



AFIKEPO NEWS

Tracking tool brings new lease of life

With the use of the tool, T/A Mphonde communities have improved their legumes uptake to 70 per cent compared to less than 30 per cent before the tool was deployed two years ago.

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Not just another delicacy

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Male involvement key to family nutrition

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Tuning in for nutrition

Takondwa Care Group has a radio listening club and Baloyi says members listen to Chirundu Community Radio for programmes on breastfeeding, antenatal care, home care, hygiene, and agriculture, among other subjects.

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SUCCESS STORY

Afikepo helping teens reach their full potential



Lughano Adolescent Girls Group members are seen with baked bread at Mwenelupembe Village in Karonga, northern Malawi ©UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chikondi

For members of Lughano Adolescent Girls Group, from Group Village Head Mwenelupembe in Karonga, the saying that half a loaf is better than none is true both literally and figuratively.

The girls — 23 of them — own and run a bakery in their home village. The building housing the bakery is a brick-and-mortar affair, with a wisp of smoke escaping intermittently from under the eaves and rising slowly to the sky on this hot afternoon.

Over a dozen girls are gathered outside this ordinary house, chattering and performing various chores. Some knead the flour while others enter the bakery and soon emerge with teary eyes.

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The Government
of Malawi



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○ Afikepo helping teens reach their full potential



Mirriam Sichale a pregnant woman is seen leaving Lughano Adolescent Girls Group premises after buying bread ©UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chikondi

As the girls walk in, you cannot help observing a 'ritual' they perform. As they walk in, they take off their shoes, and everyone does that without exception.

"People visit the toilet or step on some other dirt. This is a healthy area where we keep a lot of foodstuffs such as flour and oil, and we don't want them to be contaminated," explains Lawrence Malongo, a group member.

The bakery is the group's second enterprise, having started with a garden where they grow various vegetables to supplement their diets and finances.

The bakery was established as an intervention under the Afikepo Nutrition Programme, a five-year undertaking to support multi-sectorial efforts to curb malnutrition among children below five years, women of childbearing age, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and adolescent girls.

The programme is funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented, with support of the Malawi Government, by FAO and UNICEF in Chitipa, Karonga, Mzimba, Nkhata Bay, Nkhotakota, Salima, Kasungu, Chiradzulu, Thyolo, and Mulanje.

Mbilika Simwaba, Afikepo District Nutrition Officer for Karonga, explains that the programme focuses on promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture by promoting nutrient-dense crops such as orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, orange-fleshed maize, soya beans and fortified beans.

"We work with farmers through care groups. Households are mobilized into groups where we target under-five children, pregnant women, and adolescent girls," says Simwaba.

Afikepo works with 411 care groups and 241 adolescent girls' groups in Karonga, focusing on crop demonstration plots.

"The groups are also engaged in income-generating activities. Lughano Adolescent Girls Group, for instance, runs the bakery. The bakery produces buns and bread to which we add orange-fleshed sweet potato flour as an ingredient since it has vitamin A. They also participate in cooking demonstrations, WASH trainings, dietary diversity and integrated health services," added Simwaba.

The adolescent nutrition groups have also contributed greatly towards reduction of teenage pregnancies and keeping girls in

schools as well as enhancing transitioning of girls from primary school to secondary school. Lughano Adolescent Girls Group is comprised of out-of-school girls, some of whom dropped out of school while others completed their studies. Most of them are now in marriages. Dropping out of school or even getting pregnant early would be regarded as a misfortune by some, but the girls did not want that to stand in their way of earning a living.

The group started in 2020 with 30 members, but it now has 23 after seven others married in areas far from the village.

Malongo, who is 18 years old, dropped out of school in 2016 when she was 11. She now has two children, the youngest of whom is only nine months old.

"The rate of teenage pregnancies is high in our area and because we are often sidelined, Afikepo has supported us to ensure that we access adequate information on nutrition hence we formed a club where we grow vegetables to diversify our diets in line with the six food groups," says Malongo.

She says they also have a village bank to which members contribute K100 each in shares. Earnings from the bakery are also added to the shares.

"It is important for children to eat a lot of nutritious food for healthy growth. Our products are rich in nutrients such as vitamin A, which is good for health and eyesight," says Malongo.

