



KONDWANI MSISKA STANDS IN FRONT OF HER RICE FIELD AT THE HARA IRRIGATION PROJECT IN KARONGA DISTRICT, MALAWI. GAFSP FUNDING HAS PAID FOR THE REHABILITATION OF THESE IRRIGATION CHANNELS, WHICH DELIVER WATER YEAR-ROUND AND HELP LOCAL FARMERS INCREASE THEIR YIELDS.

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Is GAFSP reaching
small-scale food
producers in Malawi?

Introduction: The GAFSP-supported SIVAP in Malawi

In 2009, about 90 percent of Malawi's population lived below the income poverty line of \$2 a day. This number is even higher in rural areas, where the vast majority of people are small-scale food producers¹. Agriculture accounts for around a third of Malawi's GDP, and provides a livelihood for more than 80 percent of the population². The sector is composed of about two million small-scale food producers who use 6.5 million hectares of cultivable land and around 30,000 commercial estates that hold around 1.2 million hectares of cultivable land. The majority of small-scale food producers cultivate less than one hectare³. Only two percent of Malawi's cropland is irrigated, and almost all of the irrigated land is controlled by commercial estates. The issue of supporting small-scale food producers with climate resilient agricultural development solutions is therefore crucial to the fight against hunger and poverty.

The 2013-18 Smallholder Irrigation and Value Addition Project (SIVAP) is the first, and only, program funded by the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) Multi-Donor Trust Fund in Malawi. It is aligned with Malawi's agricultural investment plan (Agricultural Sector Wide Approach, 2010), and Malawi's medium-term development framework (Malawi Growth and Development Strategy, 2011-2016). The SIVAP is implemented in seven districts in the Northern, Central and Southern regions of the country. The districts have been selected as they include areas in the Green Belt Initiative, a national agricultural development, which aims to intensify irrigated agricultural production around water bodies such as Lake Malawi and the Shire River. Three districts are also part of the areas covered by the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA), which focuses on climate change adaptation efforts in the districts that are most vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather.

The SIVAP aims to contribute to poverty reduction and ensure sustainable food security at household and national levels by increasing crop production and diversification, including through the development of high value chains. The SIVAP is designed to benefit 11,368 farm families (of which 5,600 are female-headed) under irrigation farming, and 58,700 farm families (of which 29,300 are female-headed) under rain-fed production⁴. The following three components should achieve objectives of improving crop production and productivity, and improving net farm incomes:

COMPONENTS	MAIN OUTPUTS	TARGETS (BY 2018)
Sustainable land and water management	Irrigation schemes developed	12 schemes; 2,050 hectares developed
	Irrigation schemes rehabilitated	5 schemes; 1,295 hectares rehabilitated
Crop diversification and value chain development	Seed selection/multiplication promoted	Groundnuts (306MT); Rice (352MT); Pigeon pea seeds (98 MT) selected/multiplied
	Rain-fed cropping supported	16,600 hectares of rain-fed area planted; 29,350 Male and 29,350 female farmers supported
	Agro-processing and value-addition supported	9 agro-processing centers developed
	Market linkages promoted	2 private sectors/value addition entities networked
Institutional strengthening and capacity building	Public sector and smallholder farmers supported	31 Government Staff; 100 Health workers; 225,000 farmers trained
	monitoring and evaluation system developed	1 monitoring and evaluation system established and operational
	Project coordination	17 Government of Malawi staff appointed

1 <http://www.ifad.org/operations/projects/regions/Pf/factsheets/malawi.pdf>

2 idem

3 http://www.usaidlandtenure.net/sites/default/files/country-profiles/full-reports/USAID_Land_Tenure_Malawi_Profile.pdf

4 <http://www.gafspfund.org/sites/gafspfund.org/files/Malawi%202012%20GAFSP%20Proposal%2027th%20March.pdf>



The land and water management component consists of the development of new irrigation schemes and the rehabilitation of schemes built by the Government of Malawi during previous projects, often with support from international aid agencies. Since the 2000s, irrigation management transfer policies have led to the Government of Malawi handing over the management of irrigation schemes to local Water Users Associations (WUA)⁵. These local community organizations have been established by the government for the purpose of promoting local responsibility in the management of irrigation schemes. They monitor and regulate the operation and maintenance of the irrigation and drainage systems, collect water charges, and handle water related conflicts among their members.

