

Empowering rural women in Malawi



In central Malawi, many families live in dire poverty. Women in this region are often uneducated and rely on rain-fed agriculture to produce food and income for the entire year. This project provides 2.000 women with the tools they need to run their own business, making them financially independent while improving their family livelihoods and food security.

Location: Dowa and Mchinji districts, central Malawi

Project timeline: Nov 2017 – Dec 2018

Total project cost: €112.347

Funding gap: €92.019

Context & background

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world; over 70% of the population lives below the poverty line of \$1,25 a day. More than 80% of its people depend on agricultural activities for a living. There is a huge difference between men and women farmers in terms of access to land, resources, and credit.

Women account for most of the socio-economic activities in Malawi. However, it is estimated that only 4% of the agricultural land is registered to women. The women who do have their own plots often have no rights to cultivate this land for their own use, while women account for 70% of agricultural activities in the country. Despite their major contribution, the number of people living in poverty is increasing. Women are mostly unskilled and one third of the women is illiterate.

Due to the lack of education and agricultural knowledge, mainly non-climate-resistant agricultural techniques are used. The high costs of seeds, lack of available land and unexpected extreme weather conditions limit a good harvest, causing most families in Dowa and Mchinji to be unable to provide sufficient food for themselves throughout the year.

In addition to these socio-economic circumstances, there are also traditional-cultural views that withhold women from their development. Men control the finances and women are expected to take care of the household. Women lose a lot of time while carrying out domestic duties, like collecting water, cooking, child rearing. Because of these traditional gender roles, the majority of women depend entirely on men who are often employed as carpenter or have a small non-agricultural trading company. This makes vulnerable women in Malawi an easy target for gender discrimination and violence.

The story of Margret

Since her husband's death in 2007, 35-year-old Margret Rodgers does not have ownership of her land. When he died, his relatives grabbed Margret's land. She fled to Chiwere (in Dowa, Malawi), but was not welcomed by her own family. By early 2014, the lack of food and income was so severe that Margret had to send her four children to an orphanage 10 kilometres away.

Margret: *'What hurts most is that my children have to live as orphans while I am alive. If only I owned my own piece of land or would be able to start a small business.'*

The project that ActionAid has developed is aimed at a solution to the problems women like Margret face.

Margret: *"This project will help me to fulfil my dream: to bring back my children from the orphanage and provide them with three meals a day, year round."*



What we could achieve together

This project aims to support 2,000 unskilled rural women from two districts in central Malawi (Dowa and Mchinji) to start a small businesses so they become financially independent. The planned project period is from November 2017 to December 2018. The project will be conducted in cooperation with the *Coalition of Women Farmers* (COWFA), ActionAid's local partner in Malawi. Together with your support we will achieve the following:

Outcome 1: 2,000 women receive vocational and entrepreneurial training to start and run a commercial, production or agricultural business

- We offer 10-month **alphabetization trainings to 1,000** women through our REFLECT-ACTION method (<http://www.reflect-action.org>). A specific guide is developed in advance and three training-of-trainer workshops are organised for the community.
- We develop the **entrepreneurial skills of 2,000 women** for running a business by means of basic business management trainings. The trainings last two weeks and will be given within the local communities.
- We offer **1,800 women vocational training**, for instance in weaving carpets and baskets, keeping cattle and poultry, growing crops, processing corn and processing and packing of peanuts.

Outcome 2: 2,000 women have access to appropriate microcredit to start their business

- We connect 1,140 women with micro-credit institutions and agricultural loan banks.
- We set up 15 small-scale Village Savings and Loans (VSL) funds where all women deposit a small amount and can rely on in times of need.

Outcome 3: At least 20 local, national and international governments and women's rights organizations are involved in this project so that they will be able to set up or finance similar projects.

- We involve all stakeholders at the start, during and after the project period. To this end, stakeholder meetings will be organized at district level to share best practices, lessons learned and project results.

How this project will lead to lasting impact

By the end of the project, 2,000 rural women will have improved business management skills and are able to actively participate in sustainable economic activities. Their increased vocational skills will allow them to generate a steady income to support their households. Additionally, they will have increased access to micro-credit services and start-up capital for small-scale businesses. Finally, 200 (local)



government, national and international organizations with a vested interest in women's rights issues in Dowa and Mchinji will learn about this project and are able to adopt and replicate the lessons through initiating new projects that will benefit women.

As long-term impact we expect that there will be improvement in food security situations for chronically food insecure female-headed households, reduced school dropout rates for children, especially girls in the targeted areas and a decrease of gender-based violence cases in the targeted communities.

Monitoring & Evaluation

ActionAid in Malawi examines the progress of the project by frequent field visits. In addition, this project is also included in the annual Participatory Review and Reflection Process (PRRP) - an accessible way for communities to share their ideas, priorities and concerns about projects. This system is used in several countries, including Malawi. The main advantage is that the PRRP makes ActionAid accountable to the people they work with, simultaneously making the community co-owner of the project. ActionAid Malawi's project leader will regularly speak to COWFA's members and make frequent visits to Dowa and Mchinji to monitor the project's progress.

Project costs

The total cost of this project is € 112,347. Some costs are already covered, but we are still looking for co-funding to carry out this indispensable work. Upscaling or downscaling of this project is possible. With your investment, we can improve opportunities for 2,000 women in central Malawi.

Contact

For more information about this project, please contact Ester van den Berg, philanthropy and partnerships officer and program officer at ActionAid Netherlands. By e-mail: ester.vandenberg@actionaid.org or by phone: 020-5206210.

Together we have the power to change the future.

Join us!