

Farmer Field Schools Midterm Report – April 2023

This report shares the latest developments under Temwa’s Farmer Field Schools project in Nkhata Bay North, Malawi, which started in November 2022. We are pleased to report that, thanks to your contribution, significant progress has been made training farmers to become more food and income secure. Below we describe the positive developments in the communities over the past six months.

Project context and aims

In the Nkhata Bay North where Temwa works, 90% of families are subsistence farmers and 58% of people live below the national poverty line. The families here depend on being able to grow food, but are facing hardships due to the effects of climate change. Erratic rainfall, drought, flooding, strong winds and crop pests are affecting food production and exacerbating high vulnerability and poverty. These challenges have been worsened further by local deforestation, which erodes the soil, dries up water sources, and lowers agricultural productivity.

This project aims to improve food security for vulnerable households by establishing Farmer Field Schools, through which local lead farmers will train their peers in agricultural knowledge and skills. This is 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 facilitators that cover a range of topics related to crop production, pest management, soil conservation, and other aspects of sustainable agriculture. Over time, this will help 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.

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 : Improved agricultural productivity through sustainable agricultural practices

Farmers in Nkhata Bay have often relied on unsustainable farming practices which are not resilient to increasingly unpredictable weather practices. Use of chemical fertilisers, similarly, have proved unsustainable following their huge increase in price last year. This project aims to equip farmers with sustainable agricultural methods through Farmer Field Schools.

Community Meetings

In the early stages of the project, Temwa facilitated reflection meetings with community members on crop productivity, food security, and sustainable agriculture practices. As well as farmers, Village District Committee members and Village Heads were also present, to encourage local governance involvement in the project.



The meetings also helped farmers identify the current challenges affecting harvests, and methods for which to improve this. Farmers noted the lack of access to resources, difficult topography, poor adoption of sustainable agriculture practices, and insufficient coordination among local governing structures as key challenges. In the Njiri area, the attendees suggested only 2 farmers out of every 10 are considered to have food and nutrition security and financial security. The attendees proposed a number of initiatives, including demonstration plots so that they can learn, discuss and share experiences and solutions.

[Farmer Registration](#)

Following these meetings, farmers were welcomed to register for the project. Temwa has worked with local organisations and community leaders to identify farmers who might best benefit. The criteria for selection was based on a variety of factors such as willingness to learn, level of interest, and previous experience with farming. We have now registered 31 farmers for Njiri farmer field school (Denthema and Yakwapula Villages) and 82 farmers in Bula (Chilembe, Wakhalika and Gomba villages), making a total of 113 farmers so far. This has far exceeded the anticipated number, demonstrating the need for such training projects in these communities as well as member's commitment to the project.

[Curriculum Development](#)

Temwa has begun supporting these farmers to develop a locally tailored curriculum for each Farmer Field School, so that specific agricultural practices can be passed on according to each community's need. Developing curricula involves identifying the challenges currently being faced in each specific location, and identifying relevant strategies to address these. Each curriculum should provide farmers with practical knowledge and skills that can be applied in their own farming practices. This could include topics such as crop management, soil conservation, water management, pest control, and marketing.

The Njiri Farmer Field School's curriculum has been developed, but the Bula Farmer Field School's curriculum is still in progress. Travel to Bula, for both the Temwa team and farmers, has been challenging due to extreme rainfall, however the curriculum should be finalised in the coming weeks.

[Farmer Training](#)



Already, we have seen success resulting from farmer's training sessions. At the Tionelepo Breeding Centre in Kalinda Village, Mchulu, a training session on pig production management was held with 6 farmers, 4 of which were female, and a Mchulu VDC member.

The farmers identified the challenges they were currently facing, and were trained on best practices for pig-rearing, including constructing pig sties, mobilising sufficient feed for the pigs, and consulting veterinary personnel. Each farmer committed to the new transition plan formulated, and now hopes to register new individuals in the coming months to pass on their learning.

In the coming months, the lead farmers will continue to be trained and supported in establishing, organising, and managing their Farmer Field Schools. All of the school's curricula will also be finalised in accordance with the community's needs and goals for the project.

Community Story

Lead farmer passing on his successful learning

Mathews Msuku lives with his family of seven in Yakwapula. In recent years, he was not harvesting enough food to support his family as he was relying on monoculture crops and very expensive chemical fertiliser. Mathews struggled to provide clothes and school fees for his children, and often the family went hungry.

Last year, Mathews was trained by Temwa on sustainable agriculture practices, including mixed cropping and organic manure. Last season, he cultivated four acres of maize using mbeya manure, compared to previous years when he could only afford chemical fertiliser for one acre. He has also been able to grow one acre of ground nuts, two acres of cassava and 100 bananas. Now Mathews and his family have enough food, and they are able to sell the surplus.

This year, Mathews has registered under the Farming Field Schools project so that he can pass on his learning to other farmers. Already, Mathews has seen community members adopting sustainable agricultural practices having witnessed other's success in increasing harvests. In the future, Mathews hopes to expand his commercial farming and establish big markets which will attract buyers to the village, benefitting him and his fellow farmers.

"Before Temwa, I used to cultivate so little that I had to stay hungry some days. I could also not afford some of the basic needs for me and my children because I was getting so little profit after selling the little that I had harvested. But ever since I joined Temwa, I have learnt so many sustainable agriculture practices that are helping me harvest more than before."