Eighty nine percent of the SIVAP total cost (US\$44.65million) is funded by the GAFSP. The producer partners' one percent contribution is non-monetary and mostly consists of family labor during the construction of irrigation networks.

ActionAid's study in Chikwawa and Karonga districts

ActionAid commissioned a study to look at the SIVAP implementation model and impact, with a focus on small-scale food producers, women producers, the engagement and participation of producer and civil society organizations, and climate resilience. Even though women's empowerment and climate resilience are not specific objectives of the SIVAP, ActionAid considers that such goals are key to any successful attempt at enhancing food security and poverty alleviation in the long term. Sixty three women small-scale food producers from local water users' associations and farmers' groups were brought together in Chikwawa and Karonga districts, in order to hear directly from women about how the SIVAP is addressing their needs. Government staff and representatives from farmers' and civil society organizations were also interviewed for the study.

EDINA KASALA WITH SOME OF THE MAIZE SHE HAS BEEN ABLE TO HARVEST FROM HER LAND COVERED BY THE TIMOTI IRRIGATION SCHEME IN KARONGA DISTRICT

PHOTO: EVA-LOTTA JANSSON/ACTIONAID

5 http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Phade775.pdf

Key findings on the SIVAP implementation

1. Does the project target small-scale food producers?

The Smallholder Irrigation and Value Addition Project (SIVAP) aims to enhance food security and incomes of small-scale food producers. The project aims to support 79,000 producer partners, from an estimated 13,000 families, made up of smallholder farmers, traders, and agro processors. Each producer partner is projected to earn \$414.6 from irrigation activities, compared to the \$211.9 that was earned before the start of the project from rain-fed agriculture.

In all twelve project sites, the work is focused on plots of land measuring less than 0.5 hectares, with an average plot size of 0.3 hectares. The support provided to rain-fed agriculture is focused on the development of cassava, rice and legumes on plots of a maximum of one hectare, with the exception of cassava plots measuring an average of two hectares in four sites. Given the elements mentioned above, it seems clear that the SIVAP is reaching small-scale food producers, and this was further confirmed by fieldwork and meetings with producer partners in Karonga and Chikwawa districts.

2. How does the project engage and reach small-scale farmers?

a. Increase in agricultural production

When this study was undertaken, the farmers had only gathered one harvest since the project had started, but had already seen an increase in production due to the interventions under SIVAP. Some of the activities, such as the distribution and multiplication of high quality seeds, and the rehabilitation of irrigation canals, have already enabled small-scale food producers to increase rice and maize production.

At the Timoti Irrigation Scheme, farmers reported that the rehabilitation of the irrigation canals has made irrigation water more readily available throughout the rainy and dry seasons, which has improved their maize yields. At the Mphinga Irrigation Scheme, women farmers said that seeds provided by the SIVAP enabled them to produce high-quality rice that would be attractive to high-value markets, including the major supermarkets in Malawi.

“The rehabilitation of the scheme by SIVAP has greatly improved our access to water for irrigation. As a result, we have been able to harvest more rice from the same fields. With the coming of SIVAP, we are no longer worried of hunger.” Female rice producer, Mphinga Irrigation Scheme, Karonga District

b. Access to high-value markets

Under its Crop Diversification and Value Chain Development component, the SIVAP has connected rice and pigeon pea farmers, and their cooperatives, with national-level companies, allowing them to avoid intermediaries and middlemen, and directly supply more profitable markets. Farmer organizations from Machinga, Chikwawa, Thyolo, Nsanje and Salima were successfully linked to companies such as Rab Processors Ltd, Trans-globe Ltd, Sunseed Oil Ltd and Export Trading Group, and their members, including women, directly benefited from higher sales and income.

Mitole pigeon pea farmers access a lucrative market

The Mitole Farmers' Group, a group of pigeon pea farmers under Mitole EPA in Chikwawa District, are full of praise for the SIVAP Project for helping them to sell their pigeon peas at a higher price. The group was set up under the SIVAP Project in 2014 and received training on association operations and management, as well as good agronomic practices for pigeon peas.

