



AFIKEPO NEWS

Village savings and loans pick up the pieces after Cyclone disaster

Thanks to her membership to the village savings and loan association (VSLA), which is an intervention under Afikepo, Chikaonda is slowly rebuilding her life.

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Women in Mulanje rising from cyclone disaster

The Afikepo Nutrition Programme, is helping women in the area to recover by providing training on integrated farming, kitchen gardens, and personal hygiene.

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Afikepo steps up in the fight against cholera

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Afikepo brings hope for reconstruction

Despite the disruptions brought about by the cyclone, Banda prefers to look on the positive side of Afikepo, noting that it has built people's resilience, ensuring its benefits would be sustainable.

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SUCCESS STORY

Volunteers tackle malnutrition myths for healthy children



29-year-old Pilirani Kachimanga carrying her 6 months old daughter Trinity Kachimanga at their home in Lipalama Village in Chiradzulu southern Malawi on Friday, 2 June 2023 ©UNICEF/2023/Chikondi

Pilirani Kachimanga grew up hearing that eggs are hazardous for pregnant women and lactating mothers.

During her first pregnancy over a decade ago, elderly women warned that she would give birth to a crybaby with a head "as hairless as an egg" if she broke the taboo.

"The thought of having a bald-headed baby who wept relentlessly was terrifying, but I didn't stop eating eggs for my health and the good of the unborn child. Strangely, nothing peculiar happened, except that I looked healthier than my friends who believed the myths and my baby was born with greater weight than theirs," narrates Pilirani.

The 39-year-old woman, who defied the fear of the unknown, recalls that many pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and children aged below five were malnourished in Lipalama area, Traditional Authority Mpunga in Chiradzulu District, southern Malawi.

Overdependence on nsima and porridge from maize flour, energy-boosting meals with scanty nutrients required for children's growth was to blame.

"The elders also told me a baby cannot live on breast milk alone, but babies spoon-fed porridge instead of being exclusively breastfed for six months, had ballooned bellies, low weight and slow growth," she explains.

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○ Volunteers tackle nutrition myths for healthy children

Pilirani feels lucky to have overcome the myths for the benefit of her three children.

“Many children in my neighbourhood were malnourished due to myths that created fear of the unknown. From 15-year-old Femia to seven-month-old Trinity, none of my three children suffered malnutrition,” she brags.

Pilirani exclusively breastfed the three children for six months. Her smiling baby, born on 27 November 2022, personifies the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, not extra foods likely to harm their health and growth.

On 27 May 2023, she introduced light complementary feeding, mostly porridge comprising a mix of ingredients from six food groups in Baby Trinity’s diet.

“I kept hands off extra meals because breast milk contains all the necessary nutrients for a baby and her digestive system wasn’t well-developed to break hard food,” Pilirani explains.

Trinity’s complementary platter contains porridge enriched with groundnut flour, eggs, vegetable soup, pawpaw juice and other foodstuffs.

Pilirani learned to prepare the soft meal with a bit of everything from *masanje*, the communal cooking demonstrations convened by nutrition promoters and cluster leaders who share the importance of diversified diets and ways to prepare nutritious meals from locally available foodstuffs.

“Apart from the enriched porridge my daughter takes four times a day, I also learned how to cook porridge from pumpkins and make juice from pawpaws and sweet potato leaves,” she states.

The interventions such as cooking lessons and door-to-door visits by the community-based volunteers helps fight malnutrition, and have proved pivotal in shattering myths and misconceptions fueling malnutrition in children.

“During the sessions, promoters tell us to eat more than just nsima every Malawian grows up with. They show us many nutritious local foods that we can eat for our benefit if we master different ways of preparing them,” she explains.

Pilirani is one of 360 mothers under Mwaiwathu care group in Traditional Authority Mpunga, Chiradzulu District in southern Malawi. The group led by nutrition promoter Elias Maluwa comprises 36 clusters of 10 households each. The volunteers work with cluster leaders and village heads to end malnutrition. This is part of Afikepo Project funded by the European Union to ramp up nutrition, sanitation and hygiene so that children can live healthy lives and reach their full potential.

