

ECRP Insights

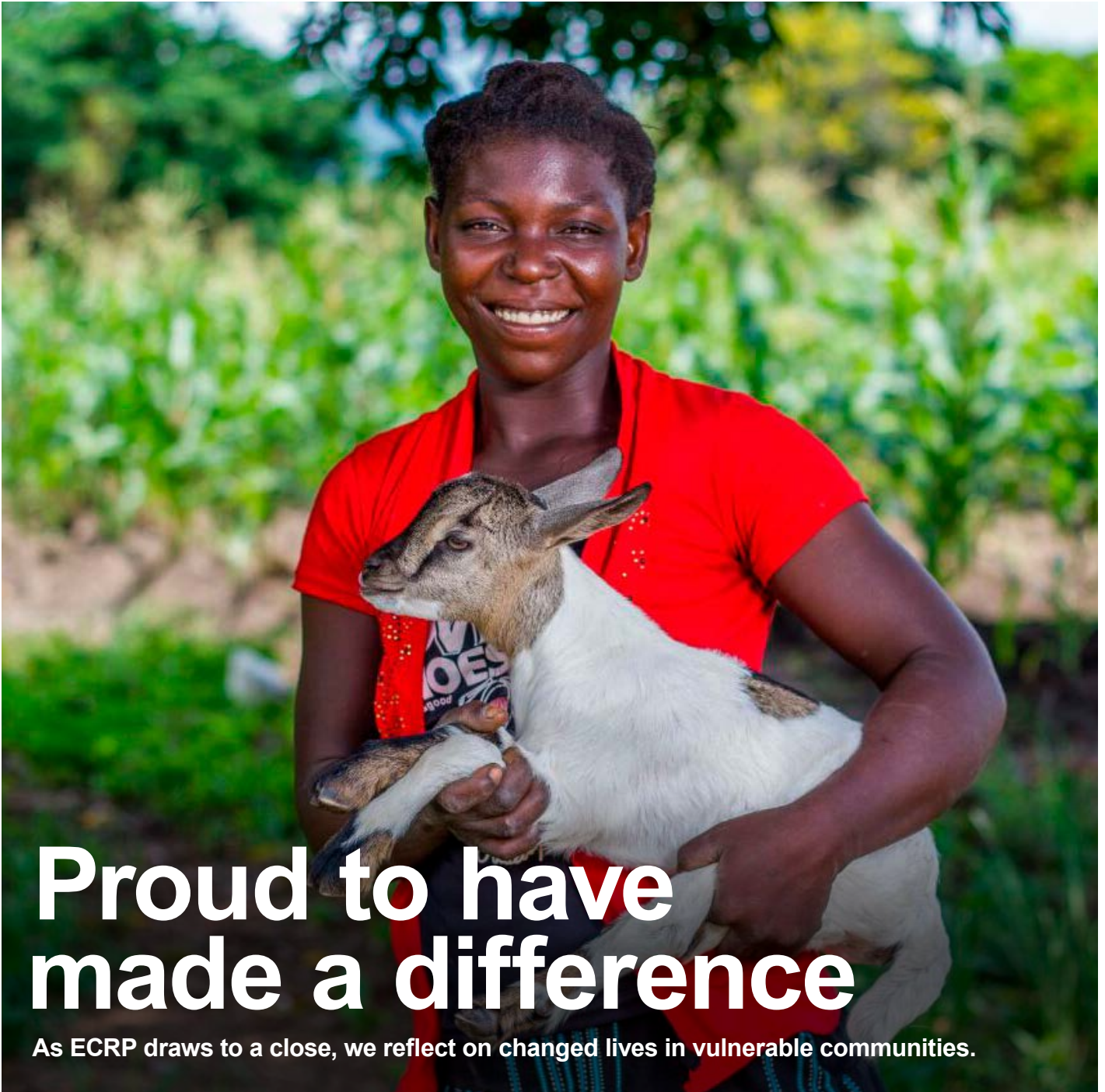
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Proud to have made a difference

As ECRP draws to a close, we reflect on changed lives in vulnerable communities.



