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EDITOR'S NOTES

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER



Happy New Year and a blessed 2016 from the editorial team here. It has been sometime. However, this has been due to an editorial decision that we made. We thought we would move to a quarterly pitch.

This has been rejected by all our stakeholders and we will back to the monthly circle in our next volume.

Today we take a shot at all the departments. Research, Land Resources, Animal Health, Planning, Extension, Fisheries, Irrigation, Water Development, and Crop Development. We appeal to you to kindly share with us what you are doing, how you are doing the what and where. Which technologies and activities, who is doing all of it well (case studies).

Without dissemination, we are blind looking for a black cat in a pitch black room while actually the cat is not there in the first place.

A lot of us are jittery about communication: afraid and at a loss. We barely use the capacity and capability we have in the Ministry. Well, it's like the gallant battles which have been given in human history. Fierce, long battles, sacrifices have been given for friend, for battalion, for country.

However, despite all that, millions of Epitaph's mark these remains of the gallant fighters with two plainly said words: UNKNOWN SOLDIER.

We at this magazine appeal to you to make the Agricultural Communication Branch your first point of reference to disseminate what you are doing and help change the perception about agriculture out there.

We fear, that when all is said and done, however gallantly we fought the battles, if nothing is known, if nothing is publicised, if nothing is done in the light of day and disseminated, the same fate awaits us: Here lies an Unknown Soldier who died gallantly fighting for his country.

We have faith that you are different and choose to be different. Kindly ask a patriotic and faithful desk person to be responsible for sending all contributions to us through the e-mail: acbranchmw@gmail.com

EFFECTIVE REPORTING FOR A TRANSFORMED AGRICULTURE SECTOR



Participants to media training pose with Guest of Honour - PS Maganga

By Cynthia Mahata

The lack of specialized and effective agricultural reporting has affected Malawi's agriculture sector in many ways than one. Most Journalists in the country lack the basic agricultural knowledge needed to produce deep, informative stories with a positive impact. Seeing this need, Farmers Union of Malawi (FUM) and NAPAS joined hands and funded a training workshop for Malawian journalists on agricultural reporting.

The training included journalists from the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, Nation publications Limited, Zodiac Broadcasting Station, Nyasa times online, Times Group, Power 101 FM, Radio Islam and MJ FM.

Participants were trained by experts in media and agriculture such as Dr. Bright Molande, Director of Information in the Ministry of Information and Civil Education and Dr. Allan Chilimba, the senior deputy director at the Department of Agricultural Research Services.

Seeing the need to incorporate climate change issues in agricultural reporting, the journalists also benefitted from a presentation from Mrs. Elina Kululanga, a weather expert from the Department of Climate Change. She stressed on the need for journalists to get a basic understanding of weather patterns and how weather predictions come about, so that they are in a good position to inform and warn the farming community.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, which was held on 16th February, 2016 in Blantyre at Sunbird Mount Soho, Secretary for Agriculture, Mrs. Erica Maganga pointed out that journalists have got the power to influence positive change in the sector. She encouraged them to take their time when gathering information so that they establish facts and inform the country accordingly.

On their part, journalists pledged to work diligently to help improve Malawi's agricultural sector and pleaded with the government to make their job easier by being forthcoming with information.

SORGHUM FARMER SHINES IN BALAKA DISTRICT



Tomato Anyezi Bwanali in his sorghum garden

By Tiwonge Nkhonjera-MADD

Sorghum farmers in Balaka District are shining for owning a crop that is promising against the harsh torrid weather conditions in Balaka district. Sorghum fields have stood firm the recent dry spell in the district.

Tomato Bwanali from Mbatamira Village T/A Nsamala in Rivirivi EPA is among the farmers that are being admired by others for investing in sorghum.

"Last year I received sorghum seed from our AEDO under Sustainable Agricultural Production Programme (SAPP). I planted on a smaller scale since I was not very familiar with the crop. But then I was thrilled with the bumper harvest I realised this year. As such I was encouraged to plant the crop on a larger scale," says Bwanali with a tinged smile playing on his face.

Bwanali, who is also a lead farmer under the SAPP is positive that his household will not run out of food in the current agriculture season despite the erratic rainfall pattern that has

affected maize and other crops in the district.

"I received 5 kgs of seed that I planted on a half acre and we are expecting to harvest at least 20 bags of sorghum part of which I will process into flour for domestic use," he says.

He continues to say that sorghum is a versatile food that can be used for breakfast, lunch and supper.