“We don’t want any child to suffer from malnutrition and its debilitating effects, so we work closely with village heads to confront the myths and misconceptions fuelling malnutrition. We now have healthy children and mothers,” Elias states.

Sights of healthy children at play delight the volunteer who believes a healthy start in life boosts their growth, learning and productivity.

“We happily work to create a community free from malnutrition because Malawi needs healthy people to develop. We are saving our children and time once spent nursing sick children. When children are happy and free from preventable conditions, we are all happy,” he explains.

Elias and his group also promote sanitation and hygiene to combat diseases that fuel malnutrition in children.

“Before Cyclone Freddy struck in March this year, 177 households had latrines. However, 82 were destroyed by the torrents that battered our area for four days nonstop,” he says.

None of the 11 pregnant women and 22 children aged under five in his zone was diagnosed with malnutrition in May this year.

“The future looks bright if we continue working together to have healthy children born of healthy mothers and protect every child from malnutrition,” he explains.

Maxwell Matumbo, one of the 20 Health Surveillance Assistants at Thumbwe health Centre, is equally optimistic.

He explains: “The community-based agents, especially the promoters, cluster leaders and village heads, are our ears and eyes in areas where they live. As community health workers, we are too few to get to every household, but these people quickly alert us when they detect suspected malnourished children, sanitation gaps and myths.

“As a result, the number of malnourished children detected during nutrition screening sessions in communities and at our health facilities is falling. From January to June this year, only two children received ready-to-use therapeutic food [a peanut butter-like paste] used to treat severe malnutrition without complications. Until 2019, we used to find eight malnourished children a month.”

The community health worker finds it incredible that no child is admitted to the health centre’s nutrition rehabilitation unit or receiving milk used to treat complications of severe acute malnutrition.

“I thank Afikepo for empowering community-based agents to confront malnutrition and myths in their midst. Now children are healthy and growing well, thereby spending more time in school, learning to become productive citizens, not bedridden with preventable disease or wasting time and money on hospital trips.”



Pilirani Kachimanga preparing to feed her daughter alongside cluster leader Mary Mtambo in Lipalama Village in Chiradzulu ©UNICEF/2023/Chikondi

Village savings and loans pick up the pieces after Cyclone disaster

The road to recovery



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Bridget Chikaonda is still picking up the pieces months after Tropical Cyclone Freddy knocked her off her stride and set her back by years in her efforts to improve her life.

Before the disaster struck, she had 15 chickens and two pigs. All chickens perished when a wall of her house collapsed on them. Similarly, the wall of the pigsty also collapsed, killing the sow. Her crops were washed away, and her toilet collapsed. For the crestfallen Chikaonda, it was a disaster beyond belief. The loss was a shared experience throughout the village.

Since the cyclone, however, Chikaonda and others have been held by the hand by the social support system in the village as they recover from the disaster.

She is a beneficiary of the Afikepo Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture Programme in her village, Sani, in the area of Traditional Authority Nanseta in Thyolo.

The programme, which is funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the Government of Malawi, in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), aims to address the problem of undernutrition, particularly in under-five children.

Thanks to her membership to the village savings and loan association (VSLA), which is an intervention under Afikepo, Chikaonda is slowly rebuilding her life.

She has rebuilt her house with a loan she obtained from the VSLA. She has planted some crops to replace those that were washed away to improve the consumption of diversified diets by her children, one of whom is only four years old. More than anything, she yearns to start rearing chickens again once she has finalised repaying the loan.

The piglet that survived the disaster stays close to her heart as she says it is key to her recovery and survival.

"If you rear pigs and follow all the husbandry practices, you make more money with which you can provide for your family as well as save some with the village bank," Chikaonda says.

She is effusive in her praise of the village bank, which she says has been the difference between despair and the path to recovery: "Without the village bank, I wouldn't have rebuilt this house."

