

## Temwa's Farming Futures Project End of Year Report - November 2023

This report shares an update from the last six months of our new **Farming Futures** project's first year, which began in September 2022 and came to an end in September 2023. The project has made incredible progress in its first year to increase communities' climate resilience and improve stewardship of natural resources. Your support has been absolutely vital to the successful start of the project, and we are excited to share details with you below.



### Project context and aims

Around 90% of households in Nkhata Bay North are smallholder subsistence farmers, with 58% of the population living on just over 50p a day. This extreme poverty means that most families suffer from income and food insecurity. In the wider Nkhata Bay district, over a quarter of forest cover has been lost in the last 20 years alone, which has led to soil erosion, dried up water sources, and lower agricultural productivity. This rapid deforestation, coupled with the impacts of climate change (including increased droughts, flooding, strong winds, and erratic rainfall), is making it difficult for farming communities to make a living to support their families.

This 3 year project called **Farming Futures** focuses on building communities' climate resilience through sustainable farming, forest-friendly livelihoods, and sustainable use of local natural resources. Temwa is supporting self-organising farmer groups to increase their crop yields using sustainable farming practices, and diversify their income through livestock exchanges and business development.

### Project achievements

We are proud to report the following project activities have taken place:

#### Outcome 1: Improved community engagement with climate change solutions

The farming communities in Nkhata Bay North are extremely vulnerable to the worst impacts of the climate crisis. Crop yields last year were drastically lower due to heavy rains and strong winds, made worse by a lack of forest cover due to prolific deforestation. Farmers continue to resort to unsustainable practices, including cutting down trees to sell, or to clear land for crops.

The Farming Futures project uses an awareness campaign, including events and radio programmes, to improve community understanding of the negative impacts of deforestation and sustainable livelihood alternatives. This campaign demonstrates to community members the success of sustainable businesses, inspiring other farmers to form groups and adopt climate-adaptive livelihoods.

## Radio Programme

Temwa has continued conducting monthly radio shows as part of this awareness campaign, reaching an estimated 20,000 people with information on sustainable farming practices. In June, for example, a jingle was used to invite community members from Mchulu and Chikondo VDC to attend the awareness event on making different organic fertilisers.

Similarly, in August, the radio programme invited farmers in Chigwere, Levubu, Chipaika, Kalonga and Bununkhu to attend training on land management, and soil and water conservation. The programmes were disseminated every month except May, when the radio station was not operating.

## Awareness Events

Following our successful 'official' project launch events in April, we have continued hosting awareness events attracting large crowds. In June, 650 farmers from Mchulu and Chikondo attended an event on sustainable livelihood practices including how to make organic fertilisers. In August, an awareness event in Chigwere and Bununkhu invited farmers to join Temwa's training sessions on sustainable farming. We estimate this event will lead to another 600 farmers attending future sessions.

## Sustainable Agricultural Practices training

Responding to demand from community members, from July, Temwa began conducting village-wide training on sustainable farming techniques. In July, a training event was conducted in two villages where farmers had previously been reluctant to adopt organic fertilisers as they lacked the knowledge to make them. The results from the training are expected to bring a large harvest in the upcoming growing season.



In August, 145 farmers across a total of 13 villages in Chigwere, Bununkhu and Chimojimoji were trained on sustainable agricultural practices which included Bio char, Mbeya fertiliser, and natural pesticides. One village, Mlemeka, chose to focus specifically on soil and water conservation using swales and marker ridges. This village is on a steep slope so these measures are vital to avoid soil erosion. They chose a plot of land for demonstrations and 45 households are expected to adopt what they learned from the session.

## Outcome 2: Increased income security of farming households through forest-friendly enterprise

Once farmers have adopted sustainable farming practices, and their production has increased as a result, they often lack training or opportunities to develop this into a profitable business. Through Farming Futures, farmers can pool their resources into groups and develop business skills and access to markets. Across three years, Temwa will work with 25 new and existing farmer groups who want to engage in forest-friendly livelihoods, such as cash crops, small livestock rearing, and beekeeping. This diversifies family income streams, while reducing reliance on felling trees.

18 groups are currently registered, with 5 new groups currently forming as the project begins its second year. Each farmer group is provided with tailored support according to their individual stages of operation- from increasing their harvests through sustainable methods to supporting marketing and branding their products.

