

WORLD FISH CENTER

July 31, 2008.

Fish for the elderly and orphaned children

As fish caught from natural lakes and streams have traditionally been an important part of the diet in landlocked Malawi, increasing population and declining catches reduced annual per capita fish consumption from 14 kilograms in the 1970s to 4.2 kilograms in 2005. Aquaculture has since been seen as an exit option to relieve pressure from dwindling capture fisheries and increase fish production and consumption. The project "Fish to feed HIV affected families in Malawi" implemented by WorldFish Center in collaboration with World Vision with funding through Global Giving in southern Malawi, helps HIV/AIDS affected and infected poor families including women to live a better life with nutritious food on the table and money in their pockets through appropriate adoption of Integrated Aquaculture-Agriculture (IAA) technologies to the needs of the affected families. Over the past twelve months, the WorldFish Center, with the Global Giving Fund has made remarkable contribution to improving income and food security through the promotion of Integrated Agriculture Aquaculture (IAA) in primary schools. Nineteen (19) ponds have now been constructed and stocked with fish. One school, Samalani, enjoyed its first harvest in June with over 30kgs of fish harvested from a 300 square meter pond. All schools have now opened maize and vegetable fields that are being irrigated from the pond water. The optimism in reducing food and nutritional insecurity increased even more with the adaptation of the IAA technologies to improve incomes and nutritional status of the HIV- affected elderly and orphaned households.

Malawi like many other sub-Saharan African countries faces a huge challenge to cope with the HIV/AIDS pandemic that reduces productive labor as productive members of the households die from HIV/AIDS related illnesses leaving many households headed by either the elderly or children. Today, almost one-fifth of Malawians aged 15-49 are infected with HIV/AIDS and each year tens of thousands die as a result of the disease. These ominous signs for vulnerability amidst the HIV/AIDS affected families pose an enormous challenge for the government and policy makers. It's therefore important that individuals join hand to fight the pandemic just as some are doing through the Global Giving in sponsoring this project. Twenty (20) elderly and orphaned households in Chingale, Zomba were selected by the communities themselves in April 2008 to benefit from the IAA initiatives. Twenty five (25) ponds have now been constructed and 12 have been stocked with fish.

CHIUNDA Village – In this green village of flowering trees and shrubs, bordered to the west by the majestic Zomba Mountains has five of these beneficiaries. It is hard work to dig a fish pond particularly the elderly, which is a meter deep and about 200 square meters around. But people here and elsewhere joined together to dig each other's ponds.

"We had 30 members out digging together and they would build three ponds in two weeks," Kanyema said outside her house. "We work from morning to sunset. Females do all the cooking, men the digging."

The help doesn't end there. "One day there was a very heavy rainfall. One of my ponds was damaged by the rain," she said. "When people saw the problems, they came in large numbers and all of us repaired the pond."

Asan Chiunda, the chief of the village, which is named after him, stood next to one of his ponds, which he had just drained. Two boys were shoveling rich dirt into a wheelbarrow, which was then taken to the chief's maize fields. Because of the fertilizer and better irrigation, some farmers now are harvesting three plantings of maize a year, instead of one.

“The village is changing because of these fish ponds,” the chief said. “People have money now. They have enough food. Some even have new roofs with iron sheets!”

But the villagers know they must keep close watch over the ponds – especially monitoring the source of water, which comes from the nearby Zomba Mountains. Group Village Headman Jusu said that villagers now are trying to make sure others don't cut down trees for charcoal on the mountains, which creates erosion and depletes the water source.

“People are really understanding why they need to conserve the forests on the mountain,” he said.

The other constant issue is the frequent hardships experienced by villagers. Kanyema, the former schoolteacher, said she would spend the next day at a funeral for a woman named Mariana who died of an AIDS-related illness in the nearby village of Kapito. Kanyema said the woman, who was not married, left four orphans. All were moving in with a relative in Chiunda village.

“We will do our best for those children,” she said. “We now have to come together to talk about how we can help. But we know that we can help them – because of the fish. I sincerely thank all donors that are contributing to the noble task. I wish even just one donor were able to come and see how their contributions are benefiting the poor here in Chingale”.

The success of the project hinges on the increased participation of women who are taught how to raise, process and market their fish - generating the much-needed income for other household needs and medical care in the process. Furthermore, the approach is succeeding because it cheaply and efficiently integrates aquaculture into existing farm operations. Capital and financial investments are minimal because farmers are encouraged to use farm waste and crop by-products as fish feed – thereby improving nutrient recycling and resource flow. Farmers also grow vegetables on the perimeter of their ponds, taking advantage of the water that seeps into the surrounding soil to keep their plants thriving for both home consumption and sale in the local markets. With such low investments, farmers can produce about 1,500 kilograms of fish per hectare each year besides the significant amount of other crops.



For further information, CONTACT Dr Daniel Jamu, WorldFish Center – Malawi Office.
MAIL, P.O Box 229, Zomba, Malawi. EMAIL d.jamu@cgiar.org , FAX (+265)01 536 274.
PHONE (+265)01 536 298, (+265)01 536 313,
Website: www.worldfishcenter.org