Even though the farmers grew their pigeon peas individually in the 2014/15 agricultural season, the SIVAP – through the Chikwawa District Agriculture Office – assisted them in identifying a more profitable market for their pigeon peas. The project organized for the pigeon peas to be transported to Malawi's commercial city of Blantyre (about 40 km away), where the farmers were able to sell to Transglobe Produce Exports (a processor and exporter of pigeon peas) at MWK300 per kg (US\$0.70 per kg), instead of MWK150 per kg (US\$0.35 per kg). By cutting out the intermediate traders that normally buy the pigeon peas at such a low price, farmers were able to get a better price for their crop.

Encouraged by the higher price for their product, members of the Mitole Farmers Group sold the remaining pigeon peas that they had in storage, selling the additional 2,250 kg to Transglobe Produce Exports for US\$0.92 per kg.

"SIVAP has really assisted us to get good price for our pigeon peas last year. This has encouraged a lot of people to grow pigeon peas this year. Now we know where the market is, and we will not allow intermediate buyers (vendors) to buy our pigeon peas from us again", said the Secretary of Mitole Farmers Group

"I have been able to build a brick house with the money that I received from my pigeon peas this year. This would not have happened if my pigeon peas were bought by vendors. I am growing pigeon peas again this year because I plan to fit my house with iron sheets after I sell my pigeon peas", said a member of the Mitol Farmers Group

c. Increase in income

A review of SIVAP Quarterly Reports, and discussions with project implementers and producer partners, suggest that the project is improving the incomes of small-scale food producers, including women. Increased agricultural production through the irrigation networks and other agricultural practices and inputs support, coupled with better links to market, is improving farmers' incomes. Women farmers participating in the SIVAP project reported being able to use some of the income generated from the sale of their food crops to pay their children's school fees.

d. Increased food security

Under this project, increased crop production, productivity, and higher incomes should all contribute to increased food security. The project aims to reduce the average number of months of household food scarcity per year from 3.2 months (baseline in 2012) to 1.5 months by 2023. Although this short study has not been able to conduct an exhaustive survey of progress on food security in the sites visited, it does include testimonies of increases in crop production and increases in incomes, which are expected to contribute to increased food security, as laid out in the SIVAP. Some producer partners mentioned an improvement in food security since the SIVAP started in their area.

Although the crop diversification and agricultural production support activities have focused on commercial crops such as pigeon peas, women beneficiaries have reported improvements in food security. This has been attributed to the producer partners' inputs in the choice of crops, the increase in production from irrigated lands while rain-fed rice cultivation continued (leading to greater overall food availability), the associated increased incomes, and training on food preparation and nutrition (including for commercial crops such as pigeon peas):

"Things have improved in our homes. My food security situation is much improved, as I am able to have food even during critical food shortage month of February. I have also been able to start building a brick house, with the money that I have generated from the sale of my rice. Things are much better now, since the scheme was rehabilitated."
Female rice producer, Mphinga Irrigation Scheme, Karonga District

e. Strengthening local farmers' groups

Poor farmer organization at the local level is one of the key challenges that the SIVAP is facing, because the majority of small-scale food producers in Malawi are used to working independently. To address this problem, the SIVAP has been organizing community sensitization, farmer mobilization and formation of farmer organizations in order to improve their technical and social capacities, and with the objective of enhancing their viability.

- As previously mentioned, linking up farmer organizations from Machinga, Chikwawa, Thyolo, Nsanje and Salima to national-level private companies has increased economic opportunities for these groups.
- Cooperatives and farmers' groups from Karonga, Nkhota-kota, Salima, Chikwawa and Nsanje Districts were also supported to attend the National Agriculture Fair of 2015, where they were able to interact with buyers, enhance their profile, promote their various products and learn from other well-established agro-processing companies
- The project has also provided training for farmers' organizations on how to run their cooperatives, women's participation in leadership positions and running farming as a business, among others.

