

Programme Area Summary

Country: Malawi

Programme Area: Food Security (Secure Livelihoods) 2004-2009

What is the aim of the programme area?

To increase food security at household level.

Why is VSO working in this particular Programme Area and region?

In response to acute maize shortages and chronic under nutrition in Malawi, VSO is supporting the disadvantaged to feed and nourish themselves so they have an adequate state of health to enable them to make a viable living. Thus work in this Programme Area contributes to two of VSO's development goals: Health and Social Well-being and Secure Livelihoods. VSO Malawi is going to support the global goals through increasing food security at household level with emphasis, wherever possible, on empowerment of especially disadvantaged households in our focus districts in Malawi.

Key beneficiaries and partners

- Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development (MoIWD)
 - Department of Irrigation (DoI)
- Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS)
 - Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES).
 - Department of Crops Production (DoCP)
 - Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development (DAHLD)
 - Department of Land Resources (DoLR)

The focus of our support will be on food production and diversification, particularly through appropriate small-scale irrigation, crops and livestock development and enhancing capacity of extension services to promote agriculture as a business.

- A number of smallholder farmer membership associations.
To improve the commercial potential of smallholder farmers, enhancing economic status and social conditions, the focus will be on processing and marketing of food and cash crops. VSO Malawi will help build the capacity of farm associations (membership organisations of smallholder farmers), give technical assistance and improve the accessibility and availability of agricultural inputs and market information systems.
- Private sector associations or companies with corporate social responsibility agendas: eg Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT), Makande Tea and Coffee Estates, Eco Products Limited (EPL), Luwawa Forest Lodge/Sovcraft
- Local NGOs: Development Action for Marginalized Rural Areas (DAMRA), Eva Demaya Centre
- Civil society: CISANET
- Relief agencies: WFP, AAH

Key objectives of the programme and the cross-cutting themes?

- Provide technical expertise through recruitment of specialist skills in micro-irrigation engineering, livestock and crops production, and nutrition involving training of both smallholder farmers and agricultural technical advisory personnel.
- Improve and develop the ability of smallholder farmers to undertake farming as a business
- To improve distribution of food ensuring it gets to where it is needed, when it is needed.

The identified strategies will contribute to food security through:

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- More food produced at household level. Improving the quality and quantity of the food produced and increasing the diversity of food types.
- Improved access to markets both for produce and supply of agricultural inputs
- Increased cash income of small scale farmers through improvements in processing and marketing of agricultural produce enabling more purchasing power for food
- Improved food distribution and food supply monitoring

Current programme activities

The strategy is being developed through consultation with District Assemblies, current and potential development partners and other stakeholders (including academics) and the volunteer development workers themselves. In the light of the 2002 famine, these consultations have consistently come through with a strong message: that we needed to refocus our erstwhile sustainable rural livelihoods work onto food security and move away from a scattered collection of unlinked placements. Our long term volunteers are now part of a more focused programme of complementary placements covering: food production, irrigation, crop diversification and livestock development; agricultural marketing and processing; policy level lobbying and food distribution.

Focus of International Volunteer Placements

- Irrigation and Agricultural Extension
- Nutrition
- Business and Market Development

Workshops, training & conferences

- Sharing best practice in low input irrigation, agricultural practice
- Promoting nutrition awareness
- Sharing experience on capacity building for farmer associations

Support to national volunteering

- Several partners work through national volunteers
- DAMRA, MOGA, Eva Demaya Centre
- Most of the Farmer Associations are run by committee members on voluntary basis

Research

- Household level surveys are built into M&E of many placements as per Government of Malawi Food and Nutrition Security Policy
- Centre for Appropriate Technology promotes research into new low cost technologies

Advocacy and Global Education

- Civil Society Agriculture Network is a key partner involved in Government budget monitoring and policy analysis
- Feeding up experience from District level local government work to both district and national level lobbying
- Global Education across the country programme through exploring issues behind the “food crisis”

Partner exchange visits/study tours

- Frequent use of volunteer exchanges throughout the programme – sharing volunteers specialist skills with more partners than their own employer.
- Linking similar partners for exchange and learning visits – eg Mpoto Dairy Farmers Association visited Shire Highlands Milk Producers Association, their sister organization in Southern Region
- Proposed LINKS visit between Malawi Organic Growers Association and an Organic

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training institute in Zambia

Providing grants and/or equipment for partners e.g. small grants fund

- Small grant from private donor as well as VSO PC05 fund supports partner needs in:
 - Attending conferences
 - Conducting household surveys
 - Small equipment purchases etc

Development of publications or other materials for training or communication

- Promotion and distribution of Low Input manual (developed for WFP)
- Production of a CD about Zoa Tea Estate Relief and Social Development Programme as learning resource
- Building up a resource unit in the VSO office of publications etc available to both volunteers and partners

Other partnership activities

- Market Assessment of the Smallholder Dairy sector
- Planned Sector forum subject to funding
- Sub programme of linked strategic placements with Dairy Associations, Commercial processor, Bureau of Standards and Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development

What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?

- Recruiting agricultural skills from southern development partners with experience of relevant participatory approaches as well as low cost irrigation and soil conservation techniques
- Applying market value chain assessment approaches to the capacity building of farmer associations promoting specific commodity lines.