DISCOVER



Winding down and handing over



In recent months, we have been focusing on winding down DISCOVER programme activities, making sure that our exit from communities runs smoothly and ensuring the sustainability of the work we have done. We have been conducting exit meetings with various structures and relevant institutions, handing over responsibilities for the projects we have been promoting.

At the same time, critical work in DISCOVER communities has continued. Those engaged in irrigation farming have harvested their crops, filling the food gap caused by the drought during the 2015/16 growing season.

And while the rainy season started on a bad note with hailstorms, floods, dry spells and fall armyworms, there is light at the end of the tunnel and there are hopes of a bumper yield. Those communities affected by floods have already started rebuilding their homes. Once again, this shows how the integration of different activities provides synergy and helps households to quickly bounce back.

Looking back at where we started six years ago, we can be proud we have made a difference in DISCOVER communities: strengthening resilience, through capacity building of structures at community and district levels, and in individual households through the adoption of climate smart agriculture and disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies.

Esther Mweso
DISCOVER Programme Manager

Celebrating a unique programme



Here it is, our last bulletin. We made it! And we have every reason to celebrate. ECRP has been a unique programme, and I am proud to have been part of it.

ECRP has beneficiaries who have walked out of poverty – some do not need food aid any more, and floods and dry spells will not push them to the brink. Household income and asset ownership levels have risen, knowledge of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and the ability to anticipate and respond has increased.

We are proud to share the lessons learned from ECRP: resilience will not be achieved through one intervention; it does not take a day to build the resilience of vulnerable people, but it is possible over time; and the flexibility to respond to a changing context is key.

My appreciation goes to everyone who has been part of this great programme: management, the programme team, finance and support staff – some of who have been with us since the very start in 2011 – government through DCCMS, DODMA, EAD and the DoE, our donors UK aid, Irish Aid and the Norwegian Embassy, and LTS CDM for enabling the learning which strengthened ECRP over the years. All of your contributions took us this far.

Sophie Makoloma
ECRP-Christian Aid, Chief of Party

About ECRP and DISCOVER

Christian Aid and United Purpose (formerly known as Concern Universal) are each leading a consortium for the Enhancing Community Resilience Programme (ECRP) – a five-year initiative with an extension of one year – to improve food security, reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience. It has a reach of 600,000 people directly, and up to 1.6 million altogether, in 11 districts of Malawi prone to natural disasters and climatic hazards.

Running until 2017, the programmes, known respectively as ECRP-Christian Aid and DISCOVER, work with local partners to deliver a range of support. This includes early-warning systems and disaster risk management, village savings and loans groups, conservation agriculture, small-scale irrigation, post-

harvest management, agro-forestry, livestock, seed banks, and low-carbon technologies such as fuel-efficient cookstoves and solar lights.

ECRP has received funding, totalling more than £21m over the past six years, from UK aid from the UK Government, Irish Aid and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The goal of ECRP is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and increase vulnerable communities' resilience to shocks such as floods. We aim to help people to earn a living in a sustainable, profitable way, incorporating natural resource management and risk reduction and increasing their ability to adapt, as well as to have a voice in decisions affecting them.

Cover photo: Back in 2012, DISCOVER distributed 35 goats to 17 members of the Chitemwano Women's Club in Zengeranjala village, TA Wasambo, Karonga district, to provide livelihood options for households whose crops were affected by prolonged dry spells. Now, five years on, the village has more than 300 goats thanks to the Pass It On scheme, where those who received goats have, in turn, provided goats to other villagers. The DISCOVER project also trained a livestock lead farmer to provide animal health services to the group. Photo: Self-Help Africa/Richard Nyoni

Influencing climate change and disaster risk management policy



ECRP is recognised for its contribution to the National Climate Change Management Policy.

One of ECRP's most significant achievements has been its contribution to, and influence on, government policies, strategies and programmes.

