



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNEVOC

International Centre
for Technical and Vocational
Education and Training



Preparing Malawian farmers
for post-COVID-19 recovery

Promising Practice 2021

Context

Modernizing poultry farming

While the Malawian poultry sector has expanded in recent years, production has struggled to keep pace with rising demand. To address this shortage, multiple improvements are needed to overcome existing constraints in production systems, breeding practices, disease and parasite management, and marketing strategies. The modernization of local chicken production will enable farmers to become more competitive, meet consumer demand and ensure the sustainability of the sector.

Arable farming

Grains and cereals are a major food source in Malawi. By providing training in post-harvest care, MVS aims to equip farmers with the skills needed to greatly improve crop yields, extend the post-harvest life of crops, increase market quality and price, and ultimately improve the availability of grains and cereals in Malawi.

Economic stability

The training programme offered by MVS focuses on the upgrade of livestock rearing methods and harvesting practices. The long-term goal is to improve the economic stability of small-scale farmers and strengthen their preparedness for possible crises in the post-pandemic era.

Overview

Implemented by: Mikolongwe Vocational School

Where: Malawi

Theme: COVID-19 response

Status: Programme active since February 2021

Mikolongwe Vocational School (MVS) provides school leavers, farmers, and underprivileged youth, who are unable to attend government and private universities and colleges, with subsidized vocational training.

The school is centred on equipping young men and women with technical skills and knowledge to become self-reliant and productive members of society, either by securing employment or starting their own businesses.

Objectives

The objectives of the programme are:

1. To equip farmers with up-to-date knowledge and skills in poultry production and post-harvest crop handling
2. To connect farmers for knowledge sharing and further upskilling
3. To train farmers to become trainers, something which is vital for the sustainability of the programme
4. To support farmers with training on how to better protect their crops from pests and incremental weather damage and how to care for livestock to avoid losses due to diseases and incorrect handling,
5. To uplift the economic status of households who suffered loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic



Training small-scale farmers

There are significant knowledge gaps in small-scale farming practices in Malawi. Many farmers do not have proper livestock housing facilities and often lack proper disease management practices. These limitations negatively affect yield and reduce the economic value of their livestock and produce.

The loss of crops due to pests and poor practices also continues to be a major issue for farmers. These challenges, combined with abrupt weather changes, can wreak havoc on livelihoods.

Through the MVS training programme, farmers are supported in improving the health of their livestock (predominantly chickens) and the quality and quantity of their crops.

An added value is that all of the material used during training is locally available and can be sourced directly by farmers, ensuring that the practices learned can continue to be applied long after training has ended.

Overall, the nature of the programme is self-sustaining as trainees are taught how to train others and pass on their newly acquired knowledge to others in their communities.

Outcomes and impact

Newly acquired knowledge

Heightened knowledge and skills related to small-scale farming led to improvements both in crop quality and yield, and to the health and value of livestock.

Financial gain

Improved outputs from farms resulted in increased income for farmers and provided a measure of economic stability for themselves and their families.

Food security

On a larger scale, improved yield and protected crops will help alleviate food insecurity in Malawi, with crops being available for longer periods throughout the year. In addition to benefiting the health of the farming families who would otherwise be vulnerable to food shortages, the improvements in crop management enable other livestock farmers to buy good quality animal feed at reasonable prices more readily, thus improving their own animal produce yields.

Improved farming networks

Increased connections between farmers as a result of this initiative have resulted in greater support networks and an expansion of knowledge sharing.



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Challenges and insights

Locality and timing

There was a concern that farmers would not be able to attend the training if it was a long distance away from their farms and at busy times during the farming calendar. With this in mind, training venues were identified that were situated close to farms and the courses were run during farming off-seasons.

Personalized support

In an effort to encourage farmers to sign-up for training, the benefits of the course were clearly presented from the outset. Personalized support also proved to be invaluable, with training tailored to the needs of each farmer. This was reinforced by visits from dedicated staff members to farmers' homes for on-site mentoring and guidance.

Inclusiveness

COVID-19 has negatively impacted the finances of many households in Malawi. The biggest impact has been on women and children. For this reason, making sure that training was available to both male and female farmers was a critical part of programme planning and implementation

The future

Ensuring sustainability was at the core of programme design. Farmers were encouraged to share their new skills and knowledge with others in their communities, something they were eager to do upon course completion.

Furthermore, the training programme will be added to the main curriculum for agricultural training. In the future, all those who undergo a formal agricultural course will complete this module in livelihood and post-harvest crop handling.

Learn more

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