

# EMPOWERED RURAL WOMEN

*Success Stories*



African Institute of Corporate Citizenship

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## BACKGROUND

The African Institute of Corporate Citizenship (AICC) is an NGO that is committed to being a center of excellence in Africa by promoting the role of business in building sustainable communities. AICC specializes in acting as a catalyst and facilitator of change; a broker and initiator of multi-sector partnerships and platform; and as a knowledge hub for issues relating to the role of business in society. AICC is committed to promoting responsible growth and competitiveness in Africa by changing the way companies and other local organizations do business in liaison with the public sector to benefit people and the economy in order to build sustainable communities. AICC's exceptionality is the capacity to engage stakeholders both private and public through Public Private Partnership (PPP) approach.

Currently, AICC through UN women with funding from Standard Bank is implementing Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) programme in Mchinji and Mzimba Districts which aims at increasing productivity and access to market through climate smart agriculture technologies. The project targeted to develop a groundnuts value chain by concentrating resources on building the capacity of women smallholder farmers that are critical to the broadening of the agricultural sector in Malawi. Through the WEE project, AICC expands its mandate to stimulating and supporting private sector investment in the country's agricultural and rural market with specific focus on youths and women.

The project is promoting the participation of women groundnuts farmers through the development of women clubs concentrating on increasing groundnuts through climate smart technologies. The project is expected to empower women farmers through participatory designing and user led innovations by linking the potential of user led innovations to enable women to design and develop their own labour saving agricultural tools, tailor made for their culture, soils and cropping systems.

This booklet is a selection of stories depicting some of the successes that AICC has registered through this project especially on women. The stories specifically focus on the interventions that AICC has undertaken in strengthening women participation in strategic decision making, financial enhancement, change in livelihood and surge in groundnuts productivity.



*Women farmers in one of the groundnuts demonstration field*

## ESTHER DEFIES THE NORM AS SHE BECOMES A BREADWINNER IN A VILLAGE WHERE FEMALES ARE TREATED AS INFERIORS

Coming from a background where women are always regarded as inferiors, with no decision making power, WEE project has opened a new chapter for one Esther Sato. Esther hails from Mufomuli village, T/A Mpherembe in Mzimba. She is 43 years old and married with 5 children.

Being a housewife, Esther was not allowed to go out and fetch anything for the family as this was not allowed per tradition in her community. Esther was being hurt in her heart in silence as she could not influence anything in the family whilst she knew she could do something to provide for the family. For a

in implementing the project for them to be co-workers and for females not to be taken as inferiors. Besides teaching the groupings in good agricultural practices, modern technologies of handling groundnuts to reduce aflatoxin, AICC continually trained the groupings in the benefits of shared responsibilities amongst men and women. At first, there existed resistance from the males to be co-workers with women but the pieces of training changed their different perspectives.

During the time of elections in Zuwe cooperative, where Esther belongs, she contested and was elected as a board treasurer. The momentum that AICC built in

the females made her become one of the most active members in the grouping. She requested her husband to manage the piece of land that they have been using for the past years on her own. Esther challenged her husband that using the expertise she had gained from AICC she would do wonders with the piece of land. With hesitation, the husband allowed her and she started preparing the land.

During the time of sowing, Esther was one of the individuals that had access to improved groundnut seed of CG 9 that AICC made available to the cooperatives. For the first time, she used double-row system of planting groundnuts, she used aflasafe and inoculant all of which she



*Mrs Esther Sato holding her fertilizer bag with her goats aside*

couple of times, Esther had requested her husband to join a women grouping to assist the family in one way or the other. However, this was taken as an insult to the husband as the husband believed that for a woman to contribute something to the family, it was like belittling a man. Esther and family, therefore, have been living in dire poverty not knowing when they could get out of that devastating condition.

Things took a twist when AICC introduced the WEE project in partnership with UN Women with funding from Standard Bank. AICC engaged both men and women in strengthening cooperatives in the groundnut value chain. AICC brought together males and females

learnt from AICC's extension services.