In May, three new farmer groups were formed following community engagement meetings facilitated in Mchulu, Chikondo, Ganunkha village and Sakalani village. The new groups, the Sakalani, Ganukha, and Vilimjembe farmer groups, have requested training on sustainable farming techniques to support their fruit and vegetable growing.

### **Farmer group training**

In July, for example, the three newly formed farmer groups received their first training sessions, aiming to increase production, establish market linkages, and bring about sustainability of the groups in terms of resource mobilisation.

The groups received training on making organic fertilisers and natural pesticides, as well as growing potatoes, onions, tomatoes, and cabbage throughout the winter.

The Dube farmer group has been focusing on increasing their banana production, and hope to have 1,000 banana plant shoots by this December having now been trained on the process of banana multiplication. They expect to make approximately MWK 1,000, 000, while continuing to grow banana plant shoots to plant in their own farms too.



In August, the Sakalani farmer group was trained on functioning as a Village Savings and Loans Association, in order to save and borrow money to expand their business. They have agreed to meet every Wednesday to continue expanding their business and investing together. The group is expecting to make MWK168,000.00 by investing interest gained through operating as a VSLA while farming potatoes.

In August, Temwa supported market research for the Sakalani, Vilimjembe, Kanolo and Kaputamwera groups. Market linkages were established through this activity so that all the groups now have potential buyers to buy their products once harvested, including restaurants in nearby towns.

### **Winter cropping**

In the last six months, the project has focused on winter cropping - supporting farmer groups to grow crops in the winter months in order to create more consistent harvests, rather than relying on one harvest at the end of summer. Harvests have become more and more unreliable as the climate crisis impacts weather patterns, so multiplying occasions to grow and harvest food is vital.

In June, Temwa assessed the availability of land for winter cropping among the newly established farmer groups. Assessing each group individually is vital in order to provide specific support according to their needs. In the Vilimjembe group, each farmer grows crops individually but will sell their products collectively, while the Kanolo and Sakalani groups have chosen to farm together.

At the end of the Vilimjembe group's training, the 22 participants successfully demonstrated their ability to make organic fertilisers and repellents to aid their winter cropping.



The chairperson for Vilimjembe group thanked the Temwa team, saying that “the farmers have been waiting for such a training so that they can make their own manure as chemical fertilisers are now expensive”.

### **Material support**

In July, the three new groups were provided with some starting materials including seeds for potatoes, onions, cabbage, and tomatoes. Using these seeds, the group can grow crops to harvest while cultivating more seeds for the next growing season to increase sustainability. The Kanolo group was also supported with materials for a water irrigation system installation. This will be used to irrigate the two hectares of land where potatoes have now been planted.

Comprising 22 committed members, the Kanolo group are anticipating a yield of 605 tins of Irish potatoes, having enhanced their soil health and crop growth with organic fertilisers and water irrigation.

In June, Temwa supported the design and construction of a greenhouse for the Dube farmer group. Materials were supplied by both Temwa and the 51 group members themselves. The group expects to multiply their banana plants exponentially using the greenhouse, which will provide protection from adverse weather conditions, and maintain the correct temperature needed for optimal growth.



### **Business plan reviews**

The existing groups have now formed collective business plans to continue expanding their income generation. In May, the Zulunkhuni beekeeping group and Penjani beans group were supported with reviewing their business plans and developing detailed marketing and resource mobilisation strategies. The improved plans for 2023-2025 were then agreed upon and finalised.

All group members from the Zulunkhuni beekeeping group decided on a growth path to increase their income, and developed plans to construct an office and register their business as a cooperative by

December 2023. Both groups clarified each member’s respective roles, and identified other organisations who might be potential market partners.



Likewise, in July, a review meeting was conducted with the Kaputamwera group who grow groundnuts. Their business plan review focused on improving group dynamics and increasing crop yields. So far, the group has harvested 76 tins (1,900kg) of unshelled groundnuts, from which they expect to make approximately MWK 608,000.