ECRP has gained recognition from government and NGOs for advocacy work, which has engaged policy and decision makers such as MPs, parliamentary committees and key personnel in relevant sectors.

In 2012, ECRP partner the Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA) developed a comprehensive advocacy strategy which identified five advocacy issues to bring about greater coherence between climate change and disaster risk management (DRM) policy instruments and implementation. These were:

- increased budget for climate change and DRM
- revised Energy Policy reflecting an integrated approach to rural energy provision, combining renewable, efficient

and equitable solutions to provide village energy supply systems to meet both domestic business needs

- enhanced climate forecasting service that supports resilience-building by 2014
- higher profile for conservation agriculture in the draft National Agriculture Policy by 2015. Development/ dissemination of conservation agriculture guidelines
- ensuring climate change adaptation and DRM plans and interventions at all levels are gender sensitive.

ECRP's key policy and advocacy issues have been reviewed and new ones added.

ECRP has had a number of successes, contributing towards development and approval of the National Climate Change Management Policy, National Agriculture Policy and National Disaster Risk Management Policy. ECRP conducted policy reviews and development position papers which were used as advocacy tools when engaging government and consultants developing the policies.

ECRP is key contributor towards the draft National Meteorological and draft National Energy policies, the draft National Resilience Plan and the draft Disaster Risk Management Bill. With all of these, the programme has conducted policy reviews and collaboratively developed proposals with other CSOs to present to government or consultants where applicable.

On forestry advocacy, ECRP has engaged the Department of Forestry on the need to improve forestry conservation and the Department of Energy Affairs on renewable energy. On budgetary allocation towards climate change and DRM, ECRP conducted several budget reviews between 2012 and 2015.

Irrigation scheme doubles yields

Balaka district has been hit by dry spells and floods for the last five years, leaving many families food insecure and dependent on aid from charities and government.

Joseph Bauleni's family, from Chakanza village, have been among those affected. In response, Joseph and others from Chakanza formed the Titamande irrigation scheme, drawing on the rivers which run close to their village. The scheme uses gravity flow water from the rivers which is, in turn, supplied to the fields by treadle pumps.

'We have adequate food... others are complaining of food insecurity'

The scheme has been supported by DISCOVER partner United Purpose (formerly known as Concern Universal), which has provided materials and technical support. The group also received training and support on irrigation management and crop production.

Farmers involved in the scheme have reported yields that have doubled. Joseph, who acts as secretary for the scheme, is expecting to harvest a dozen 50kg bags of maize from his quarter of an acre for the second time this year. The average yield for this plot size is five bags.

'My colleagues and I are now able to grow food and cash crops three times a year. We have adequate food for our families while, within the same area, others are complaining of food insecurity,' Joseph says.

The scheme now has 110 member farmers, of which 40 are women. Newer members have joined from neighbouring villages. But Joseph adds that more people are interested in signing up for Titamande, which has a seasonal registration fee of MK 6,000. The fees are used to support members in times of need.

The irrigation scheme can potentially cover 17 hectares, but only seven hectares is currently being farmed, so there is certainly scope for membership to grow even further.

Lazarus: ‘What is stopping you?’



ECRP has enabled Lazarus and Elizabeth Mtika to show their determination.

Lazarus and Elizabeth Mtika are among a select group of people involved in all nine of the interventions being implemented by ECRP.

With support from ECRP partner Heifer International, which implements the programme in their community of Katema Village, TA Simlemba, Kasungu district,

the couple began by practising new farming technologies such as conservation agriculture, leading to their highest yield ever.

The family is now food secure, and their four children go to school with full stomachs after a meal of porridge made from soya-bean flour – a crop introduced by the programme. The family store food for future use in a smeared granary built outside their house – part of ECRP’s post-harvest management initiative – and sell any surplus produce to generate extra income.

