

Temwa's Farmer Field Schools Project Mid-Term Report – August 2025

We are pleased to report on the latest six months of Temwa's Farmer Field Schools project, now in its third year. As the climate crisis continues to impact communities in Nkhata Bay North, our project is more vital than ever. Below we describe developments in the communities in the first six months of Year 3.

Project context and aims

In Nkhata Bay North, 9 out of every 10 households rely on farming for food and income generation. Over the past 5 years, crop yields have dropped drastically. This is largely related to the climate crisis, which is causing unpredictable rainfall, droughts, soil run off, flooding, strong winds and crop pests. The disruption to the food production system has made households increasingly vulnerable to food insecurity and poverty.



Figure to the right – maize processing

The Project, initiated in 2023, aims to enhance smallholder farmers' knowledge and skills in sustainable agriculture through Farmer Field Schools. The schools offer a group-based learning process where farmers engage in experiential learning, experimenting and problem-solving in their own fields.

The project involves a series of participatory learning sessions, led by trained Temwa facilitators that cover a range of topics related to crop production, pest management, soil conservation, and other aspects of sustainable agriculture. Over time, this helps to embed climate-smart agriculture and food production practices and improve capacity and skills across the community - increasing agricultural productivity and climate resilience, while enhancing capacity to manage natural resources.

In 2023, Temwa established 3 Farmer Field Schools and trained a total of **73** farmers. In 2024, there were **177** additional enrolments, 20 joining the original 3 schools, and 157 attending 5 new schools in new areas. Since January this year, we have added 4 new Farmer Field Schools at Mchulu, Lukhanda, Chigwere and Gonamuthondo, and enrolled **120** new farmers, taking the total number of farmers passing through the schools to **370** since the beginning of the Project in 2023. There has been strong engagement by women who represent more than half of the Farmer Field School intake.

The Project also has a peer learning element, with graduating farmers teaching other farmers in their communities the full curriculum. **60** Graduated farmers from Year 1 have gone on to teach **180** farmers in their communities. **65** graduated farmers from Year 2 are now sharing their knowledge with **240** farmers in this 3rd year of the project.

Project achievements

We are proud to report that, in the last six months, your support has helped build the knowledge and skills of farming communities through the following project activities and achievements;

Outcome 1 : Improved agricultural productivity through sustainable agricultural practices

The 3rd year of the Project started with meeting stakeholders from 8 of the Farmer Field Schools established in previous years. The meetings helped to assess the progress made on implementation of their curricula, reflect on achievements, challenges, and lessons learned during the previous year. The reviews established that the schools had implemented 100% of their curricula. The results from their demo plots prompted 85% of registered members to adopt different types of SAPs during rainfed farming. Stakeholders, including farmers, project coordinators, and local authorities, contributed valuable insights to guide the 3rd year of the Project.

The results from the Project's existing Farmer Field Schools and high demand from community members led to the decision to further expand the project to the lakeshore village of Mchulu and the upland villages of Kayionanga, Mwandenga, and Gonamthondo. To establish the new schools, Temwa facilitated reflective meetings at village level through which community members were mobilised into groups.

Figure to the right - Community members during a Reflection meeting at Kayionanga Village



The reflection meetings explored food security trends and farming challenges. During the meetings it became evident that in the 4 villages that had not yet been reached by Temwa, farmers lacked knowledge on sustainable agriculture practices and were not being supported by government extension workers or other organisations.

During these meetings, an average of 50 community members participated and were highly engaged and expressed a strong interest in adopting SAPs and peer learning. Their enthusiasm for the project was evident through their commitment to allocate land for the implementation of the project. With the support of Village Agriculture Committee members and Chiefs, Temwa subsequently enrolled 120 farmers into 4 new schools. These members were selected based on vulnerability and with consideration of all age groups and gender.

Operation of farmer field schools

The 120 newly enrolled farmers (77 female, 43 male) from the 4 new schools were trained on group dynamics, and operation and management of the Farmer Field Schools. Temwa supported each School to establish a main committee and sub-committees (for marketing, welfare, fundraising). Initial training created a conducive environment for learning for every member regardless of their age, gender and health status. In addition, the knowledge gained helped the schools to develop their own constitutions.

Tailored curriculum development for newly established Farmer Field Schools

Each school developed a curriculum. Topics were tailor-made to respond to the specific challenges faced by farmers in their locations. In addition to soil mapping, testing and analysis, topics included training in:

- Improving soil health with organic inputs (such as biochar manure, compost and liquid fertiliser)
- Matching crops to soil types
- Water harvesting and conservation measures
- Mixed cropping and inter-cropping strategies
- Natural pesticides production and integrated pest management
- Cooking demonstrations to improve nutrition
- Storage and preservation of perishable crops
- Food preparation, preservation, and utilisation
- Seed multiplication
- Livestock rearing and integrated livestock farming
- Propagation of fruit trees

Temwa also supported previously established Farmer Field Schools to amend their curricula with emerging priorities, including local seed multiplication (due to the increasing prices of hybrid seeds on the market) and livestock rearing.



Demonstration plot used as a learning hub

All the 4 new schools were supported with designing and laying out of plots for comparison and demonstration during winter cropping. Each of the new FFS were supported with seeds, including Rape, Chinese, Mustard, Egg plant, Cabbage, Carrot, Green Paper, Tomatoes and Onion for effective demonstration of different manure techniques trained through the schools. The produce from the plot will be sold to sustain the FFS.

Figure to the left - Farmers being trained in manure production at Lukhanda FFS

Mchulu FFS designed a demonstration garden (pictured right) with intercropping and various SAPs to showcase the practices to the broader community. The findings from the demonstration plots will help participating households make informed decisions on practices to adopt in the rainfed farming season.





