

WORLD FISH CENTER

March 31, 2008.

Fish to feed primary school pupils in Malawi

Introduction

The GlobalGiving Funding project was initiated in Malawi, in Chingale area of Zomba District, in the year 2007. The overall goal of the project is to enable poor households, including women and HIV/AIDS affected and infected to live a better life with nutritious food on the table and money in their pockets. The first phase targeted primary schools with the idea to improve the educational achievements of children, in particular girls from poor and food-insecure families. Children from poor households often drop out from schools mainly because of hunger hence the introduction of school feeding programs. The project assists in constructing ponds, stock the ponds with fish and use the fish into the existing school feeding program; and with the income from sales of fish seed the schools can buy teaching and learning materials.

Following the success of the sensitization and planning meetings that were done in the first phase, the project had received an overwhelming positive response. The first four ponds (300m² each) at Ntanangala Primary School have been a nucleus of knowledge by many surrounding schools. There are many study visits made to the school every school term. Three schools immediately after the rainy season (February) started their own ponds.

This report gives progress of the school pond construction of these new ponds.

Achievements to date

It is very difficult to construct fish ponds during the months of January to April in Malawi because soils are very wet hence difficult to work with. Farmers start constructing fish ponds in June or July after the rainy season is completely gone. But this has not been the case with teachers and guardians of Ntungulusi, Milale and Samalani schools. Believing that an early bird catches the worm, construction of fish ponds in the schools had already started by February 2008.

a) Planning

Good planning is one of the success factors for every project. Similarly successful fishpond project absolutely requires good planning. Before the construction of the ponds was done, a preliminary site visit to the three above schools was done. This was aimed at coming up with a proper design and layout of the ponds to be constructed. Several criteria, which are paramount for pond construction, like soil quality, water quality and quantity, topography of the land, proximity to the school and other factors were considered. Of central importance in the planning process was the participation of parents and guardians, teaching staff and committee members of the three schools. The surveying team walked through thick bushes but with positive expectations that one day in the shortest time possible there shall be water keeping fish instead of the tall bluegum trees.



*An area that was just laying idle
At Samalani Full Primary School*



*Parents and teaching staff identifying an
area for fish ponds at Ntungulusi School*

b) Pond Construction

Having carefully selected the sites and planned for the ponds' layout, a total of fifteen (15) ponds were measured and pegged as follows:

Ntungulusi	4
Milale	4
Samalani:	7

Inlet and the main outlet canals of the ponds were designed to enable the drained water irrigate vegetables and maize in winter. All the ponds which were designed and pegged were of 400m² each. The parents and guardians started the digging by the end of February. They organized themselves in smaller groups and each group had a specific day to provide labour for digging the ponds. WorldFish and World Vision field staff technically supervised the whole process.



Parents and Guardians take their turn in excavating the fish ponds at Milale School



Pond construction at Mtungulusi Primary School

By mid March three ponds had been completed at Milale School. Teachers, parents, guardians and school committee members from the targeted primary schools were very happy and thankful with the introduction of the project at their school. Mr Maida, a head teacher at Milale Full Primary School was very happy with the development at his school and had this to say. *“This programme has come at an opportune time where our dreams of having fish ponds around the school have come true. Fish is food of excellent nutritional value, providing high quality protein and a wide variety of vitamins and minerals. Incorporating small-scale aquaculture into on-going school feeding programs will improve our children’s performance since hunger impairs learning especially in our young pupils.”*

The excavation of all the 15 ponds is now complete and currently parents and guardians are working on the water canals to bring water to the ponds. All the ponds have an average depth of one meter.



Work of their hands: A finished pond awaiting liming and manuring before water is put in



Other ponds near completion at Samalani School

The smiles and happiness were also vividly expressed by the pupils after completing the ponds. The inclusion of fish farming in the school extra-curricular activities will provide skills and knowledge of fish farming to the younger generation that will likely produce future aquaculturists and farmers. Feeding and management of the fish will be done by children from the senior classes (standards 6 – 8).



Smiling faces of Ntungulusi pupils



Tan Siew Pheng from WorldFish Malaysia during her recent visit to the targeted schools