Mirriam Sichali, pregnant with her third child, is a regular bakery customer. She could easily buy her bread elsewhere, but the quality of the bakery's products has had her hooked. Besides, she feels duty-bound to promote the girls so they and the area can prosper.

"Ever since the bakery opened, I buy their bread every day, and I have never regretted it. Their bread is delicious, and it is satisfying and adds energy. We mostly pay in advance because if you don't, it finishes quickly," says Sichali.

Afikepo encourages the out-of-school adolescents to return to school, and only when they fail do they come in with income-generating activities to enable them to stand on their feet and buy food for their households, according to Simwaba.



Lughano Adolescent Girls Group members, comprised of out-of-school girls, some of whom dropped out of school while others completed their studies. Most of them are now in marriages.

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Tracking tool brings new lease of life



Hanifa Siyame (right) and Marriam Amisi are seen leading group discussions at Chikombe Village, Nkhotakota, central Malawi ©UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chikondi

The fear of maternal mortality has currently no hold on the community in Group Village Head Chikombe in Traditional Authority (T/A) Mphonde in Nkhotakota.

As health and nutrition promoter for Thandizo and Chimwemwe care groups in the area, Hanifa Siyame, has seen it all, she hopes that such avoidable tragedies have been consigned to the dustbins of history.

She attributes the change in their fortunes to the Community Behavior Tracking Tool (CBTT), a monitoring tool under Afikepo nutrition programme, which is funded by the European Union (EU) and being implemented by FAO and UNICEF in 10 districts.

“We are coming from a bad situation. Pregnant women rarely attended antenatal clinics and even when they did, they didn’t take the iron-folic acid tablets they were prescribed,” says Siyame.

The community, however, seems to have turned a corner, all thanks to the CBTT which has allowed the community to track health and nutrition issues in the area and take corrective measures where necessary.

“We now meet as a community every three months to assess the progress we have made in health and nutrition, and this has helped to reduce incidence of maternal deaths. All women now attend antenatal clinics and take their medicines. Community bylaws and working with male partners have also helped to ensure women take their medicine faithfully,” explains Siyame.

Afikepo supports multi-sectorial efforts to curb malnutrition among children below five years of age, women of childbearing age, pregnant and breastfeeding women and adolescent girls in Chitipa, Karonga, Mzimba, Nkhata Bay,

Nkhotakota, Salima, Kasungu, Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje districts.

The tracking tool contains nutritional indicators to track the progress communities are making in terms of behavioral change. Main indicators tracked by the tool include the numbers of pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, adolescent girls and nutritional assessments of under-5 children using the Middle Upper Circumference Tape (MUAC).

“The CBTT acts as our guide in terms of what is working and what is not. It informs our decision-making about what should be done to ensure we make it right. If the indicators are bad, we come together as chiefs, cluster leaders and everyone, and discuss the matter.

“For instance, we had a problem with consumption of legumes and especially the cultivation of beans due to the weather in this area. The CBTT guided us on this and we consulted agriculture extension workers who gave us advice to diversify to other legumes such as pigeon peas, cowpeas and groundnuts,” says Siyame.

Group Village Head (GVH) Chikombe says the application of the tool has built resilience and promoted self-reliance and good nutrition practices in his area.

“We grow vegetables, legumes, cassava, maize, which make us food secure. We support the work of promoters and cluster leaders and whenever we have meetings, they update us about the nutritional needs of children. Now, our children are not stunted; they are bright and healthy,” says chief Chikombe.

Packson Tsiku, Afikepo District Nutrition Officer for Nkhotakota, also says the tool has helped in monitoring behavioral improvements in the communities. Data for the CBTT is collected monthly, but it is compiled over a period of three months, after which care group promoters consolidate the report and share it with stakeholders in the community.

“It is at these community meetings where they discuss the data, what can be the cause of a trend and what measures the community can put together to improve,” Tsiku says.

He further explains that CBTT exposes bottlenecks in communities and the solution they come up with are those that can work best in their community and culture.

“When we compare when this tool was introduced in 2020 to now, we see a great improvement in all indicators across the district and these changes are attributed to these community meetings that take place every quarter. They can assess if they are making progress by comparing data of one quarter from previous quarters to see how they are improving and to see which areas still need more efforts to improve on,” says Tsiku.