Esther's field was taken as a model field due to how quick she learnt and adapted to new ways of planting groundnuts. In the first time, Esther harvested 1000 kgs of groundnuts on a field where she used to harvest an average of 300kgs. From the proceeds that Esther got from the groundnuts sales, she has been able to pay back a cooperative loan, saved money for her daughter's school fees and she managed to procure start-up inputs for the next growing season, a thing which as a family they could not manage in the past. Esther has also managed to diversify by buying 2 goats to start goat rearing. She is currently contemplating of increasing her VSL shares from 20,000 to 30,000.

## MTENJEMANGA COOPERATIVE ATTAIN FINANCIAL STABILITY

... “When we started, we were a bit skeptical about who would buy our produce. With the improved groundnuts varieties, we have links with different buyers who have promised to buy groundnuts from us after the harvesting season.”...

The role of women in our communities is often considered subordinate to that of men. Women in most cases are expected to look after the household, the children and ensure food security. On the other hand, men are tasked with ensuring financial security. In Malawi, women contribute 53% to the agricultural labour force. This is because they have limited access to land and thus resort to offering labour to farm owners. The African Institute of Corporate Citizenship (AICC) through Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) financed by Standard Bank is striving to empower women through creating awareness and sensitizations to women groups through different interventions.

M t e n j e m a n g a cooperative which is under Mkanda EPA in Mchinji District is among women farmer groups that have benefited from the WEE projects. Rather than staying at home and waiting to be financially supported, the women have settled on self-empowerment. The project has been implementing different interventions at M t e n j e m a n g a cooperative with an aim of building women capacity to uplift themselves.

The group consists of 54 groundnut producers of which 9 are men. Before being part of the WEE project, the group used to produce old groundnut varieties solely for household consumption. According to Ms. Georgina Gama, a 35 year-old divorced woman who is the cooperative's Secretary, the group started out as farm labourers where they would get hired by community members to till land during planting and weeding season. They were also practicing apiculture but their earnings from the bee production were

insufficient and needed to look for diverse ways to sustain their needs.

Encouraged by WEE project, the group members embarked on a journey of cultivating improved groundnut varieties such as CG-9 and CG-10 which they accessed through AICC. Ever since they became part of WEE project, Mtenjemanga cooperative has benefited tremendously as besides accessing the improved variety seed, they have been trained thoroughly on improved groundnut production and best financial practices. “The old varieties, despite having a higher oil content

which makes them more desirable, are less resistant to drought conditions, pests, and diseases and have a low yielding rate. “But this seed that AICC has brought to us, is performing wonders,” said Ms. Georgina Gama.

“The market demand for the improved varieties, moreover, is higher than that of the old varieties,” She added. Ms. Gama further alluded that when they started off, they were a bit skeptical on who would buy their produce. To her amazement, the improved groundnuts varieties afforded them a ready market through contracts they signed to supply to a seed production company. We have also benefited from trainings and demonstrations organized

by the WEE project and thus expanded our networks and the opportunities that we have received, have surpassed our expectations,” concluded Ms. Gama.

Since the project embarked, the group members' lives have been transformed significantly. Most of the members can now afford to keep their children in school with the profit made from the groundnut sales. Mrs. Eunice Harrison Gama for instance, a 39 year old woman and a mother of 6 children, with a hearing



Mrs. Eunice Harrison Gama on her goat kraal holding young goats in her hands

problem from Malizani village, Traditional Authority Nyoka, in Mchinji District, no longer worry for any form of financial support to her family as she is making enough to feed her children, paying school fees for her son and cater for all her needs. Before the project, Mrs. Eunice Gama was getting less than 100 Kgs of groundnuts on her one acre land. After applying all the skills she grasped from AICC trainings, she managed to harvest 256 Kgs of shelled groundnuts on a half-acre

and managed to sell her quality groundnuts at MWK 400 per Kg that enabled her get MWK 102,400. She also joined a Village Savings Loan Association (VSLA) that belongs to the cooperative and managed to come out with MWK 85,000 from the MWK 21,000 she invested. Mrs. Eunice Gama intend to use part of the proceeds for her children's school fees and she is also diversifying into goat production.