Farmers from Mapako Farmer Field School (*pictured left*) embarked on designing their demonstration plot after training on soil and water conservation techniques. Farmers are enthusiastic with the progress and are expected to replicate the skills gained in their respective fields.

Peer learning

Peer learning is a central element to the project, as many farmers commit to training their peers once they have graduated. Of the 177 farmers who graduated from FFSs in 2024, 65 are being supported to pass on their skills and knowledge to a minimum of 3 others in 2025. Members of the Mabuli VDC expressed their gratitude for the establishment of 2 FFSs in their area because, through peer learning activities, other community members that are not direct participants in the schools will also learn sustainable agricultural practices, helping to reduce food insecurity for the whole community.

Monitoring and assessments

In January this year, the socio-economic status and income levels of households were mapped in five villages. This process increased community awareness and understanding of the income constraints experienced at the household level. They appreciated that SAPs are an alternative to purchasing costly farm inputs.

A Crop Estimate survey facilitated by Temwa at the beginning of the year showed that at least 65% of the 250 graduated farmers from the 1st and 2nd years of the Project have enough food from both winter and rainfed farming to take them through to the next harvest. It was also established that food sufficiency was not dominated by one crop, but came from diversified nutritious sources, including orange fresh sweet potatoes, cassava, yams, maize, bananas and beans.

In May and June, review meetings were held with 4 of the Field Schools from previous years to assess progress and readiness for winter cropping. During the visits, farmers highlighted the need to support them with reliable equipment for irrigation to support effectiveness of the demonstration plots. Temwa also responded to requests for refresher training on manure production, natural pesticides and cooking demonstrations.

Outcome 2: Improved Advocacy and Strategic Partnerships for sustainable development

The project participated in the National Agro-Ecology Conference in July and also the National Food Sustainability Festival. The two events created a platform for partnerships with other institutions promoting organic farming including; Scope-Malawi, Kusamala Institute, DETUS, PELUM and Perma Outreach.

Temwa staff also continued to collaborate with institutions including Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Scope-Malawi, Lunyangwa Research Station and the Government Department of Meteorology. Through the partnership arrangements with Scope-Malawi, Temwa staff have been trained on preparation of Nthaka Plus manure, an innovative manure that restores the soil rather than just providing instant growth. In addition, Temwa staff also received training from Lunyangwa Research on local soil testing and analysis, seed multiplication and livestock rearing.

The project engaged with Village Development Committees throughout the first half of the year. This included orienting 2 VDCs (Mabuli and Chigwere) and 2 Village Agriculture Committees on their roles and responsibilities in the project. The training of stakeholders in VDCs and VACs is key to the sustainability of the project. For example, Temwa staff participated in the March monthly meeting for the Chigwere Village

Development Committee and established that crop yields had been affected by long dry spells. As a way forward, Temwa together with the VDC agreed that they should promote peer learning activities to scale adoption of SAPs and reach out to the wider community. In addition, the VDC requested for a support on trainings of multiplying local seeds in preparation for the upcoming farming season.

Challenges and lessons learned

1. The Government's chemical farm inputs lending programme initially affected mobilisation of community members due to an over-dependency on use of chemical fertilisers. However, Temwa staff worked with potential farmers to change their mindset with positive results.
2. High inflation led to many budgeted items increasing in price, some as much as doubling. This affected allocation of resources and as a result some budget items were trimmed.
3. Project funding constraints - inconsistent cash flow affected full implementation of the planned activities between May and June.
4. The Project faced a shortage of staff with no community facilitator to support implementation of activities. This increased the workload on the Project Officer.

Successes

Despite these challenges, the Project was able to get off to a good start in its 3rd year, with full engagement of an enthusiastic cohort of farmers in 4 new Farmer Field Schools. The project has made good progress in preparing farmers in the adoption of SAPs in preparation for both the rainfed and winter farming seasons. Temwa has also engaged at District and National Level with a view to encouraging the wider uptake of SAPs to maximise the impact of the Project on income, resilience and food security across Nkhata Bay North and beyond.

Community Story

Organic manure paves way for smallholder farmers in Usiska



Lyton is one of the members of Mchulu Farmer Field School. Since joining the Mchulu Farmer Field School, Lyton has gained valuable knowledge on Sustainable Agricultural Practices (SAPs). *'After learning about the production and benefits of sustainable practices, I decided to establish my own garden to apply the knowledge gained'*. In his garden, Lyton planted bananas, maize, vegetables, tomatoes, and onions. His aim was to test the effectiveness of the organic manures he learned about—Biochar, Mbeya manure, and farmyard manure. The results were

impressive. The use of organic manure has helped him earn MWK 20,000 from selling vegetables, and he expects more income as he continues selling his produce. With these results, he is confident that he will achieve food and nutrition security and make profits from farming.

Peer Learning benefits the wider community



Lora Mkolongo is one of the peer learners who has adopted SAPs in her winter cropping farming after learning from a neighbouring Farmer Field School beneficiary. Peer learning is happening within and beyond school boundaries to help farmers who did not have a direct chance to participate in farmer field schools.

She learnt how to prepare biochar and managed to produce a 50kg bag which she used to grow vegetables in her backyard garden. Lora has since been making an average of Mk4,000 per week from sales of vegetables and is now able to provide her household with more nutritious meals.

Thank you

The Temwa teams in Malawi and the UK are deeply thankful for your generous support. With communities facing increasingly severe impacts from the climate crisis and acute financial challenges due to the global cost of living crisis, your support has become more vital than ever. Thank you for helping to create healthier, safer, and more resilient communities, and for empowering them to shape their own futures.



THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE!

For further information about this project or our future plans, please contact:

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