3. How does the project engage small-scale food producers, farmer organizations and civil society organizations?

a. Engagement and participation of small-scale food producers, especially women

During the design phase: In the Karonga District, producer partners were consulted during the project design process on plans for irrigation scheme rehabilitation and construction matters. This took place through the management committees of the existing Water Users Associations (WUAs) – community organizations in charge of the operation and maintenance of irrigation and drainage systems, the collection of water charges, and the resolution of water conflicts among members.

"Some of us were consulted when the SIVAP project was about to start. Officials from the Ministry of Agriculture in Lilongwe and here in Karonga came. They were accompanied by our local extension workers. The whole executive committee members of the scheme



were present. We were asked how the scheme was operating, the challenges that we faced as farmers, and what type of initiatives the upcoming project should undertake. We were also asked about the community's commitment to participate in the upcoming project." Female farmer, Timoti Irrigation Scheme, Karonga District.

A REHABILITATED
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**PHOTO: EVA-LOTTA
JANSSON/ACTIONAID**

The producer partners' inputs led to changes in the project design, for example regarding the choice of irrigated crops in the Timoti Irrigation Scheme in Karonga:

"During the consultations, producer partners at Timoti Irrigation Scheme indicated that they were used to cultivating rice and tomatoes in the irrigation schemes. Through the consultations it was agreed that the scheme should prioritize maize production to promote food security." District Agriculture Development officer, Karonga District.

"When the scheme was originally developed by the Japanese in 2007, we were growing a lot of rice and vegetables. But during our discussions with officials before the scheme was rehabilitated by SIVAP, we agreed that we should be growing maize in the scheme since people here already produce a lot of rice under rain-fed production." Female farmer, Timoti Irrigation Scheme, Karonga District.

Women were not directly consulted as a distinct group, but consulted as members of the management committees of WUAs or members of farmers' groups. In some of these organizations, women do not have access to leadership positions, which could easily have led to insufficient consultation of women. In Mitole Farmers' group in Chikwawa District, women producer partners said that they were not consulted at the beginning of the project. It



seemed that only a few male leaders from the group took part in the first series of meetings with the Ministry of Agriculture officials at the district level.

During the implementation phase: Various stakeholders reported that the project continues to engage concerned parties, including small-scale food producers, during project implementation. Discussions with the local government extension workers are regularly held to provide feedback on how the project is being implemented. Producer partners in Timoti and Mphinga Irrigation Schemes said they were engaged and their feedback is usually taken on board as the project is being implemented. Formal discussions between the WUAs and the project monitoring team also take place during monitoring visits.

“Whenever there are monitoring visits to the project sites, formal discussions are held between the monitoring team and the WUAs. During such meetings, the WUAs are given an opportunity to provide feedback, including their concerns in the implementation of the project activities. Such feedback is incorporated in the project.” SIVAP Desk Officer, Karonga District

“Our extension worker always consults us to find out how we look at the project and what needs to change. We are glad that most of the suggestions we make are taken seriously by the government.” Woman farmer, Mphinga Irrigation Scheme, Karonga District

b. Engagement and participation of farmer and civil society organizations

Engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs) and farmers’ organizations under the SIVAP is minimal. During the design of the project, the Government of Malawi Technical Team and officials from the African Development Bank (AfDB) held consultative meetings with various stakeholders, including farmer associations and women groups. At the national level, the Farmers’ Union of Malawi (FUM), an umbrella body of farmers’ organizations in Malawi, the National Smallholder Farmers’ Association of Malawi (NASFAM), and the Civil Society

WITNESS NGWIRA, A SMALL-SCALE FOOD PRODUCER, AT WORK IN HER RICE FIELD, PART OF THE HARA IRRIGATION PROJECT IN KARONGA DISTRICT

PHOTO: EVA-LOTTA JANSSON/ACTIONAID

Agriculture Network (CISANET) all took part in a consultative workshop that was convened during the project design period in February 2012. However, their level of engagement in the implementation process, managed by the Ministry of Agriculture services, is low.

National-level CSOs and farmers' organizations are not targeted by the SIVAP. Until now, the capacity development and institutional strengthening effort of the project has mostly focused on the public sector (services from the Ministry of Agriculture) and local community organizations (farmers' groups and WUAs).