Olive Mpambo, who chairs the VLSA, faced a similar fate after her chickens and a pig also perished in the disaster. She, too, has moved on. She has bought another pig to replace the one that died.

"My ambition now is to buy chickens and start raising them again once I have repaid the loan I obtained from the village bank," Mpambo says.

The VSLA, Mpambo explains, has 19 members (all female), but following Cyclone Freddy, only three, including Chikaonda, obtained loans to rebuild their lives.



Olive and her sons uprooting grass in their backyard garden ©UNICEF/2023/HD Plus

○ Village savings and loans pick up the pieces after Cyclone disaster

“At the time of the disaster, all members had outstanding loans, but some didn’t want to get more because they were afraid of defaulting. Only three people obtained loans to rebuild their houses. One rented a garden where she is growing vegetables,” Mpambo explains.

Even under such challenging circumstances, Chikaonda and Mpambo aim to provide for their families and ensure the nutritional well-being of their respective under-five children.

It is a point not lost on either Village Head Sani or Ellard Kuse, who is the chairperson of Nanseta village nutrition coordination committee.

The village chief acknowledges that the assistance his village has received from Afikepo, especially in the promotion of backyard gardens, will go a long way to improving the nutrition of his subjects, including children.

“All people in the village are encouraged to construct backyard gardens because they contribute towards proper nutrition of children,” the chief says.

Kuse agrees, noting that the promotion of dietary diversification runs at the heart of the Afikepo nutrition programme.

“We encourage people to have backyard gardens, raise small livestock such as chickens, rabbits, hare, pigeons, ducks and guinea fowls. We also urge them to join VSLAs to enable them recover in times of need,” says Kuse, who is also the master trainer for the area.

He foresees a long road to recovery for the communities, but feels the biggest challenge facing them in that process after the rains washed away their crops will be how they rehabilitate the fertility of the soil.

Kuse explains that keeping small animals such as chickens and rabbits performs a dual function of improving nutrition of the families as well as providing manure for farm use. Communities, he adds, are taken through the production of compost manure from plant waste and animal droppings.

“We are working with the communities to restore the fertility of the soil so that they can grow their crops. We are encouraging them to use manure to restore the fertility,” Kuse says.

With the Afikepo interventions, Chikaonda and other people affected by the cyclone are on a steady path to recovery of their livelihoods.

Women in Mulanje rising from cyclone disaster

Promoting good nutrition during emergencies



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Women in Group Village Head Waluma in Traditional Authority Chikumbu in Mulanje will not forget the traumatic experience of Cyclone Freddy.

Their crops were washed away, their houses and other home infrastructure, such as kitchens and toilets, collapsed or were partially destroyed, and they lost their food and the animals they were rearing.

The Afikepo Nutrition Programme, funded by the European Union and implemented by UNICEF and the Food and Agriculture Organisation, has been active in Mulanje for years. However, the destruction brought by Cyclone Freddy threatened to set back the gains made over the period, explains Misheck Mwambakulu, FAO District Manager for Mulanje.

“The little food that remained in their houses was washed away. Crops in their fields got washed away. The infrastructure that supports good sanitation and hygiene, such as toilets, were completely demolished with rising water levels,” Mwambakulu says.

Janet Bisani, a promoter in GVH Waluma, explains that the disaster left them in a pickle and disrupted the promotion of nutrition and hygiene, which are central to Afikepo, in the village through Tapatsidwa and Takonzeka care groups which she oversees.

“Before Cyclone Freddy, we would meet in groups and teach each other how to prepare the six food groups from locally available sources. We taught our members about integrated farming, kitchen gardens, toilets, tippy-taps, and personal hygiene. You may eat six food groups, but if the household fails

to follow hygienic practices, children could contract cholera,” Bisani says.

Stella Tebulo, a mother of three, and Sheila Juma, a mother of one, fondly recall the pre-cyclone days when they learned about cooking and modern farming practices through their respective care groups.

