



When communities come together



Agriculture and Forestry Programme Annual Report 2020

January 2021

Agriculture and Forestry Programme Summary

This report describes progress under Temwa's agriculture and forestry programme in Nkhata Bay North, Malawi.

Covid-19 Impacts in Nkhata Bay North

Following the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic to Malawi in 2020, Temwa paused most of our programmes for several months, to follow local guidelines and to protect our staff and the communities we support. Our agriculture and forestry work was on hold from April to July.

Officially there were only about 420 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Nkhata Bay district by the end of January 2021, but testing capacity is very low in Malawi. A senior local chief, TA M'bwana, who was deeply respected within the community sadly passed away from Covid-19 in July, which started driving home the seriousness of the threat posed by the virus. There



has been no governmental support for PPE or community awareness in Nkhata Bay North to help prevent transmission and tackle misinformation circulating in social media. Temwa was able to raise funds to provide PPE to the five local health centres, to set up 38 hand-washing stations at community hubs, to run Covid awareness campaigns on local radio, and to produce and distribute 1,870 reusable masks to community members.

The impact of Covid-19 has, however, gone way beyond public health. Prolonged school closures have led to an alarming, unprecedented increase in sexual relationships, substance misuse, teenage pregnancies, child marriages and school dropout rates among children and youth. Furthermore, as many families in Nkhata Bay North depend on small-scale businesses or hand-to-mouth 'piece work' for income, they have struggled to feed themselves as local markets have had to close due to Covid-19 restrictions.

In January 2021, Covid-19 cases were again very rapidly increasing in the country. The severity of the quickly changing situation has deeply shocked our team both here in the UK and in Malawi, and we must sadly report that two of Temwa Malawi's trustees tragically passed away due to Covid-19 within one week, making the devastating impacts of the pandemic far more real.

Agriculture and Forestry Programme Activities in 2020

Diversified and sustainable livelihoods for disadvantaged households – Temwa's livelihoods support in 2020 helped mitigate the challenges posed by Covid-19. We worked with 15 Farmer Associations and Community Enterprises specialised in baking, beekeeping and the production of crops and livestock. Based on their stage of development, each group received responsive training and support based on its needs, for example, on business management, leadership, agricultural techniques as well as marketing and branding. They were also provided materials such as seeds, beehives and tools.

The Farmer Associations are gradually growing in business capacity: some are buying seeds from previous profits, while others are planning to expand to new lines of business (e.g. a pig production group is looking into beekeeping). Livestock pass-on between groups is also working well, and group members are reporting more varied diets, additional income and improved soil fertility, with some farmers doubling the size of their harvests thanks to organic manure. Temwa's support in 2020 enabled four groups to sell their produce in Mzuzu. The diversification of income sources through the 15 Farmer Associations and Community

Enterprises have made the families of 180 member farmers more resilient to economic and climatic shocks. It has also helped ensure that 1,080 people in the benefiting families have enough to eat.

Temwa also continued to support the operations of our Usisya Demonstration Garden, a local centre for learning. The garden has started generating some income from the sale of organic vegetables, which is then invested back into operations.

Increased community stewardship of natural resources – Communities planted 64,500 trees in 2020. Mostly this was for landscape conversion, transforming 25 hectares of bare land into woodland that will be used for timber. There is high local demand for timber, and farming families are starting to realise that growing, harvesting and replanting trees for construction materials is a sustainable, long-term investment for future income. About 13,000 of the planted trees were for agroforestry fields to improve soil quality. Out of the total trees planted in 2020, 18,068 trees were grown under our new Carbon Balance scheme and will help balance 2,263 tonnes of CO2. Seedlings have been growing well for the new planting season, and as of January, the communities have started planting more pines, mahogany, moringa and agroforestry trees.



Strengthened local governance – Temwa continues to work in close collaboration with local governance structures, such as Area and Village Development Committees, to ensure that our activities are aligned with local development plans. We build the knowledge and skills of these local structures, based on their needs, so that they can promote and enforce reforestation and forest-friendly livelihoods in their areas, including the protection of trees through local bylaws and patrols. Local governance structures and chiefs were engaged in all activities and have generously allocated land for some Farmer Associations for communal cultivation and learning.

Community Stories

“Today I am proud to tell the world that I am an influential citizen of Malawi”



Edna Kamanga is a farmer and mother of four, living in Njiri village. She is proud of herself “because I have contributed to the reduction of carbon in the atmosphere by planting over 1,500 trees”. Charcoal production used to be a common way to earn money in Edna’s village and trees were cut down on a daily basis. Learning about sustainable farming through Temwa, Edna began to understand that she does not have to cut down trees to earn an income. She learnt how to manage tree nurseries and woodlots, sharing her new skills with others too.