"We use sorghum flour to make porridge for breakfast, the same flour we use it to make nsima for lunch or supper. We also cook grains just like rice. Flour is an important ingredient for toba that we drink in most cases," he adds.

Like the majority of farmers in the district, Bwanali has also diversified his crop production by planting maize, but has placed all his hopes on sorghum since most maize fields are succumbing to the ongoing drought.

Other Farmers from Mbatamira village said that they have learnt a lesson from Bwanali who has proved that crop diversification is the way to go with the changing climatic conditions.

According to Village Headman Mbatamira, if all people in his area planted sorghum alongside maize, the impending hunger would be checked.

"Most of us planted maize only because we are used to growing the crop, we do not grow other crops like sorghum seriously but this year we have learnt a very big lesson indeed, our maize is fast wilting due to water stress, while people like Bwanali haven't lost faith because they have something that they can hold on to" he said.

He added that it is clear that people from his area will harvest inadequate food and food shortage is certain this year.

"In the next growing season, I will encourage people from my area to grow other types of food crops apart from maize only. Crops that are more resistant to dry spells like sorghum should be encouraged in order to attain food self sufficiency at household level despite the changing weather pattern," Village Headman Mbatamira says in conclusion.

CASSAVA AND SWEET POTATO COME TO THE RESCUE IN MANGOCHI

By Fredrick Agulamalo Makiyi (DACO - Mangochi)

The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development through Agriculture Sector Wide Approach Programme, ASWAp-SP has intensified the promotion of drought tolerant crops such as cassava and sweet potato in all the eleven Extension Planning Areas, EPA in Mangochi district. This is a mitigation measure to the prolonged dry-spells and erratic rains the district has been experiencing.

The situation has led to permanent wilting of crops in most parts of the district while in a few areas, farmers have not planted crops.

Currently, the ministry is distributing cassava cuttings and sweet potato vines to farmers whose maize crop was affected.

Speaking to Agri-e-News reporter, Assistant District Agricultural Development Officer ADADO for Mangochi Lingster Nampona says, "the initiative will increase cassava and sweet potato production by 5% and 3% respectively based on the third round of 2014/2015 Agricultural Production Estimate of the district."

In addition, some Non-Governmental Organizations NGOs such as Catholic Development Commission of Malawi CADECOM in Mangochi and National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi NASFAM in Balaka are also providing cassava cuttings and sweet potato

vines. The organizations are working in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development through Mangochi District Office.

On his part, CADECOM's District Risk Reduction and Disaster Coordinator, Christopher Mirinyo says, "a total of 15066 farmers have benefited from the programme." Each beneficiary received 3 bundles of cassava cuttings and three 50 kg bags full of sweet potato vines. One bundle of cassava cutting contains 50 one meter long sticks.



Farmers From Mthiranjanja Epa Getting Their Cassava Cuttings

ECHOES FROM THE FIELD

SMALLHOLDER HORTICULTURAL EMPOWERMENT AND PROMOTION PROJECT TURNS THE FORTUNE OF KALIPENTALA



Kalipentala Family in front of their iron roofed house

By Vincent Kachilli

Just like other smallholder farmers in Kalinde Village, Group Village Headman Mingu, Traditional Authority Kalumo in Ntchisi District, Malawi, life of Josephy Kalipentala was not exception two years ago. A family man aged 43 with 7 children, the most reliable income being farming; life was unbearable. Worse still, the farm produce coming from his fragmented small plot failed to fetch better prices at the market and vendors used to plunder them. Today, Kalipentala is one of the few shining examples of transformation, thanks to Smallholder Horticultural Empowerment and Promotion Project (SHEP) for market oriented knowledge.

Kalipentala says before the project his family was facing social and economic hardships due to unreliable markets. "I used to invest a lot of money in farming, but the returns were less due to unreliable markets" Kalipentala says

Kalipentala says with the coming in of SHEP, the transformation is total. "With the coming in of SHEP approach, farming has become easy, and indeed to this, I have enough money to support my family due to better markets."

The SHEP approach was introduced to Makonde Irrigation Scheme in 2014 where Joseph Kalepentala is one of the group members. SHEP is facilitating market research first before production of horticultural products so that they should easily access the market after production.

Today he is able to harvest 112 pails (20 litter pail) of potatoes on the same piece of land (0.1ha) he used to harvest 40 pails of potatoes.