“I learnt about the one-pot dish that has all food groups. We learnt the importance of feeding nutritious food to our children,” Tebulo says.

Juma, too, recalls the time when they practiced integrated farming and they would grow crops such as cowpeas, soya, groundnuts, maize, and orange-fleshed sweet potatoes (OFSP) on small parcels of land to maximize land use while rearing small animals such as chickens and rabbits on the side.

○ Women in Mulanje rising from cyclone disaster



Tapasidwa caregroup in session in Mulanje ©UNICEF/2023/HD Plus

“In normal times, we lacked for nothing. On one piece of land, we would grow maize, potatoes, soya, pigeon peas, and cowpeas. If one crop doesn’t work out, we would rely on another crop that did well,” Tebulo adds.

In the aftermath of the cyclone, Afikepo moved in swiftly, Mwambakulu explains.

“We normally implement our activities under the care group model, which has community structures such as promoters, village nutrition coordination committees, and area nutrition coordination committees. We were alerted about how Mulanje has been affected through these structures,” he says.

They immediately commenced activities through promoters to continue providing key messages on how households can live, considering that most of their sanitation structure were destroyed.

A cooking demonstration in April was one of the earliest activities the women under Takonzeka and Tapatsdwa care groups organised.

“Since most of the maize and other crops got washed away. We are now dependent on OFSP, which survived,” Bisani says.

During the cooking demonstration, Tebulo says she learnt about the many uses of OFSP, such as porridge, chips, and juice.

Years of involvement with Afikepo have given the women plenty of resilience tactics, such as growing different crops under winter cropping.

“We do winter cropping and hope to get our salvation from there. I also rear chickens which are keeping me going,” she says.

The group also has a solar dryer which allows members to dry vegetables found in plenty during the rainy season for later use.

“Because of the solar dryer, we could use the food stored in the house soon after the cyclone. It is very helpful,” Bisani says.



A solar dryer that is used by the caregroups to dry and remove moisture content in food substances ©UNICEF/2023/HD Plus



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Afikepo steps up in the fight against cholera

Over the past year, Malawi has experienced its worst cholera outbreak in two decades. Currently, 59,000 people have contracted the disease, and 1,761 died.

As infection and fatality cases continue to decline, there are still challenges regarding community behaviour change.

Health surveillance assistant, Dynes Josiah, says behaviour change in Sani village Thyolo started to become a reality when five cholera cases were detected in the area in January and February this year.

“Initially, when we did door-to-door household visits on good hygiene practices to prevent cholera, people never took us seriously. It took time for the message to sink in, and when the area registered cases, people started to listen,” she explains.

Since then, the last reported cholera case in Sani village was on February 17. Josiah attributes this to the collaborative work she has undertaken with the village’s leadership, promoters, cluster leaders, and care groups to help arrest the spread of the disease by enforcing hygiene standards.

One of the people Josiah has been working closely with is Olive Mpomba, the promoter for the Afikepo Nutrition Programme for Sani village.

Mpomba explains that the Community Behaviour Tracking Tool (CBTT) has played a significant role in tracking the village’s best hygienic practices.

○ Afikepo steps up in the fight against cholera

The CBTT is a monitoring and evaluation tool deployed under the Afikepo Nutrition Programme, which contains indicators to track the progress communities are making in terms of behavioural change towards nutritional uptake among pregnant women, lactating mothers, adolescent girls, and nutritional assessment of children under the age of five using middle upper circumference tapes as well as handwashing practices.

The Afikepo nutrition programme is funded by the European Union (EU) in partnership with UNICEF Malawi and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to address the problem of undernutrition, particularly in children under five.

The WASH component in the CBTT provides guidelines for washing hands on five occasions: before preparing food, after changing a nappy, after visiting the toilet, before eating, and before breastfeeding a baby.

