

Bvumbwe women tell

A Compelling Vegetable Story



“ Women here, like most other areas of Malawi, have been left behind doing domestic chores while the men venture out to earn a living; providing for their families, taking care of their needs and putting their children through school. ”

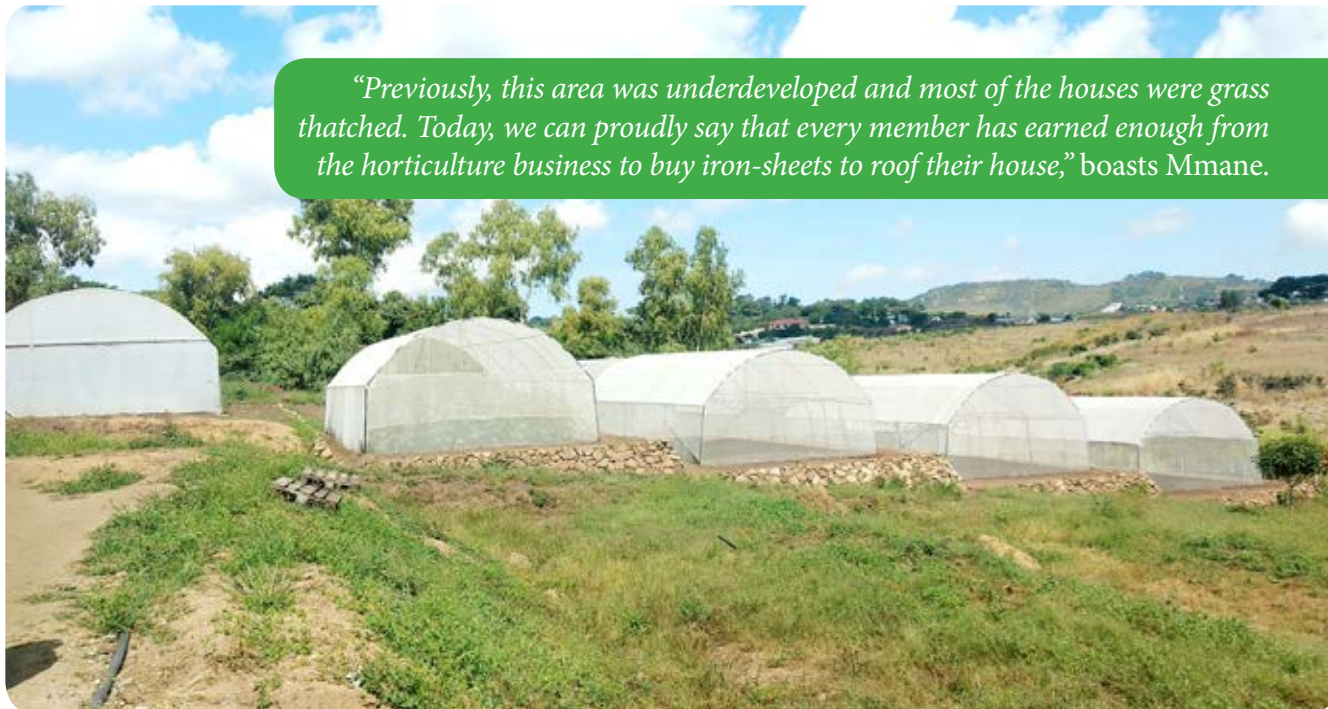
It is almost midday on a Thursday and uncharacteristically cold in Thyolo District, southern Malawi. But for 34-year-old Chifundo Mmane, it is ideal weather for her horticulture business.

Chifundo waters her vegetable garden, about 40 meters away from her home.

From afar, the garden is vividly green, a lush oasis amidst dry uncultivated land. Chifundo, a single mother, is using drip irrigation with basic but modern technology.

She is amongst 20 women farmers who are celebrating in Chinkwende Village, in Traditional Authority Bvumbwe Thyolo district.