### **Group committee activity**

In the last six months, we have seen great improvement in the farmer group’s committee activeness and engagement. In particular, all committees in the Penjani and Dube groups have been active in their

positions after being trained on their roles and responsibilities. Their executive committees have been consistently organising group meetings, while the fundraising committees have been identifying ways to source additional money and resources to grow their businesses. For example, the Penjani group have moulded 4,000 bricks to construct a hut to keep their chickens. The Dube group have sourced 100 bags of cow and goat manure to make 200 bags bio-char manure which has been applied to their banana crops.



The Dube group's marketing committee has been busy looking for marketing for their group members who are doing winter cropping of beans, green peas and cabbage. One member, Stelia Kanyika, raised MWK150,000.00 from cabbage sales in August alone.

The group's welfare committees have also been organising visits to any sick members, and organising food provision during field activities, to ensure group members are healthy and strong during the farming season.

### Outcome 3: Strengthened community stewardship of local natural resources

Farming in Nkhata Bay has been made increasingly difficult due to a lack of forest cover as a result of rampant deforestation. Fewer trees means less protection from heavy rains and strong winds, and soil health has reduced massively. Temwa supports communities to engage with climate-adaptive farming practices in order to protect their resources. We also support local governance structures to promote sustainable management of local natural resources to prevent further deforestation, for example enforcing existing bylaws protecting the forests.

Farming Futures' work to strengthen resource stewardship is complemented by Temwa's Restoring Forests project. In 2022-2023, we supported communities to plant 33,542 trees, meaning that, since 2020, we have successfully out-planted 126,528 trees. This year, we have been raising 75,000 tree seedlings ready to outplant this winter. The seeds are a mixture of agroforestry and water-retaining tree species, along with 800 bamboo seedlings, and fruit trees raised through grafting of trees in our Demonstration Garden.

#### Bylaw Reviews

In the last six months, Temwa has continued working closely with the 100 Village Development Committee (VDC) members and 8 Village Natural Resource Management Committees (VNRMC) who work to strengthen stewardship of natural resources in their communities.

In June, we facilitated a participatory community review of existing forest bylaws and community strategies for forest management in Chigwere. 16 VDC members were advised on how to ensure that communities are fully involved in protecting the forests. This activity is expected to build more confidence in the VDC members to devise ways of managing the forests through participatory approaches.





## Forest Amendment Act

Temwa has also been supporting the promotion of the Forest Amendment Act, adopted by the Nkhata Bay District Council in 2020. Along with the district's Forestry Officer, we have been engaging 32 VNRMC members in Bununkhu and Nyapwere on the Act, which strengthens penalties for any act of destroying the forest either by felling trees, bush fires, timber and charcoal production.

It is expected that the VNRMC will create its own village bylaws in line with this act in order to bring an end to felling trees and starting bushfires, both of which were prevalent problems in these communities.

## Community stories

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### *Rashid- A successful beekeeper*

*Rashid Msowoya is a member of the Zulunkhuni beekeeping group. He works as a carpenter, but wanted to increase his family's income. He joined the beekeeping group in 2016 and Temwa supported him with two beehives to begin his beekeeping.*

*Rashid now has 31 beehives. Between 2020 and 2023, he harvested 100 kgs of honey, from which he made MWK340,000.00 from the honey sales. Using his carpentry skills, he is able to make more beehives, and help the other group members make their own.*



*Using the money raised, he has purchased a solar battery for his household to provide consistent light. He is also now able to pay school fees for his daughter to attend secondary school. Rashid says his family are proud of the achievements they have made in recent years.*

### *Reaping the rewards of winter cropping*

*Stellia Kanyika is a member of the Penjani beans group in Njiri. During this winter season, Stellia has been implementing winter cropping through her cabbage farming. In May, she planted her cabbage crop, adopting a sustainable approach by utilising Mbeya manure fertiliser to increase her crop yield.*

*Previously, Stellia's crops had been attacked by pests, but now she uses Chibomba natural pesticides to safeguard her crop.*

*With the earnings from her recent harvest, she has been able to purchase a bag of fertiliser for the 2023-2024 farming season. She has also been able to pay the school fees and acquire essential items for her son, who is currently in Form 2.*



*Stellia plans to scale up her cabbage cultivation efforts in the coming farming season. She has already raised cabbage seedlings and diversified her crops with the inclusion of tomatoes.*