first harvest. The spectacle drew tens of locals who looked bewildered, not believing that fish could be farmed just like crops.



Fish harvesting at Phala Irrigation Scheme

GVH Nantusi, who also witnessed the harvest and was visibly happy, said the harvest was the culmination of months of his subjects' hard work and determination to have fish on their doorstep.

"With these fish ponds, we have been empowered economically. Besides, fish is very good for our bodies. We need more of these ponds," GVH Nantusi said, watching fish being hauled out of a pond.

Annie Magombo, Chikwawa District Fisheries Officer, said there was great need to support fish farming upland to allow fish in the Shire River to breed. The district currently has 86 active fish ponds.

Magombo said communities in the district see the Shire River as their source of fish protein. But she noted that the fish in the river has been depleted in recent years due to increased human population.

"The support SVTP is providing in the Elephant Marsh is timely and commendable. These ponds show that it is possible to conserve fishery resources," she said during the harvest day in Nantusi Village.

Fighting exploitation over Nsanje's priceless tuber

Story by: Gospel Mwalwanda



A member of Mwanda Thabalaba Club with some Thabalaba tubers

A young man travelled to Nsanje in search of a root tuber that was reputed to possess medicinal remedies. The man was looking for the root not because he had a health problem and wanted a cure, he was a vendor and wanted the root for resell. The vendor was looking for a root tuber of a perennial climbing plant called *Columba* which is found in south eastern Africa, including Malawi. The plant produces thick fleshy yellow root tuber called *Thabalaba* in Nsanje or Njoka in Yao.

At a glance *Thabalaba*, or *Jateorhiza palmate* the scientific name, looks like any other tuberous root and can easily be mistaken for cassava with its brownish colour. But *Thabalaba*, which is found in the Matandwe Forest Reserve in Nsanje, is no ordinary root tuber. It has monetary value as it is used in the manufacture of different medicines. The root has a bitter taste and is said to be useful for treating fever, diarrhea, rheumatism, and for relieving vomiting and nausea, among other uses. With such uses, *Thabalaba* is attracting vendors from distant places to Mwanda Village in the area of Traditional Authority Malemia in Nsanje District, who go there to buy the root tuber.

But most of the vendors are cheats. They capitalize on the locals' ignorance about the importance and real value of the root to offer very low prices, knowing the locals will have no option.

It is against this background that Mwanda Thabalaba Group in collaboration with the Department of Forest and the Environmental Affairs Department is implementing Access Benefit Sharing (ABS) Community Protocols in Nsanje district.



Members of Mwanda Thabalaba Club cutting Thabalaba tubers

Mwanda Thabalaba Group which is part of a Village Natural Resources Management Committee is a communal, forest management and user group within the Mwanda Forest Co-management block established in 2012 under the Shire River Basin Management Programme. The group was established under a co-management arrangement with the Department of Forest. Under the co-management arrangement, the group co-manages the Matandwe Forest reserve while benefitting from resources from the reserve.

Mwanda Thabalaba Group comprises locals, most of whom are women who partly earn their livelihood extracting Columba roots in Matandwe Forest Reserve, covering 26,381 hectares. Columba roots are found on alluvial soils along either rivers or streams, and under or between rocks at low altitudes. The root tubers are processed into slices and dried. It is the dried roots that are sold to vendors.

Mwanda Thabalaba Group Leader Khelesi Eliya, said that although they had been selling the Columba root for some time, they had nothing to show for their hard work because of the low prices vendors offered.

“A vendor would come and fill a three-ton pickup after buying the root at K20 or even K10 per Kg. We are told they make a fortune when they sell the root to exporters,” she said.

The vendors resell Columba roots to exporters at either K600 or K1,000 per Kg, according to John Banda, the District Environmental Officer for Nsanje.

“And when the root is exported, it is sold at between US\$2.0 to US\$3.00 per Kg [K1,500 to K2,250],” Banda said, adding that the Columba roots are processed into pharmaceutical products abroad.

Malawi exported 30,000 Kg of Columba roots in the 2019-2020 financial year, according to Malawi’s Annual Economic Report 2020.

The coming of the Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP), has brought a glimmer of hope for Mwanda Thabalaba Group with the introduction of Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) protocols that ensures that communities that own generic resources benefit from their

utilization and are protected from unscrupulous buyers. At the moment, Mwanda Thabalaba Group is the only community group in the country currently piloting ABS Community Protocols.

Malawi is party to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS). Through the ABS Protocol, the Government of Malawi through the Environmental Affairs Department is ensuring that there is fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources. The access and benefit sharing (ABS) regulations address challenges that communities face in ensuring sustainable utilization and conservation of genetic resources. The challenges include illegal access of genetic resources, unequal sharing of benefits arising from use, loss of export revenue and unsustainable harvesting of resources.

“The Environmental Affairs Department (EAD) through the Shire Valley Transformation Programme has put up ABS protocols which we did not have in the past,” Banda said.

He said the EAD was also facilitating community protocol guidelines that would guide the community and other stakeholders in the extraction of genetic resources up to exportation.

The SVTP will irrigate 43,370 hectares of land by abstracting water from the Shire River at Kapichira Dam and conveying it by gravity to the irrigable areas in Chikwawa and Nsanje through canals. With \$5.5 million funding from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the SVTP will ensure that all impacts on environment and wildlife are mitigated at all stages of the project’s implementation. The fund is to cater for issues of wildlife and environmental conservation in Lengwe National Park, Majete Wildlife Reserve, Mwabvi Wildlife Reserve, the Elephant Marsh, and Matandwe Forest Reserve.

“The SVTP through GEF has provided resources that have enabled both guide lines to be produced though in draft form. Locals had ideas, but had no resources,” Banda said.

“The aim is to sustainably manage natural resources and improve community livelihoods. This way, irrigation farming in the Lower Shire Valley will be sustained, increasing food productivity”.

Banda said the Mwanda Thabalaba group was formed on a pilot basis and that in future, more groups would be established in other areas of the district. The group also has a nursery aimed at domesticating Thabalaba root.

“We want to domesticate the root at community level so that it can be grown at household level to ease pressure on Matandwe Forest Reserve,” Banda said.

Members of Mwanda Thabalaba Group received training from SVTP. During the training, the group learned how it could utilize the Columba root in a sustainable manner, among other things.

Eliya expressed joy that government had come up with interventions to protect groups such as hers from dishonest buyers, and to ensure sustainable use of natural resources in Matandwe Forest Reserve.

“We were at the mercy of buyers. We thank government for intervening when we complained against prices buyers were offering. Imagine one of them insisted on buying the root at K10 per Kg,” she said.

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