The Mtikas use fuel-efficient stoves to avoid using too much firewood and have solar-powered lights. Through ECRP’s livestock approach, they own eight goats which live in a well-designed and constructed khola and have a garden close by for seed multiplication. Lazarus is also involved as a trainer and village agent for his local village savings and loans (VSL) group.

The industry and endeavour of the family is even more remarkable, given that Lazarus lost his hands at the age of just nine months, following a horrific fire at his parents’ home. Growing up in poverty, Lazarus was always ambitious and wanted to become a teacher. But due to his family’s limited means he couldn’t continue his education and dropped out of school in grade eight.

Now ECRP has served as a platform for Lazarus to show his determination and strength of will.

‘When people ask me: “how do you do so?”, I just ask them one question: “What is stopping you?”,’ he says.

He is grateful to ECRP for the impact it has had on his family’s life and welfare and hopes other people living with disabilities will be reached, striving to succeed themselves.

Not surprisingly, Lazarus is well-known in his community and beyond, and has been an inspiration for others to get involved in the programme.

Hope for people with disabilities

Estery Kameta used to live from hand to mouth, struggling to make ends meet and support her family. But with ECRP’s support, her life has changed.

Estery, 35, lives in January village, GVH Matipwiri, TA Mnthiramanja, Mulanje district, and has a physical disability, which affects her ability to farm. She has not been able to buy farm inputs like fertiliser, and she and her daughter had to rely on food assistance from the community.

For years, Estery dreamed of independence and being able to support her family – working hard to achieve this. It was not until ECRP partner CARD came to the community offering support and advice for people living with disabilities that Estery’s life changed.

Through the programme, she has been able to realise her potential.

‘I will no longer depend on others to give me food because I will harvest my own maize’

Estery learned about conservation agriculture and was motivated to open her farm which had been idle for many years. This growing season, she put conservation agriculture techniques into practice and now has a maize field of her own.

‘I am very happy because I can now farm. With ECRP, farming is easier,’ she explained. ‘This year, I will be able to provide food to my family. I will no longer depend on others to give me food because I will harvest my own maize.’

Pigeon pea farmers are in business

ECRP has organised pigeon pea farmers to form marketing groups, training them in business practices, improving access to better markets and organising meetings with potential buyers in the area.

Farmers in GVH Chisinkha, Mulanje, have benefitted from group selling, gaining bargaining power over the price of their product, and more freedom to choose the right buyer.

The higher quality and greater quantity of the crops produced cooperatively fetches a better price at market.

The introduction of marketing has also helped farmers to realise a better price for their pigeon peas this season.



Planting for the future

The DISCOVER project is working with primary schools to ensure disaster risk reduction (DRR) knowledge is passed on from teachers to students. The project is installing equipment such as rain gauges, which are monitored by school teachers to record rainfall readings and are useful in early warning systems.

Kabale Primary School in Lyamayolo, Karonga district, is one of the schools benefiting from the project. In our picture, student Jestina Mogha is planting a katope seedling, one of 1,000 trees the pupils have planted in a school woodlot they now manage.

Cooperative buzzing from honey project's sweet success

DISCOVER is supporting the Chilwa Honey processing cooperative in Salima district.

It has been a long journey since 2012, when 75 individual farmers in the area – the majority of them women – joined together to form clubs.

A year later, through DISCOVER partner COOPI, a cooperative was established and its members trained and registered with the Ministry of Trade and Industry. It was hoped that this move would boost production, improve processing and increase market access through collective marketing.

In 2014, Chilwa rented space for the processing, packaging and selling of honey. Although the cooperative were able to produce 600kg of honey, reaching larger and more lucrative markets remained a challenge.

In 2015, the cooperative decided to purpose-build a site suitable for trading honey, and which met industry standards, so it could penetrate both local and international markets. Taking part in the National Agriculture Fair, the cooperative managed to reach different retailers and customers ordering Chilwa Honey.

The cooperative now makes its own beehives using local materials to further increase the production capacity.

By 2016, membership had increased from 75 to 101. The cooperative has produced 1,600kg of honey over the past two years, which has been sold for an average price of MK 3,000 per kg (MK 4.8m).