With the use of the tool, T/A Mphonde communities have improved their legumes uptake to 70 per cent compared to less than 30 per cent before the tool was deployed two years ago.

“The uptake of iron-folic by pregnant women has also been a huge success because when we were starting, it was below 60 per cent, but it is now close to 100 per cent almost in all areas,” says Tsiku.



Hanifa Siyame a promoter is seen in her chickens pen at Chikombe Village, Nkhotakota, central Malawi ©UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chikondi

Not just another delicacy

A chicken is a delicacy to many. But to Gaster Musukwa, consuming chicken is par for the course, just as common as consuming vegetables.

The farmer, from Donald Village in Traditional Authority Mwenimsuku area in Chitipa, is a model of self-reliance and lives a life of contentment on his vast land. He has about 200 trees of tangerines, oranges, pears and mangoes, and also raises 10 cows, seven goats, 11 sheep and three pigs.

"I had 300 chickens a few weeks ago but I sold all of them and started all over again. I harvest them when they are too many so that I can use the money to pay school fees and other

necessities. I now have 30 chickens," said Musukwa.

He started farming in 2006 by growing maize, driven by a desire to be food sufficient. Since then, it has been a process of incremental growth and learning.

In the same year, he started rearing 70 Black Australorps (Mikolongwe chickens); two cows, some goats and sheep, and a pig which a relation gifted him. In 2012, he diversified to beekeeping and also constructed a fish pond where he started raising fish. By 2013, he had added fruits to his growing portfolio of farm products.

"What led me into farming was a desire to have enough food as well as have some to spare for sale. Proceeds from the crops and livestock assist me to pay school fees for my children, including one who is at Mzuzu University," explains Musukwa.

He is one person who has adopted what is referred to as nutrition sensitive agriculture approach which is being promoted by Afikepo Nutrition Programme.

At the heart of the programme is the belief that children can reach their full potential, both in physical growth and cognitive abilities, if they have access to proper nutrition and hygiene.



Gaster Msuku is seen with his wife and grandchildren at his home in McDonald Village, Chitipa, northern Malawi ©UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chikondi

In Chitipa, as in nine other districts across the country, Afikepo is promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture to curb malnutrition among under-5 children, women of childbearing age, pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as adolescent girls.

As Chance Kamwendo, FAO Nutritionist for Afikepo in Chitipa, explains, the programme promotes food diversity, emphasising the consumption of six food groups, as well as issues of hygiene.

"Afikepo means children have to be well-fed and well-nourished so that they should reach their full potential in terms of height or cognitive abilities. Specifically, we are looking at nutrition sensitive agriculture in terms of production," said Kamwendo.

In promoting nutrition sensitive agriculture, Afikepo focuses not only on food production, but also food utilisation and diversity. In Chitipa, which has about 234,000 people, Afikepo is reaching about 129,000 people in 28,000 families.

So much has been achieved since the project was rolled out in 2017. As Kamwendo explains, issues of hygiene have improved, knowledge on consumption of six food groups has increased and there has been a marked improvement in adoption of nutrition messages and best practices.

"Nutrition indicators have improved. For example, stunting was at 35 percent in 2016, but it is now at 33 percent. There is also a high adoption of bio-fortified foods such as

orange maize and beans. At the beginning of the project, there were no bio-fortified foods being grown in the district. But if you go into the villages now, people are demanding them," added Kamwendo.

He explains that Musukwa is a shining star among many in the district who have adopted the concept of nutrition sensitive agriculture. The farmer, Kamwendo says, has intensified the cultivation of different fruits and other crops because of the message he has been receiving from cluster leaders.

"At first, he had fruit trees and the like, but in terms of utilisation, he was just focused on selling them. He had under-five children, but he didn't know that these food groups, the six food groups, need to be consumed the way

○ Not just another delicacy

they are. Sometimes they would just consume one type of food, but now he knows that he needs to combine different foods to enrich his diet and also feed the grandchildren living with him,” explains Kamwendo.

Musukwa, who has five grown up children and seven grandchildren, agrees. He says there is a difference in the way he feeds his grandchildren from the way he raised his children.