“The handwashing component helps in cholera prevention. Under-five children are dependent on their parents, so we encourage parents to wash their hands. Children usually copy the behaviour of their parents. If parents don’t wash their hands, their children will follow



Mercy Chikaonda’s son washes his hands at his families’ ‘mpondagiya’ handwashing facility
©UNICEF/2023/HD Plus

suit. If people wash their hands, we can prevent cholera,” says Iness Chitedze, one of the contributors to the CBTT. Mpomba also explains that the CBTT has become all the more critical with the outbreak of the cholera epidemic.

“We go around the village advising women and caregivers about the importance of hygiene, especially the need to have toilets and tippy-taps outside these facilities,” Mpomba says.

As one way of fostering community dialogue and continuous feedback, the village holds regular dialogue sessions. While sparks don’t fly when they have these engagement meetings, resolutions agreed upon during such gatherings are binding, and anyone who falls foul of them receives the wrath of the village chief, Witness Chimombo.

Chimombo appreciates the work that health workers, promoters, and care groups are doing, and he set by-laws to complement their work.

“We made a by-law that any household that doesn’t have a toilet would be fined a chicken. If they ignore the fine, their case will be escalated to the T/A. But most toilets collapsed due to Cyclone Freddy, so we cannot enforce that law now. We have given people a grace period for reconstruction,” he says.

Mercy Chikaonda is ahead of the curve and has taken extraordinary precautions to ensure her household remains untouched by cholera. She has a well-tended toilet and tippy-taps outside, forbidding her household members from washing plates in the river.

“We receive chlorine every two weeks, which I apply to water. If I don’t have chlorine, I draw drinking water in a bucket with a lid. When I bring it home, I boil it,” Chikaonda.

Josiah is encouraged by the village’s progress, but she vows never to relent until cholera is decisively dealt with.



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Afikepo brings hope for reconstruction

Mulanje was one of the worst affected districts when Cyclone Freddy caused havoc throughout southern Malawi. Thousands of people within the district were displaced to camps for internally displaced persons.

There was also massive property destruction and loss of crops and livestock. The disaster set back some of the gains achieved in addressing the district’s malnutrition problems through the European Union-funded Afikepo project.

James Banda, Chief Agricultural Officer for Mulanje District, says the cyclone occurred at the worst possible time in the growing season, just when some crops were ready for harvesting.

“We had what we would call a normal growing season. But we got hit by the cyclone at the very end, when the harvest was still in the field. So, most of the foodstuffs which people depend for various recipes and other food items were lost,” he says.

FAO District Manager for Mulanje, Misheck Mwambakulu, adds that the disaster destroyed the little food people had left in their homes.

“Even worse is the sanitation infrastructure like toilets were completely demolished with rising water levels. So this impacted safe water and hygiene facilities in the various villages,” Mwambakulu says.

The Afikepo Nutrition Programme aims to address the problem of undernutrition, particularly in under-five children. UNICEF and the Food and Agriculture Organisation are implementing the programme.

Mercy Chikaonda is ahead of the curve and has taken extraordinary precautions to ensure her household remains untouched by cholera. She has a well-tended toilet and tippy-taps outside, forbidding her household members from washing plates in the river.

○ Afikepo brings hope for reconstruction

Afikepo implements its activities under the care group structure, which has community structures such as promoters, village nutrition coordination committees (VNCC), and area nutrition coordination committees (ANCC).

Despite the disruptions brought about by the cyclone, Banda prefers to look on the positive side of Afikepo, noting that it has built people's resilience through such structures, ensuring its benefits would be sustainable.

"By design, the Afikepo project is more sustainable because we have been using existing local structures. We have built the capacity of these structures, and they are now better placed to deliver the service they were meant to be delivering all along," Banda says.

Violet Ngulube, the Agriculture Extension Development Officer for Thanguzi Section in the district, observes that Afikepo imparted impactful knowledge to beneficiaries who served them during the worst period of the disaster.

"Afikepo taught families about mixed cropping. The heavy rains that came with Cyclone Freddy washed away most of their crops, particularly maize. But due to that type of cropping, they could harvest orange-fleshed sweet potatoes [OFSP], on which they are subsisting," she explains.