"SIVAP is an important project for Malawi, which is currently still dependent on rain-fed agriculture. In districts where it is being implemented it has great potential of boosting food production. As a network of civil society organizations working on agriculture in Malawi, we were consulted during the design of the project. However, there is very little engagement with the project implementers. There is a need to strengthen the collaboration so that CSOs are provided the space to provide feedback to the implementers." CISANET Senior Policy officer, Lilongwe

As part of the project component "Institutional Strengthening and Capacity Building," the SIVAP has been providing support to various government institutions, including the Department of Cooperatives, Department of Nutrition, and the Department of Environmental Affairs, by strengthening the monitoring and evaluation and project coordination systems, and providing training on nutritional education and environmental monitoring. Although this support has probably strengthened the capacity of the project coordination team at the national level, as well as the district agriculture development officers' (DADOs) and the district irrigation officers' capacity to implement a large-scale irrigation and value addition project, it has not involved civil society and farmer organizations, which could have benefited from or contributed to the training.

4. How does the project reach and benefit women?

According to the project's Appraisal Report and discussions with project staff, the SIVAP is ensuring adequate participation of women (at least 30 percent of producer partners) in project implementation, and at least 50 percent participation in training sessions. Our field research showed that the majority of people undertaking the SIVAP activities are women, as was confirmed at the Timoti Irrigation Scheme:

"Even though the number of female-headed households that are participating in the Irrigation Scheme is only 62, compared to 127 male-headed households, it's the women in the majority of the male-headed households that are actually doing the work in the irrigation scheme." Government extension worker, Kaporo North EPA, Karonga District

Given the participation of women in SIVAP activities, it is expected that women will also reap the benefits of the project in terms of increased income.

The SIVAP also encourages committees and farmer-based groups to include a larger quota of women in management, training, community representation and decision-making, and other income generating activities. Training on and support to cooperatives also aims to increase the leadership and participation of women in local farmers' groups.

"Under SIVAP women are being given space to participate. There are a number of women that have been elected in our main committee. The various sub-committees also include women. As you see me now, I head the sub-committee for marketing. This project is really empowering us women." Female pigeon pea producer, Mitole Farmers' Group, Chikwawa District

“The chairperson of the WUA here is a woman. The government extension worker through the project has been encouraging women to take up leadership positions in the running of the affairs of the scheme. That is why we have now voted for a woman leader. People now know that our WUA respects women.” Female rice producer, Mphinga Irrigation Scheme, Karonga District

In spite of these efforts, women's participation in leadership positions in the cooperatives and the Water Users Associations remains too low and there is a reluctance to grant collective responsibilities to women. When asked in a collective meeting why there were only a few women in leadership positions in the Timoti irrigation scheme, one female maize farmer answered that *“women here do not like to take up leadership positions, because women are not encouraged to speak in the presence of men. In many cases, when a woman vies for a leadership position, the fellow women do not vote for her because they do not like to be led by another woman.”* Similar sentiments were raised during a focus group discussion with women farmers at Mitole Farmers' group in Chikwawa. Community sensitization to ensure increased participation of women in leadership positions in the project structures therefore remains a challenge.

5. Does the project make communities more climate resilient?

The Malawian economy is agricultural-based and reliant on rain-fed agriculture. The effects of prolonged dry spells and droughts can be disastrous at the household level, leading to food production disruptions, large-scale food insecurity, and rising levels of poverty. SIVAP interventions are addressing the problem of food insecurity by promoting small-scale irrigation, reducing the dependency on rain-fed agriculture, which helps makes farming communities more resilient to climate and extreme weather-related shocks. Three of the seven districts covered by the SIVAP – including Karonga and Chikwawa Districts visited while conducting research for this study – were selected partly because they are identified in the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) as being most vulnerable to drought and floods, and suffer from food insecurity despite having relatively adequate water and land resources for irrigation.

The project's focus on developing small-scale irrigated agriculture in these areas allows farmers to use the land and water resources more effectively, and be less reliant on rain-fed crops that are susceptible to extreme weather.