## IMPROVED LIVELIHOODS THROUGH IMPROVED GROUNDNUTS VARIETIES

*... "I was in full contact with the lead farmer and the AICC field officer who imparted me with relevant knowledge on how to grow the CG-9 seed variety of groundnut, which I found very productive and I have managed to get 25, 50kgs bags of groundnuts from the same one acre"...*

Most of the poor people in Africa, especially Malawi inhabit in rural areas and almost all of them depend on agriculture for their living. It is not an overstatement to say that one of the path out of poverty in this country relies on the performance of the agricultural sector. An increase in agricultural productivity can be enhanced if adoption of improved seeds is promoted. In this regards AICC through Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) project implemented in Mzimba north and Mchinji encouraged farmers to adopt the use of improved groundnuts seed namely CG-9 and CG-10. Selected cooperatives in 10 EPAs, (Three in Mchinji and 7 in Mzimba North) adopted the use of improved groundnuts seeds and an increase in the groundnuts productivity has been registered.



*Mrs Mary Sakasa holding her new bicycle and standing with her form two daughter*



level of influence as that of established farmers. This has encouraged more people in the community to be fully introduced into the groundnuts production.

Liweredzi cooperative is one of the cooperatives under Mkanda EPA, in Mchinji District. Formed in 2006, the group has 116 members where 66 members are women and 50 are men. The cooperative members have been part of individuals who benefited from the extension

services provided on farming techniques since the inception of WEE project. The cooperative normally plant the improved seed according to the demand in their local market. They were once involved in planting the traditional varieties of groundnuts but decided to jump the ship. Before the adoption of the improved groundnuts seed, the

cooperative was aggregating an average of 4000 Kgs of groundnuts and after planting the improved seeds they have managed to aggregate over 7800 Kgs which represents an increase in production by 95 percent. When the chairman was asked the secret behind the surge in production, he disclosed that that apart from growing groundnuts as a group, they also grow individually though they put a target of at least 100 kg per person and aggregate the groundnuts from all

members and sell it as a group as part of strengthening the bargaining power over buyers.

Members of the cooperative have improved their financial status as they have managed to keep their children in schools, buy iron sheets, bicycles and farm inputs in readiness to the next growing season.

Mrs Mary Sakasa a 45 year old woman from Shemu village T/A Mkanda is among the many women that have benefited from the WEE project in Mchinji. Mrs Sakasa a married woman with 5 children has been a small-scale groundnuts farmer for more than 10 years. She has been experiencing poor yields due to lack of access to improved groundnuts seed varieties and the knowledge that could guide her to grow the improved groundnuts seed.

She has been acquiring home-saved seed from farmers in her village and she planted it on her one acre of land. Throughout the years the crop has been adversely

affected by diseases and she only managed to harvest 5, 50 kg bags of unshelled groundnut from her one acre land. “The variety I used is an old variety and it is not disease resistant and that is why it was severely affected, but now with guidance from AICC we accessed better quality seeds, said Sakasa. “I was in full contact with the lead farmer and the AICC field officer who imparted me with relevant knowledge on the CG-9 seed variety. I found it very productive and I have managed to get 20, 50kgs bags of unshelled groundnuts from the same one acre” she added.

From the profit made, Mrs Mary Sakasa has managed to buy a bicycle, paying fees for her two children who are in form two and form three. She has also purchased fertilizer in preparation for the next growing season and has renovated her house by making it have a cement floor.

## MANDELA COCK AS A CURE FOR AFLATOXIN CONTAMINATION

... “Before AICC, I was using traditional methods to harvest, dry, grade or store my groundnuts, and that was why I was bringing poor quality groundnuts to the market.”...