The cooperative now makes its own beehives using local materials to further increase the production capacity. It is also expanding its site to accommodate processing, packaging, labelling and storage and meet the growing market demand.



Cooperative members marketing Chilwa Honey at the National Agriculture Fair in Blantyre in 2016.

'Many good things have happened'

Deliya Selemani from GVH Nyamphota, Chikwawa, is involved in seven activities under ECRP, and is proof that synergy between the different projects can have a huge impact on the resilience of vulnerable families and communities.

Deliya takes part in post-harvest management, agroforestry, keeping small-scale livestock, *chitetezo mbaulas* (energy efficient stoves), conservation agriculture, disaster risk reduction and early warning systems and village savings and loans (VSL).

'I like the way ECRP's interventions are linked together,' she says. 'Through VSL, I get money to buy seeds, and through goats, I get manure that I use in my field. Seed systems complement conservation agriculture.'

Farming had been a big challenge in Deliya's village. The 51-year-old explains: 'We could work extra hard to farm a big piece of land, but with climate change we were harvesting very little, which was not enough to sustain us. We used to grow

traditional seeds, but they took a long time to mature and brought a low yield.'

Through programme partner Eagles Relief, the people in Deliya's village were first introduced to ECRP with a focus on farming – especially conservation agriculture and seed systems. Recognised for her commitment to community development, Deliya was trained as a lead farmer.

'We were very happy to be supported with early maturing varieties of sorghum and millet,' Deliya says. 'It was very difficult for us to plant maize with the erratic rains. However, with conservation agriculture, and after we were introduced to the modern farming, we've been able to plant maize.'

'In just five years I have managed to train my own farmers in conservation agriculture. I have gained knowledge on modern farming and this will remain with me even after Eagles Relief has left our village.'

'I have achieved so much through VSL, like buying clothes for my husband and I managed to buy a bed – so now I sleep on a bed. The five years have been amazing – so many good things have happened to us.'



Recognised for her commitment to community development, Deliya Selemani was trained as an ECRP lead farmer.

Communities conserve nature by cooking with *chitetezo mbaulas*

'Selling firewood was making a lot of money for our family,' says Stella Balala, from Asikimu village, GVH Mmanga, Balaka district.

'We did not know we were doing that at the expense of the environment. All we cared for was generating income so we could buy food. We now have big regrets, because the changes in climate have affected us so much and the entire community.'

Stella is part of the DISCOVER project, which raises awareness about the harmful effects of gathering firewood and trains members on technologies that protect the environment. She signed up in 2012, when a group of women received

training from United Purpose (formerly Concern Universal).

Stella sells *chitetezo mbaulas* (energy efficient stoves) and educates fellow farmers about the importance of using them.

'We did not know we were selling firewood at the expense of the environment'

'Before the project, our only source of income was our firewood business, which was yielding very low profits as

trees started becoming scarce,' Stella says. 'The DISCOVER project has brought many opportunities.'

'We now use a *chitetezo mbaula*, which is very efficient and environmentally friendly, because it uses less firewood. It is evident that many families no longer have to travel long distances to fetch firewood.'

Through the sales of *chitetezo mbaulas*, Stella has been able to provide her husband with money to run his business as a fishmonger and also bought goats, which she has been able to breed and sell to buy fertilisers for her three-acre maize plot.

Amazing stories of change

Six ECRP community members tell of the programme's impact on their lives.



Feliya Kestitoni's husband died 15 years ago leaving her to fend for her family alone and ensure her children had enough food to eat, proper clothes and a good education.

Through ECRP, the 54-year-old, from GVH Fombe, Chikwawa, joined the Chitsanzo VSL group, which enabled her to buy goats and cows. She says: 'I am a living witness of what VSL can do to a life. I am still saving and I will continue.'



McFord Sempulo began practising conservation agriculture after ECRP provided training in Moffat village, GVH Mphampha, Nsanje, in 2012.