Just a few years ago, these women could not contribute anything towards the economic development of their country, let alone their own households.



“Previously, this area was underdeveloped and most of the houses were grass thatched. Today, we can proudly say that every member has earned enough from the horticulture business to buy iron-sheets to roof their house,” boasts Mmane.

Just a few years ago, these women could not contribute anything towards the economic development of their country, let alone their own households.

Women here, like many other areas of Malawi, have been left behind tasked with domestic chores while the men have ventured out to earn a living to provide for their families, take care of their needs and to put their children through school. But through the smallholder irrigation initiative set up in the area by Roseberry Farms, a for-profit private sector operator in the horticulture industry, their story has changed.

“Every member of the group has greatly benefited,” says Mmane.

According to Ruth Kalima, Roseberry Farms Manager, through this horticulture business each member now earns between 100,000 - 150,000 Malawi Kwacha a month, compared to an average of 30,000 Malawi Kwacha previously.

In fact, depending on the combination of vegetables

grown, farmers can bring in up to 250,000 Malawi Kwacha per month as confirmed by one of the beneficiary farmers that had a combined basket of cauliflower and butternut.

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a dual supply chain which produces high value vegetables for the retail market directly aimed at import substitution.

While the anchor farm will produce various high-quality horticulture products using greenhouse technology, the smallholder supply chain will produce crops using a combination of open land and drip irrigation.

“The rationale behind this business model is to develop women and previously disadvantaged people, and to establish Malawi as a net exporter of horticulture



products,” according to Kalima.

The company is able to buy on average 100 metric ton of vegetables per month from the out-grower farmers. Initially, before the company installed the drip irrigation on their land, farmers would harvest only 80 tons per year.

The project is supported through the Malawi Innovation Challenge Fund (MICF) – a US\$21 million competitive, transparent mechanism that provides matching-grant finance for innovative projects proposed by the private sector active in Malawi’s agricultural, manufacturing and logistics sectors.

Supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department for International Development (UKAid), and the German Development Bank (KfW) the MICF is designed to be a quick, responsive mechanism that has a deep understanding of the needs of the private sector in Malawi.

According to Kalima, there is still need for greater investment to include more women and underprivileged people to reach the goal of promoting Malawi as a high value horticulture exporting nation.

The initiative is currently utilising retail outlets such as Peoples and Shoprite to sell its vegetables. Perishables Manager at Peoples Supermarket, Chancy Chimchere says “ Roseberry supplies us on a daily basis and the vegetables

are of high quality and fresh.”

For the first time in Malawi, Roseberry has also replaced the imported English Cucumber with a locally produced cucumber.

The country is more than capable of producing high quality products for its domestic market whilst reducing imports.

UNDP Deputy Resident Representative for operations Kasia Wawiernia, is impressed with the project impact on the vegetable supply chain.

“Strengthening the out-grower program by providing the farmers with targeted technical backstopping, access to agricultural inputs and the creation of an irrigation scheme will enable the company (Roseberry Farms) to build partnerships with the contracted farmers. This is good news. The UNDP and partners are “looking forward to seeing this model being successfully replicated across the district and the region.” says Wawiernia.



“There are some very entrepreneurial Malawians, particularly women, who have got a very smart approach to using the natural benefits of Malawi which is a fantastic garden for growing things”

Chris Austin, Interim DFID Country Head, British High Commission

Project Building Blocks

Organising initial 40 farmers and establishing out-grower contract scheme



Establishment of an out-grower training program and setting up of the irrigation system for out-growers on 5 hectares; setting up of a traceability system for produce - field to super market shelf



Setting up of pack house and cold chain with capacity of 5MT per day



Setting up of 7 Greenhouses and establishing an irrigation scheme on 5 hectares on the anchor farm



100 MT of high volume horticulture produce procured from contracted farmers per month.



40 farmers have an increase in income by 75% to US\$2,100 from horticulture farming per annum. 60 new jobs to be created.



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