Aflatoxin is one of the hazardous elements in peoples’ health. This element is mostly found in legumes, especially groundnuts. Whilst implementing initiatives aimed at surging groundnut production, aflatoxin management has to be at the helm of the discussion. Aflatoxin contamination need to be reduced. One way of reducing the aflatoxin contamination in groundnuts is the implementation of best harvesting practices.

Harvesting of groundnuts includes several stages: lifting (uprooting), drying, cocking (curing), threshing (separating the pods from the vines), and shelling. Once plants have been uprooted, they must be allowed to dry for a few days with the pods exposed to the air. After drying, they are cocked

(cured) in an off-the-ground position. African Institute of Corporate Citizenship (AICC) through Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) promoted the use of Mandela cock method as one way of curing groundnuts to reduce aflatoxin contamination. In the Mandela cock method, farmers stack groundnut stalks in a circle on top of a platform, with the pods facing upwards. This allows the pods to dry should they get wet, saving them from aflatoxin infection and other damage.



Mrs. Jessie Tembo in her newly established mini shop

Mrs Jessie Tembo of Kapiri cooperative in Euthini EPA started growing groundnuts on her one acre plot in 2010. But as time went by, she wanted to quit. Her poor quality, ungraded groundnuts fetched poor prices. Post-harvest losses and infection with aflatoxin reduced her profit as well. Before AICC, I did not know how to harvest, dry, grade or store my groundnuts, and that was why I was

bringing poor quality of my produces to the market, reiterated Mrs. Tembo.”

A 35 year old Jessie Tembo from Kachitete Village, Traditional Authority Chindi, joined the cooperative which has been working with the WEE project and grasped all the instructions on how to use Mandela cock method. She first used a Mandela cock to dry her groundnuts and she testified that her groundnuts had less aflatoxin, and the weight was encouraging. “I observed less post-harvest loss because the pods became hard that rats, termites and others failed to eat the pods,” added Jessie. Now that she is earning a profit, Mrs. Jessie able to support her family. “Before, I used

to earn less than MWK 100,000 in a year on one acre, but now I have managed to get over MWK 150,000, because I am now selling high quality groundnuts. I am now able to send my children to school and I have managed to establish a mini shop at home, revealed Jessie.

Chawezi Banda, AICC Officer for Mzimba, explained that Aflatoxin was the biggest problem groundnut farmers were facing, but now there is a lot of awareness. “We are encouraging farmers through trainings to protect the crop starting from harvesting, drying, and grading up to storage,” reiterated Chawezi.

## DOUBLE ROW SYSTEM AND IMPROVED GROUNDNUTS VARIETIES

*“We planted one seed per planting station and we measured 10 centimeters by 10 centimeters planting spaces and 15 centimeters between rows on a ridge. This technique is good because this year, we have harvested 10, 50 Kgs bags of shelled groundnuts from the same small piece of land have been cultivating since 2004.”*

African Institute of Corporate Citizenship (AICC) believes that the greatest challenge of our agriculture sector is the failure to introduce life-changing technologies and the technical know-how to the neglected rural areas where most smallholder farmers live. Even where improved seed and fertilizer are available, very few farmers increase their productivity due to lack of improved agricultural technologies and the relevant trainings on how to adopt the new technology. As part of addressing this problem, AICC through the Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) project introduced the double row method of planting groundnuts to women groundnuts farmers and it has improved the groundnuts productivity among the targeted farmers.

As the name suggests, double-row planting involves planting two rows about 15 cm apart. The double-row technique allows farmers to grow two rows in almost the same amount of space as one row would require. Planting density is one of the main factors that has an important role on growth, yield and quality of groundnuts. It is important to accommodate the most appropriate number of

plants per unit area of land to obtain better yield. Establishment of optimum plant population per unit area of the field is essential to get maximum yield.