Out of the 112 pails of potatoes Kalipentala sold out 95 pails and earned MK237, 500. He has used part of the earnings to purchase 20 iron sheets to roof his house. He also bought farm inputs such as fertilizer, pesticides and seed.

The project is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (MoAIWD) through the Department of Agriculture Extension Service (DAES) as pilot with technical financial support from existing programs and projects, and Government of Japan through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). It addresses market problems farmers have been experiencing in the district. It also aims at equipping the farmers with skills and knowledge on market with the core objective of increasing household income for the improvement of farmers' livelihoods.

COMMUNICATION OFFICERS DRIVERS FOR AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

By Prisca Kachigunda

Agricultural communication Branch holds training workshop for its communication staff from DAES, ADDs and districts at Salima ADD conference room from 8th to 10th February, 2016. The training involved Agricultural Communication Officers (ACOs), District Agricultural Communication Officers (DACOs), Radio Officers and Maintenance Officer.

The objectives of the training were to build capacity of agricultural communication staff on their roles in agricultural development, increase access to agricultural information by farmers, staff and stakeholders through effective media services and monitor progress of the implementation of the planned activities under the Agriculture Sector Wide Approach-Support Project.

Deputy Director for Communication (DDCOM), Hamilton Chimhala opened the training on behalf of the Director of Extension. In his remarks, he said that ACB organised this training for Agricultural Officers as they are drivers for agricultural activities in the country and he encouraged them to be visible in every activity and should use different media tools like multimedia despite the challenges they are facing in their respective offices. In addition to that, the DDCOM requested all agricultural communication officers to write more good stories with pictures and send to DAES so that they should be featured in E-newsletter, Za Achikumbi magazine or other relevant publications.

During this important training, facilitators presented the following: roles of agricultural communication staff, introduction to media tools, message development process, tips on radio and video production techniques, tips on writing feature and news stories, how to conduct successful mobile unit campaign, tips on graphic design and photography. On the last day of the training members from various had a chance to presents their progress report under the Agricultural Sector Wide Approach-Support Project.



Njira ya makono yopezera utenga ndi ulangizi wa ulimi pa

HEALTHY MEALS

Oranges, fresh potatoes served with beans, an egg and guava juice

AGRICULTURAL RADIO PROGRAMMES SCHEDULE

- Ulimi Walero - MBC 1 - Wed & Thu 13:30 hours
- Zokomera Alimi - MBC 1 - Sat 11:30 hours
- Ulimi Walero - Radio 2FM - Mon 18:00 hours
- Bukhu la Alimi - Beyond FM - Daily 05:50 hours
- Ulimi Walero - Beyond FM - Wed - 14:00 hours
- Zokomera Alimi - Beyond FM - Frid 14:00 hours
- Ulimi Walero - Beyond FM - Sat 11:00 hours
- Zokomera Alimi - Beyond FM - Mon 15:00 hours
- Mimi wa Makono - Zodiac - Thur - 13:30hours
- Mimi wa Makono - MBC 1-Fri - 13:30hours

Coming Soon: Tisanthle Za ASWAp-SP on MBC TV

FROM HUNGER TO A CONTENTED LIFE OF SUFFICIENCY

By Kantambo Longwe

Enet Nkhuni of Chisando village, Traditional Authority Nkhambata, Nkhata-bay district is a farmer with a touch of class when it comes to crop and livestock diversification. She grows Maize, Beans, Tomatoes, Cassava, and Soya, beside rearing Goats, and Chicken.

However, Enet was not satisfied that all along until 2012 the farming page of her story was not the same. She says that in the past, despite working hard in the field, the family had never known the meaning of harvesting enough from her hilly pieces of land to feed her eight member family, thanks to the soil erosion that has led to loss of most soil nutrients and rapid drying of her land for cultivation. "The problem was too much and too common here. It had decimated maize farms to the extent that some farmers in the area associated it with witchcraft. We would dutifully go to our farmlands and plant maize every season knowing very well that we were destined not to harvest enough" recalled Enet

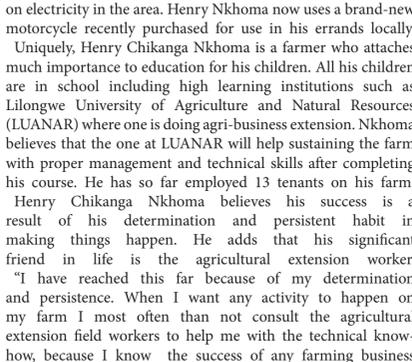
In an effort to try and deal with the problem Enet, like other farmers in the area, used to open up new farmland, but she says even the newly opened bare farmland could not hold on to its natural nutrients for long, so the situation was back to square one. The Chisando community also tried to contain the problem through use of animal manure, but her livestock could not produce enough to cover her piece piece of land.