“This project is making a big impact in addressing the effects of climate change in all the districts where it is being implemented. With climate change, reliance on rains for crop production leads to food insecurity and poverty. The rehabilitation of the irrigation schemes is making it possible for maize and rice producers to produce even when the rains are erratic.” SIVAP Desk Officer, Karonga District

“Nowadays rains are becoming very unpredictable. But with this irrigation scheme, we are assured that when we plant our rice, we will harvest since we have our own source of water.” Female rice producer, Secretary of the Water Users Association, Mphinga Irrigation Scheme, Karonga District

Furthermore, the promotion of crop diversification and the cultivation of maize, rice, cassava, soybean, groundnuts, pigeon peas, beans and sweet potatoes, increases the ability of producer partners to withstand the shocks that affect specific crops, especially those that are rain-fed.

In addition to the rehabilitation of 2,050 hectares and the development of 1,295 hectares of irrigated lands, the SIVAP supports improved cropping practices and agriculture diversification on a total of 2,500 hectares of rain-fed land, with a focus on cassava and legumes farming. Cassava demonstrates good resistance to droughts and reduces the climate and economic risks linked to maize mono-cropping. At the same time, the combination of cassava and legumes contributes to better soil management, through crop rotation and replenishment of nitrogen in the soil, which reduces the reliance on fertilizers and external inputs.

An evaluation of the project documentation fails to arrive at a clear conclusion as to whether the project's strategic direction – which includes a focus on the development of small-scale irrigation land development and some support to crop diversification of rain-fed agriculture – corresponds with an analysis of the climate risks and vulnerabilities. This means that it is impossible to say whether the climate resilience enhancing solutions in the SIVAP are supporting the small-scale food producers that are most vulnerable to climate risks. A climate risk and vulnerability analysis would help to identify the priority areas and strategic options that could increase climate resilience for a majority of small-scale food producers.

TABIA NGONYA, WITH HER DAUGHTERS PARISHA AND JOYCE, WITH SOME OF THE MAIZE HARVESTED FROM THEIR LAND AT THE TIMOTI IRRIGATION SCHEME IN KARONGA DISTRICT

PHOTO: EVA-LOTTA JANSSON/ACTIONAID



Recommendations

The SIVAP is still in the middle of its implementation phase and the impact of its interventions are only starting to be felt, even though producer partners have already reported some progress. There is, however, still time to refine and improve some elements of the project implementation, to increase the impact on small-scale food producers' participation, food security, women's empowerment, climate change resilience and poverty alleviation.

On participation in the project implementation:

- The SIVAP can strengthen the linkage with farmers and civil society organizations, by engaging their umbrella organizations, such as the Farmers' Union of Malawi (FUM), the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM) and the Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET), which were consulted during the design of the project, but much less during the implementation phase. This would ensure that the objectives of the GAFSP, which encourage active involvement of civil society organizations, are being met as the SIVAP project is being implemented.
- The SIVAP needs to engage all members – not only management bodies – at the community organization level, such as those in Water Users Associations, farmers' groups and cooperatives, to ensure that women, who remain underrepresented in leadership positions, have an equal say in the consultations and discussions relating to the project plans and activities.

On women's empowerment:

- The SIVAP needs to strengthen women's participation in the management of irrigation schemes and the running of local farmer groups and cooperatives.
- The project should continue to encourage committees and farmer-based groups to include a larger quota for women in management, training, community representation, decision-making, and other processes.
- The project should provide community sensitization around women and leadership positions. It is recommended that the project reaches out to women's rights organizations for help in overcoming this challenge, and to consider how to develop gender mainstreaming in the project implementation and gender sensitivity trainings at the level of the producer partners and project staff.

On inclusive development and climate resilience

- The SIVAP must ensure that land and water resources can be accessed by all community members, even though irrigation canals and infrastructures only serve a certain geographical area. In some irrigation schemes, land usage systems have allowed non-owners to use other people's lands outside of the rainy season to cultivate irrigated crops. In other schemes, local groups are considering introducing fee systems to ensure that no irrigable land remains uncultivated. In any case, fair access to irrigated land is key to ensure the sustainable accomplishment of the key SIVAP objectives.
- It is recommended that agriculture support activities be checked against a climate risk and vulnerability mapping to ensure that the farmers that are targeted are among those most vulnerable to climate change.

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