“It is important for children to be fed properly. We didn’t know about proper feeding and the importance of feeding children the six food groups. We only knew about three groups. If you look at my grandchildren, you can tell they eat nutritious food. Their bodies are healthy, and they are also sharp,” says Musukwa.

With funding from the European Union (EU), FAO and UNICEF are implementing the Afikepo Nutrition Programme in Chitipa, Karonga, Mzimba, Nkhata Bay, Nkhotakota, Salima, Kasungu, Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje 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.



Gaster Msuku is seen with eggs in his hands at his home in McDonald Village, Chitipa, northern Malawi ©UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chikondi



Gaster Msuku is seen holding a tray with nutritious foods at his home in McDonald Village ©UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chikondi



Gaster Msuku is seen feeding his chickens at his home in McDonald Village, Chitipa, northern Malawi ©UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chikondi

Male involvement key to family nutrition



Martin Nyirenda and his wife are seen in a vegetable garden at Bokosi Village in Kasungu, central Malawi ©UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chikondi

Men are breadwinners in most households, but few of them take an active part in household affairs, particularly decisions around nutrition and preparation of food. These are considered a woman's duties.

But men such as Martin Nyirenda and Anderson Mbeye, from the area of Traditional Authority Kaluluma in Kasungu, are turning up their noses at such stereotypes and are actively participating in making decisions affecting food consumption in their households. They are determined to go to the ends of the earth to provide for their families and ensure they are well-fed.

Nyirenda, from Luziwa Village, is the secretary of Umodzi Fathers' Group, which started in December 2021 with support from Afikepo Nutrition Programme, to encourage men to take an active role in promoting nutrition in their families.

"It is a man's responsibility to take part in household chores, more especially when his wife is pregnant. Some problems can be avoided if a man takes part in domestic chores," says Nyirenda.

Afikepo's main goal is to end stunting in young children by targeting children from zero to five years, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and adolescent girls.

Haswell Mulenga, Nutritionist for Afikepo in Kasungu, says while the programme targeted community groups that are often dominated by women, they realised that exclusion of men would hamper promotion of good nutrition at household level.

"To end stunting, the father must also be involved. If you have the support of the head of the house, everything goes on smoothly. Women gain a lot of knowledge on nutrition from various groups they belong to, but most men don't have that knowledge. As a result, they can't understand why they need to eat six groups of food. If a man has nutritional knowledge, it is easier for him to take care of adolescents, under-fives, pregnant women and also breastfeeding women," says Mulenga.

Since he joined the group in January, Nyirenda has become a champion of good nutrition for his family. Apart from providing for them, he sometimes cooks and performs other household chores.

"There are some foodstuffs such as cooking oil or meat which a woman alone may not afford. So, if I don't take care of nutritional needs of my family and their hygiene, then who will? That's why I find it important to take part. If my wife is sick, she doesn't have to cook for the family when I am around, it is my duty to do so," added Nyirenda.

His wife, Alinafeimba, agrees.

"Before men were engaged by Afikepo, it was difficult to convince them to buy some foods. They would always say we were being difficult by demanding food beyond their means. But now that they know the importance of six food groups, it's not difficult to convince them to do so," says Zimba.

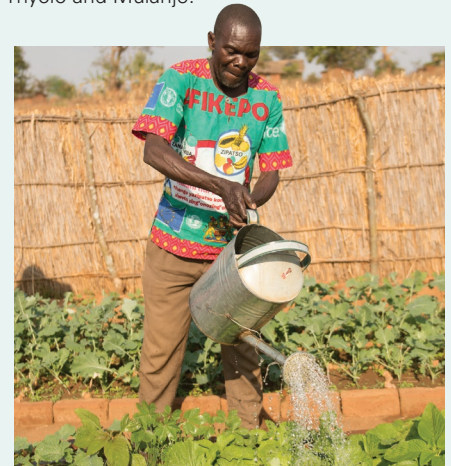
Life has not been easy for men such as Nyirenda and Mbeye, who are constantly ribbed by their friends, but they won't let mockery stand between them and the care needed for their families.

"For all we do for our families, some men regard as behaving like women, that we are being controlled by our wives. But we try to sensitise them on the importance of male involvement in taking care of the health of their families," says Mbeye who comes from Mkanda Village.