The vines for OFSP, she adds, can be replanted for sustainability.

Ngulube also observes that people need assistance now more than ever with so much that went on.

For now, Afikepo intends to continue screening children and embark on community mobilisation campaigns that will focus on regaining water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities lost in the disaster and encouraging communities to use the available foods.

"The indicators which were going on well in terms of nutrition, sanitation, and exclusive feeding have all been disturbed by the cyclone; we need to regain them within the shortest period possible, and life continues as normal," Mwambakulu says.

Chief Mpunga takes nutrition myths head on

"Thanks to the tireless volunteers, pregnant women now eat eggs without fear and food is no longer just nsima, which fills the stomach but offers less nutrients that they need to give birth to healthy babies," explains the chief.



45-year-old Ainess Benard who is Traditional Authority Mpunga is seen feeding her cow at her home in Chiradzulu southern Malawi ©UNICEF/2023/HD Plus

Ainess Benard is the first woman to be enthroned as Traditional Authority (TA) Mpunga in her rural setting south of Chiradzulu Town in southern Malawi.

In 2010, the 45-year-old mother of four became the most powerful chief in her territory where she grew up being told that pregnant women and lactating mothers who eat eggs and meat risk giving birth to bald-headed crybabies. She proudly touts herself as a defender of the well-being and rights of women and children.

"As a leader, my ascendancy and experience has taught me to serve and lead by example," she says. My people trust me because I do what I say instead of just telling them 'do this'

or 'don't do that'. I make sure everyone lives happily and enjoys good health, including those who cannot speak or work for themselves."

The community leader has become a firm cultural warrior tackling myths and misconceptions fueling malnutrition among pregnant women, lactating mothers and children aged below five.

As a custodian of culture, she goes village to village alongside nutrition promoters to ensure children have a healthy start in life that guarantees children's good health, mental growth, learning ability as well as better productivity and chances in life.

"Everyone deserves nutritious food because we cannot talk about healthy lives without healthy diets, so it's unfair that myths and misinformation denied children and women diversified diets containing eggs and meat," she states.

TA Mpunga is among five nutrition champions in Chiradzulu district, where Afikepo project has been ramping up nutrition, crop diversification and sanitation since 2018. The project is underway in 10 districts to ensure children reach their full potential is supported by UNICEF and its sister United Nations agency, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), with funding from the European Union.

○ Chief Mpunga takes nutrition myths head on

“Before the rollout of Afikepo, we had many nutritional challenges, especially stunting. Many children were too small for their age because to us, food was nsima and nsima was food. We didn’t know the importance of diversified diets, skills to prepare nutritious meals from locally produced foods and the dangers of poor sanitation,” she explains.

She thanks Afikepo for training community-based volunteers who go door to door and village to village conducting nutrition counselling sessions to share the importance of diversified diets from six food groups. The nutrition promoters and cluster leaders also convene communal cooking demonstrations to teach women different ways to prepare nutritious meals.

“Thanks to the tireless volunteers, pregnant women now eat eggs without fear and food is no longer just nsima, which fills the stomach but offers less nutrients that they need to give birth to healthy babies,” explains the chief.

Instead of just relying on meals from rain-fed crops whose yields keep dwindling due to climate change and loss of soil fertility, T/A Mpunga and her community now grow vegetables all year-round in their backyards and neighbouring wetlands. The backyard vegetable gardens symbolise a communal breakaway from just nsima and porridge from plain maize flour that kept both children and adults malnourished.

The chief knows that mindset change does not occur overnight, but gradually.

“To combat the myths and misconceptions relayed from one generation to another, I tell village heads and village development

committees to always remind people in their communities that it is time we challenged and modified harmful cultural beliefs. I personally meet resistant parents, especially fellow women, to discuss the benefits of eating diverse diets from six food groups,” she narrates.