In 2012, Enet heard of new technologies that are being promoted in her area by the Ministry of Agriculture, through Malawi - Zambia (MAZA) project that emphasizes on the soil and water conservation. The project is funded by Development Fund of Norway. Through MAZA, Enet says she was informed that the new soil and water conservation would increase yields. "I decided to try Pit planting, total soil cover, and a bit of agroforestry, proper use of manure; and since then I have never looked back. Over the years my yield has increased to almost threefold from the same piece of land

that barely produced enough for our family consumption.

Within these few years of our trying and out scaling these new technologies, we are now able to harvest more than enough. We are able to cater for our subsistence needs and also afford a huge surplus which we sell to cater for other needs such as school fees for the children. The bumper yield has also helped us as a family to change our mind set and embarked on developing our family's economic status". To date Enet has renovated her old family house and the family has built a second family house. Besides, the family has managed to buy goats with the aim that they use for meat, sales and manure collection.

Following her success in her farming business, Enet has been chosen by her community to be the Lead farmer and she has up to 20 follower farmers, 16 of them women who also engage in all technologies promoted through MAZA and self-help activities. She is urging her neighbors, who are still undecided to use the technology and she is sure they will not regret they did.



Enet and her follower farmers who have adopted technologies being promoted by MAZA

FROM TENANT TO ESTATE OWNER

By Excelllo Zidana

The story of a 45-year old Henry Chikanga Nkhoma from Gangala village, TA Mzuzuzuku in Mzimba confirms the old adage "Kantha ndi khama phiviti adakwatira njima" meaning; 'persistence pays'. "Indeed farming is business but for that business to be profitable, determination and great effort is required," says the ever smiling Nkhoma while holding his brand new motorcycle.

This is the story of a person who became tired of doing piece work to put food on his table, and confidently decided to become a tobacco tenant in Kasungu to mobilise the much needed cash capital to start his own farming business.

It was in 1991/92 farming season when Henry Nkhoma and his family trudged to the farming district of Kasungu. This is where he became a tenant at Manyanda Farm in TA Simulemba where he worked for four years, and managed to raise the three thousand kwacha that enabled him to start his own farming business.

"When I raised that money, I went back to my home immediately and began my farming business with support from my wife. I began my farming business in the 1995/96 growing season and the first thing I did was to buy 60 bags of fertilizers. At the time, all six bags cost me MK960.00. I also secured a loan from Malawi Rural Finance Company (MRFC) to carry out other related operations on my farm. That was the beginning of my journey to prosperity," says Nkhoma.

Nkhoma grows Tobacco, diversity, Cassava, Sweet potato and pulses. When asked why this much diversity, he simply says a business minded farmer needs to have options in case of unforeseen circumstances such as dry spells and pests and disease outbreaks. "Despite the unfavorable weather experienced this year, I have made millions of kwachas from selling cassava cuttings and sweet potato vines on top of selling tobacco and some leguminous crops," boasted the visionary farmer from Vihangala area.

As a 21st Century farmer, Henry Chikanga Nkhoma says conserving the environment is a priority on his farm. He says he has a woodland of approximately three to four hectares planted in 1996. This was done in response to the tree planting encouragement to tobacco farmers from the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and water Development.

Largely tobacco farmers use trees in various ways including ban construction, tobacco curing just to mention but a few. Henry Nkhoma has numerous sources of income which include houses for rent, direct sale and also livestock including cattle, goats and pigs. He has built an iron sheet house of (5 rooms) at his farm in Gangala village. Jokingly Henry says many people have been mistaking his house for that of a Member of Parliament in the area because of its outstanding beauty.

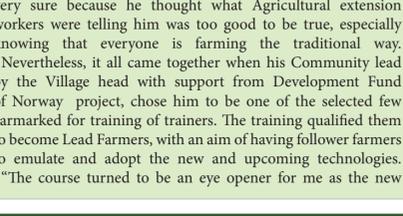
On top of several houses for rent at Jenda and Embangweni townships, Nkhoma has a multi-purpose maize mill which runs on electricity in the area. Henry Nkhoma now uses a brand-new motorcycle recently purchased for use in his errands locally. Uniquely, Henry Chikanga Nkhoma is a farmer who attaches much importance to education for his children. All his children are in school including high learning institutions such as Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) where one is doing agri-business extension. Nkhoma believes that the lone at LUANAR will help sustaining the farm with proper management and technical skills after completing his course. He has so far employed 13 tenants on his farm.