He says, as members of the fathers' groups, they encourage each other to take part in activities that promote good household nutrition.

"As men, we need to help our women, especially when they are pregnant. A child needs adequate foods to grow properly and it's my duty as a father to provide that," says Mbeye.

With funding from the European Union (EU), FAO and UNICEF are implementing the Afikepo Nutrition Programme in 10 districts, including Chitipa, Karonga, Mzimba, Nkhata Bay, Nkhatakota, Salima, Kasungu, Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje.



Levison Moyo, a man involved in household nutrition is seen watering vegetables ©UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chikondi

Tuning in for nutrition

Joyce Baloyi, from Kafwakula Village in Traditional Authority Kabunduli area in Nkhata Bay, is a farmer and cluster leader for Takondwa Care Group.

As a cluster leader, Baloyi ensures the production of various crops and promotes dietary diversity among members of the group and their respective families.

“We grow vegetables, bananas and raise livestock such as chickens, rabbits and pigs. These give us nutritious food and help us and our children to live healthy lives. We also grow crops such as oranges and maize which are rich in Vitamin A and are suitable for children. We process the maize to give complementary food to children aged between six and 23 months,” says Baloyi.

Agriculture extension workers and health surveillance assistants regularly visit the care group members to pass on knowledge about agriculture and nutrition. But not all farmers are as lucky.

Andrew Manda, who is Nkhata Bay Nutrition Officer for Afikepo Nutrition Programme says Nkhata Bay district has a vacancy rate of over 40 per cent for agricultural extension workers, meaning not all farmers and families are visited as frequently.

Coupled with this challenge is Nkhata Bay’s terrain that is largely hilly and limits movement of agricultural extension workers. These constraints, according to Manda, have affected transfer of knowledge on agriculture, particularly on nutrition.

To counter these challenges and reach the wider population, Afikepo formed 185 radio listening clubs across the district and partnered with two community radio stations, Chirundu and Usisya, to produce and broadcast information on agriculture and nutrition.

Manda says when Afikepo engaged the radio stations, it built their capacity to produce effective content for nutrition radio programmes.

“They are usually 30 minute programmes and they are aired twice a week. They are produced in conjunction with the district information office, agriculture office and health promotion office,” says Manda.

Afikepo Nutrition Programme’s main goal is to end stunting in young children by targeting under-5 children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and adolescent girls. With funding from the European Union (EU), FAO and UNICEF are implementing the programme in 10 districts, including Chitipa, Karonga, Mzimba, Nkhata Bay, Nkhotakota, Salima, Kasungu, Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje.

In Nkhata Bay, Afikepo promotes the production and consumption of nutrient dense foods such as orange maize, legumes and orange-fleshed sweet potatoes.

To ensure retention of knowledge about nutrition among care groups, Afikepo trained members in radio listening skills such as how to listen to a radio programme, note taking and how to provide feedback to the producers.

The groups were provided with radio sets for them to listen to the programmes on Tuesdays and Thursdays.



Hastings Nyirenda is seen feeding his rabbits at Kafwakula Village in Nkhatabay, northern Malawi ©UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chikondi

“We have also tried to teach the same skill to the adolescent groups. As most of them are young and interested in the radio, we sensitise them on how to produce diversified foods and improve their sanitation and hygiene practices,” explains Manda.

But the hilly terrain, Manda says, also interferes with the reception of radio signals, such that the transfer of knowledge on good agricultural and nutritional practices is impeded in some areas.

“The local radio stations we partnered with are not accessible in some areas, so we record the programmes and upload them into memory cards which we then distribute to the radio listening clubs,” he says.

After listening to a programme, care group members are encouraged to come up with their perception of the programme and discuss it with an expert who might be physically present or call in by phone.

Takondwa Care Group has a radio listening club and Baloyi says members listen to Chirundu Community Radio for programmes on breastfeeding, antenatal care, home care, hygiene, and agriculture, among other subjects.

“Most of the times when we are listening to the radio we have a health surveillance assistant, who explains in detail should we seek clarification. The programmes are important as they encourage us in our farming and guide us on how we can prepare our foods,” says Baloyi.





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.

Increasing and diversifying dietary intake of **safe and nutritious foods**



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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