Although there are still huge challenges, the 53-year-old's harvests have improved.

McFord also uses agroforestry techniques, planting several *Gliricidia Sepium* trees, which have improved soil fertility on his land.



Malita Beni, a 27-year-old subsistence farmer from GVH Supuni, says she used to be 'one the poorest people in my village'. But through ECRP's small-scale livestock initiative, her life has changed.

In 2013, she was given two goats. The goat herd has since grown to 12 and she has also been able to sell goats to other villagers. With money earned from selling goats, Malita has been able to buy cows and lay a concrete floor in her home.



Ruwambo Mwalughali from Mwanyesha village, GVH Mwakabanga, Karonga, never had much success with conventional farming, but with DISCOVER things have changed. Ruwambo explains: 'I used to practise conventional farming but due to frequent and prolonged dry spells my maize crop failed to perform. This type of farming has not been productive – my harvest was only a handful.'

Through DISCOVER, Ruwambo has learned climate-smart agriculture technologies, such as pit-planting, which maintains moisture on his fields. Ruwambo's harvest has increased greatly and his life has changed. He has hosted village, district and national level field visits to showcase his successes and encourage others to take up the techniques. 'People were amazed at how my crop performed,' he says.

Eveless Manvanva is a VSL member in Maere village, TA Mbenje, Nsanje. She has six children and 32 grandchildren. 'Before joining, I was facing a lot of challenges like food insecurity, struggling to pay school fees and other basic needs,' Eveless says. 'My main source of money was piece work [casual work] where if I got money, I was buying food only for that particular day.'

By saving and borrowing through the VSL, Eveless has bought a bicycle, a goat, put iron roofing on her house and set up a small business selling vegetables and doughnuts.

Oscar Gunduka benefited from a pig Pass It On scheme run by DISCOVER in Dziko village, TA Kachindamoto, Dedza.

An entrepreneur, Oscar saw an opportunity to maximise the return from his porcine assets by bringing other farmers on board to share the workload of rearing and breeding the pigs. The initiative now includes six households and boasts 42 pigs. With profits from this business, Oscar has invested in rice farming, a motorcycle and parcel of land where he plans to build houses for rent.



Biological mitigation – a means of river bank protection



Across the globe, increasing weather hazards such as floods and droughts, caused by climate change, are significantly threatening peoples' livelihoods and damaging the environment.

In Nsanje district, flooding has caused massive riverbank degradation, due to soil erosion and siltation, as well as damage to crop fields, livestock and homes.

DISCOVER partner GOAL has worked with communities to mitigate this situation, by planting trees on homesteads and along the banks of the Nkhande River. Erosion, siltation and the potential for floods has been reduced, along with the potential impact of flooding, destruction of crops and danger to lives and communities.

Shadreck Chikaonda from Chikunkhu village, took part in the mitigation activities. 'Before the trees were planted, the river did not have a defined route. It was flooding Chikunkhu, endangering our lives and destroying our crops. We are no longer scared of flooding or destruction of our crops.'

Communities in Nsanje have planted more than 40,000 trees since 2012, and many now have village civil protection committees.

New life as para-vet

Leonard Mwale from GVH Mchinga, Salima district, has long lived in poverty with no regular source of income.

Despite working hard as a farmer, life was tough and he could not afford the school fees for his three children. The little money he earned was just enough for basic household expenses.

Thanks to support from DISCOVER, Leonard is now a para-vet and his life has improved significantly. Leonard received training through the project and is now able to provide animal health services to fellow farmers on a fee-per-service arrangement. He was also linked to private veterinary service providers, so he can access supplies of drugs and other vital things communities need to keep their animals healthy.

Leonard is now providing vet services to more than 200 livestock farmers – receiving MK 200 per goat treatment and MK 30 per chicken vaccination. Additionally, due to demand, he has extended his service to other villages.

Leonard says: 'In 2016, I made a profit of MK 50,000 through vet services, which I never realised in the past.' He is now able to pay school fees.



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