Edna and her family now enjoy food and income security, thanks to sustainable farming, investment in tree planting and livestock production that also provides organic manure for their fields. Sustainable livelihoods that bring families money and food reduces reactive tree cutting to make money by selling firewood or charcoal – activities that would further erode the soil and people’s ability to cope.

Transformations in the Communities since 2015

As we look back and review the work we have achieved in this programme area over the last 5 years, we wanted to briefly outline some of the key learnings and deeper-level change processes that we are witnessing in the communities.

Sustainable farming embedded – Farmers started trying sustainable farming and diversification of crops following training by Temwa and district extension workers. Over time, yields and incomes have increased, while households have become more resilient to extreme weather events as they do not only rely on the success of one crop. Farmers' own experiences, along with peer learning opportunities and witnessing successes of one's neighbours, have helped spread and embed sustainable farming in the targeted communities. Some of the original seeds provided are still circulating and being used in the area. The new Farming Futures project, provisionally funded by FCDO, is expected to continue to build knowledge by showcasing successful examples and strengthening the technical skills of farmers, while also helping find markets for the cash crops that the farmers are now able to produce.

Best practice of working together as groups – Community members trialled a number of different income-generating activities under the Agriculture and Forestry Programme with varying levels of success. The most successful Farmer Associations and Community Enterprises have strong internal management structures, clear business plans and commitment to working together. They have carried on even when membership has changed. The key factor here appears to be ongoing responsive support to a group over a period of a few years, following the initial, more intensive period of training. This approach helps address any emerging challenges and capacity gaps, as a group continues to grow, and ultimately helps it to succeed.



It has also been observed that Farmer Association members appear to produce more abundant crops in their own fields than communal ones – for obvious reasons, as providing for the family will take priority.

Going forward, we will encourage them to grow the same crops individually and communally. This way their joint field can be used for learning and showcasing, while most of the pooled harvest can come from individual fields. The Farming Futures project will continue this work with 16 new and existing Farmer Associations, including those who have benefited in 2020, taking into consideration these learnings.

Environmental protection interlinked with livelihoods – During the past year, we have noticed that the communities are becoming increasingly aware of the ways that environmental action and profitable livelihoods can be mutually reinforcing. Thanks to Temwa's awareness campaigns under the Agriculture and Forestry Programme, community members now know more about climate change, deforestation as well as local adaptation and mitigation strategies. They have also seen how their fellow farmers are starting to financially benefit from forest-friendly livelihoods. These viable businesses include beekeeping, raising and selling tree seedlings, sale of fruit from orchards, and growing pines and other trees for construction materials – for many of these products there is existing local and regional demand. Temwa's future plans under agriculture and forestry are responding to this momentum and demand in the communities by providing opportunities for community members to benefit from forest-friendly livelihoods, while restoring the natural landscape.

Increased individual commitment to reforestation – The Agriculture and Forestry Programme helped to establish Village Natural Resource Management Committees to coordinate tree planting and awareness raising activities in their localities. While some of them have struggled with group dynamics and time commitment, their efforts have led to an increased community awareness of the benefits of reforestation and improved skills around this. Initially, most tree planting in the communities took place through mobilisation efforts of these committees.

Gradually, the focus of reforestation activities in the communities has shifted, based on demand, from communal planting to individual households. This approach has increased long-term sustainability, as forest management is becoming more self-organised and led by individual community members who can act as agents of change in their villages. The Farming Futures project and our Carbon Balance scheme, launched in early 2020, utilise this momentum and respond to the demand from committed individuals, while maintaining some of the active committees for them to continue showcasing best natural resource management practices more widely.

Capable local governance – The local governance structures were very weak and disorganised before the Agriculture and Forestry Programme, with no clear priorities, monitoring frameworks or systems for engaging duty bearers or community members. Following knowledge and skills training by Temwa, they are now working more in line with their mandated roles and responsibilities vested in them by the Local Government Act. These structures are becoming increasingly confident in identifying causes of problems and finding local solutions – requesting for Temwa’s help where they need external support, like for launching forest bylaw awareness and enforcement activities. Food and income security issues now also regularly appear in their annual plans. The Farming Futures project will further build the capacity of local governance structures to ensure they can increasingly plan and implement actions and initiatives independently.

Looking Ahead

Temwa are preparing towards the start of a new three-year Farming Futures project that will build on our existing Agriculture and Forestry Programme. This will be funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO).

Going forward, we will keep working around the changing situation with Covid-19, while continuing to empower the communities to take a leading role in managing agriculture and forestry activities locally – and ultimately creating more resilient communities that are able to transform their own futures.