A 40-year-old Mrs Edith Chipeta, from Kamangadazing’andu village, Traditional Authority Chindi in Mzimba District is a farmer under Kapiri cooperative in Euthini EPA. Mrs Chipeta and her husband have been growing groundnuts since 2004. “My husband and I were very poor because we couldn’t manage to support our family. We were growing

groundnuts using traditional method of planting which were making us to get an average of five 50 Kgs bags of shelled groundnuts every year,” said one Mrs. Chipeta. After being trained by AICC, we have been planting groundnuts in two rows per ridge in order to boost our harvest. We planted one seed per planting station and we measured 10 centimeters by 10 centimeters planting



Mr and Mrs Chipeta holding groundnuts bags and bags of fertilizers they have purchased

spaces and 15 centimeters between rows on a ridge. This technique is good because this year, we have harvested ten 50 Kgs bags of shelled groundnuts from the same small piece we have been cultivating since 2004. Due

to what I have experienced, I honestly advise others to start using the technique of planting groundnuts in two rows per ridge.”

Mrs Chipeta a mother of four children believes that groundnuts will be her main source of income as she will be planting improved seeds using the double row planting technology and will be following whatever she has been trained that gives her a guarantee that she will be realizing high yield. This year she has managed to sell part of the groundnuts she reaped and got over MWK 200,000 which together with her husband have

started buying groundnuts from their fellow farmers as part of business. In preparation to the next growing season, Mrs Chipeta and her husband have already purchased bags of fertilizer.

Mrs Chipeta confessed that in the past she had little contact with extension workers who could help her with instructions on how to grow groundnuts. The coming in of AICC solved the problem as she relies on knowledge from her farmers group since AICC train the lead farmers and let them train their fellow farmers.

## WOMEN FARMERS FIND A SAVIOR IN LABOUR SAVING EQUIPMENT

Smallholder agriculture is characterised by labor-intensive tasks and limited use of improved technologies, which together compromises the productivity of the sector. At the household level, reducing and redistributing the time spent by women on unpaid care and domestic work is key to improving their opportunities to participate in productive activities.

Under WEE project, reducing the workload associated with crop processing has enabled women to produce for the market needs. Women traditionally sold only small quantities of groundnuts because of the chore and labour required for manual processing. AICC therefore, linked the farmers to private sector operators with mechanised groundnuts processing manual machines which opened up a new market and also produced higher-quality groundnuts which resulted in higher market prices.

The project introduced groundnuts shellers and strippers to various cooperatives under the WEE project in Mchinji and Mzimba north. The shellers have the shelling capacity of 44 kilograms of groundnuts per hour. The shellers only provide the kernel breakage percentage of 4%. Using these shellers, farmers are advised not to sprinkle water on dry pods when shelling. While this is a very common practice, it is critical to avoid adding moisture to the nuts. Minimizing moisture is the single most important factor in controlling aflatoxin contamination on the groundnuts. The strippers that are used in threshing of groundnuts from its plant. The strippers act as a relief among women farmers as this tool saves farmers from the monotonous task of threshing manually which will take a smallholder farmer a period of 3 days to thresh one 50kg bag of groundnuts whereas with the strippers a farmer is able to thresh 2 bags per hour. The strippers have the stripping efficiency of 96%. Biyata Sato is one of the famers who is currently using

a stripper and grinder in Kamangadazi village, T/A Chindi, Mzimba. “I like this technology because it is not labor-intensive. This technology helps us to save time to do other equally important chores to improve our livelihoods,” articulated Biyata.

AICC used its uniqueness in working with the private sector to partner with private companies that produced tailor made equipment that are compatible with the rural farmer business organization as they are operated manually.



*Biyata Sato using her grinder to add value to her groundnuts*

As another way of reducing workload and at the same time encouraging climate smart agriculture technology, the project also made available Chitetezo Mbaula which was distributed and women farmers were trained on its use. This has made farmers able to know the problems of using inefficient stoves that can cause a range of harmful impacts that retards economic and social

development in developing countries. “I am proud to have been one of the farmers under this project. I thought charcoal was the only better source of fuel for easy cooking but this project has challenged me through usage of Chitetezo mabula, reiterated Junior Phiri, a youthful farmer under this project.

## INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY IN THE WAKE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change has been a drawback for agricultural progress. Whilst more efforts have been put to agricultural production, productivity has been somewhat challenging. The effort that smallholder farmers have been putting in their farms has mostly been paid back by a frustration of low output. Climate change being at the center of low productivity, has reduced soil fertility and weakened crop adaptability. While this is the case, the fact still remains that climate change is here to stay and the effects thereof will stay with humanity. This therefore calls for innovative ways of climate change mitigation and better ways of coping up with climate change.

Noting the devastating effects of climate change, AICC through its project, Women Economic Empowerment has been engaging smallholder female farmers on better ways of dealing with climate change and fostering productivity amidst challenging times. The project has made progress to achieve women's increase in their productivity through recommended climate smart agriculture inputs and services. The project has increased women's access to improved inputs to enhance women's efficiency as smallholder farmers. This has been achieved by distributing improved and climate smart inputs through grassroots cooperatives and linking partner aggregators who provides improved seed. The project linked certified seed suppliers to the farmers through the introduction of demonstration plots which were mounted as a way of seed multiplication and showcasing groundnuts technologies. This initiative has assisted women who would otherwise lack credit to buy seed. The project also established the seed revolving scheme in which members of the cooperatives, especially women, accessed the climate-smart seeds on loan.

The project also facilitated easy access to inoculant by farmers. AICC worked with inoculant manufacturers and developed a

distribution network to reach smallholder farmers with quality and affordable inoculant. The women farmers were trained on how to use the inoculant and how it contributes towards environmental conservation. “This is the first time to use inoculant. I have never harvested such plenty groundnuts. Thank you AICC, said Idah Mkandawire who is part of the project and hails from T/A Mpherembe area, Mzimba.

The project has equally facilitated easy access to Aflasafe to reduce aflatoxin contamination in groundnuts. Aflasafe is a bacterium which is coated to sorghum and applied in the groundnuts field before flowering period of the plant. The project linked IITA, producers and distributors of aflasafe to distribute and train farmers on its usage. “AICC has taught us innovative ways of overcoming climate change problems. I am confident that our lives will never be the same again,” revealed 31 year-old Idah Mkandawire of T/A Mpherembe, Mzimba.



*Idah Mkandawire standing on her pig kraal*

## YOUNG FARMER EMPOWERED ECONOMICALLY THROUGH GROUNDNUT PRODUCTION

...“I am now into pig production and I have managed to buy land of my own. I can assure everyone that when my kids grow, I will take them to private school using the income I am getting from groundnuts production. My life has surely changed,”...

Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) project is not leaving the youth behind in involving them in agricultural activities. With most young people living in rural areas, where agriculture is likely to provide the

same one acre and increased his volume of production. “I planted CG-10 which is an improved variety of groundnuts. I managed to follow all the agricultural instructions which I was taught from our lead farmer



*Goodson William standing on his pig kraal*

main source of income, it is vital that young people are connected with farming. A lot of cooperatives that have been working with WEE project have youth as part of their members. Youth has been engaged in groundnuts production where all the relevant extension services have been imparted to them.

A 33-year-old Goodson William, from Wintala village, Traditional Authority Mkanda in Mchinji District, revealed that he previously planted traditional variety in his one acre piece of land and harvested 15 bags of unshelled groundnut, despite planting early. After being trained by AICC, Goodson planted groundnuts on the

and I planted in good time. I have managed to reap thirty 50 Kgs bags of unshelled groundnuts from the same one acre.” Reiterated Goodson.

Although he grows groundnut for food, Goodson said that with such harvests, he is selling the remainder to other farmers in his village. “I have been able to buy a land of my own and I have now diversified into pig production. I can assure everyone that when my kids grow, I will take them to private schools through this income, and still have money in my pocket. My life has surely changed,” he stated, while smiling.



*Goodson William standing on his land*



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