The traditional leader also attends masanje, the community-based cooking demonstrations where she, among others, first got to taste fritters from ground soybeans as well as pigeon peas boiled together with meat and vegetables.

“I still attend the cooking demonstrations because I learn a lot, especially the different recipes from locally available foodstuffs that we once took for granted. When I go home, I put the lessons to good use so that my four-year-old grandson can grow well,” she says.

Chiradzulu district had one of the highest malnutrition rates in the country where nearly one in three children are stunted, according to the Malawi Demographic and Health Survey of 2015.

Health Surveillance Assistant Maxwell Matumbo says the numbers of moderately and severely malnourished children is dropping in TA Mpunga’s territory.

The community health worker has worked in Mpunga’s territory for 13 years. He conducts door-to-door visits and nutrition screening during under-five clinics.

He commends the chief for rallying fellow traditional leaders to safeguard the nutrition and well-being of every child, pregnant woman and lactating mother.

“The hard-working chief uses every opportunity, including communal gatherings, funerals and area development committee meetings, to rally village heads and change agents to dial up correct nutrition messages. She has set the tone for all village heads and change is vivid. Malnutrition rates are falling, meaning that children are living healthy lives as myths that prevented them from eating a diversity of foods are disappearing,” he states.

The chief makes community health workers’ jobs easier alongside the network of community volunteers when it comes to sharing the correct nutrition and sanitation practices from health workers, states Matumbo.

And Chief Mpunga is excited with the falling count of malnourished children in her area. She urges community leaders to “jump to the front and lead by doing, not just talking” in confronting malnutrition and associated myths that deny vulnerable diverse diets.

She states: “We’re thankful to partners for sharing with us the benefits of diversified diets, sanitation and hygiene. We cannot improve our health and wellbeing unless we shed harmful cultural beliefs and embrace the recommended way of life.

“The future looks good if we sustain the teamwork and community action that we have embraced under Afikepo.”

Instead of just relying on meals from rain-fed crops whose yields keep dwindling due to climate change and loss of soil fertility, T/A Mpunga and her community now grow vegetables all year-round in their backyards and neighbouring wetlands. The backyard vegetable gardens symbolise a communal breakaway from just nsima and porridge from plain maize flour that kept both children and adults malnourished.



Afikepo

is a Chichewa name, which means “let them [the children] develop to their full potential.” It is being implemented with the aim of increasing and diversifying dietary intake of safe and nutritious foods to achieve optimal nutrition for women of child bearing age, adolescent girls, infants and young children in the 10 targeted districts of Chitipa, Karonga, Mzimba, Nkhatabay, Nkhotakota, Kasungu, Salima, Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje. The Afikepo nutrition sensitive agriculture project is part of the wider Afikepo programme which is funded by the European Union and is being implemented from July 2017 to December 2023.

Nutrition in Malawi¹

Under-nutrition has characterized the nutrition situation in Malawi for decades and is a prominent factor leading to an annual loss in productivity and economic growth estimated at 10% annually². To address these challenges, the Delegation of the European-Union (EU) is funding FAO/UNICEF interventions under the overall coordination of the Department of Nutrition, HIV and AIDS and the direct implementation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development. These are part of the Afikepo Nutrition Programme, a 5-year (2017 - 2022)³ project supporting multi-sectorial efforts to curb malnutrition among children below 5 years, women of childbearing age, pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls. Afikepo is a Chichewa expression, which means "Let them develop to their full potential."

The programme is being implemented in Chitipa, Karonga, Mzimba, Nkhata Bay, Nkhatakota, Salima, Kasungu, Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje.

¹ MICS 2020/2021.

² African Union Commission (AUC) and NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (supported by ECA and the UN World Food Programme, Cost of Hunger in Africa (COHA) Study).

³ The project was granted a no cost extension by donors to December 2023.

Nutritional status of children



35%

of children under-five are **stunted**



4%

of children under-five are **overweight**



3%

of children under-five are **wasted**



13%

of children under-five are **underweight**



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