Henry Chikanga Nkhoma believes his success is a result of his determination and persistent habit in making things happen. He adds that his significant friend in life is the agricultural extension worker.

"I have reached this far because of my determination and persistence. When I want any activity to happen on my farm I most often than not consult the agricultural extension field workers to help me with the technical know-how, because I know the success of any farming business rests on the technical guidance from agriculturalists," advised the slightly short and heavy built Chikanga Nkhoma.

"Potentially, Malawi can achieve the much desired sustainable development only if its citizens were to be determined in their every day endeavors. I started as a tenant but what I have achieved on my farm now confirms the fact that prosperity is for everyone who wishes to achieve such status; Bizinezi ya ulimi ndi Dilu amdala," advises Henry Nkhoma amid laughter.

YOUNG FARMER MAKING THE WHOLE DIFFERENCE IN HIS COMMUNITY



Mphande and his family at goat hola where he gets manure for use in pits

By Kantambo Longwe

Isaac Mphande, is a young small scale farmer who is currently leading other farmers in his village on most farming activities. He lives in one of the hilly areas of northern Malawi called Chitcheka in Nkhata-bay district. Just as most parts of the countryside this part is not spared from strong effects of temperature increases, erratic rainfall and soil erosion. These plus other effects have for a very long time brought a very thin line between farmers of the area being able to harvest enough to feed their families or having to go hungry.

Working with his family, Mphande says he was one of the farmers who used the traditional way of cultivation that his family and forefathers have used for generations. "I used to clear my farmlands, and burn all the remaining plant residue on top of the soil to get clean ridges for planting my seeds" Isaac says it was not until 2013 that he learnt of water and soil conservation agriculture, but even then, he was not very sure because he thought what Agricultural extension workers were telling him was too good to be true, especially knowing that everyone is farming the traditional way.

Nevertheless, it all came together when his Community lead by the Village head with support from Development Fund of Norway project, chose him to be one of the selected few earmarked for training of trainers. The training equipped them to become Lead Farmers, with an aim of having follower farmers to emulate and adopt the new and upcoming technologies. "The course turned to be an eye opener for me as the new

technologies that we learnt, which I now know as conservation agriculture technologies, are contrary to the labour-intensive method way of farming which are common among subsistence farmers in this country. The technologies we learnt are money, time and energy saving as compared to the old way which unfortunately, as demand for land increases, it can exacerbate deforestation and greatly deplete the nutrients in soil without giving the land enough time to regenerate" explained Mphande

On her part Mrs Mphande, says with the training of her husband and the other Lead farmers most of their villagers have started adopting and practicing conservation agriculture which she articulated as a crop management system based on minimum soil disturbance, crop residue retention and crop rotations. Mary Mphande added to say that the DF sponsored project that is being implemented in their community has introduced farmers to new agricultural practices and technologies that help them to adapt to climate change and conserve scarce natural resources.

The Mphande family have twenty-two active follower households and agree that old farming ways are a thing of the past. The family says they have learnt the benefits of not burning off moisture and nutrient-dense plant residue in soils, pit planting and timely total soil cover. This they say has tripled their harvest in the recent past and they are able to harvest three times a year.

Isaac Mphande observes that although it was difficult at first to convince fellow farmers, achievements in the past two years have become a testimony that makes other farmers frequent visitors to his demonstration gardens seeking his expertise on how they can also do what he does better to achieve bumper yield, grow three times a year and have enough time for his young family.

Nevertheless, Isaac expressed his dismay that amidst all this success, there's still a few in his neighbourhood that still burn their residues and he has to be hopeful that fires do not enter his farm land. He however, was of hope that as one of their community's pilot lead farmer he would endeavour to remain of good courage and striving to make the whole community embrace the positive change that has come to their area.

From the proceeds of the newly found good agriculture practices the Mphande have lately added goats to their enterprise which serves them with manure and they are able to cultivate enough maize to meet their family's food needs, and save some that help them to generate income. Besides that the family says they have enough time for each other and the kids as their time at the garden has been reduced drastically with the new lean time, energy and money saving technologies.