

The chickens make us plan - not just dream

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Malawi is halfway through the rainy season. The muddy roads to Mtoso Village are dark red, slippery and the old Landrover can barely stay on the road. With help from SANOVO TECHNOLOGY GROUP, women in Mtoso Village, and Kumala, Ishmail and Kudoko Villages in central Malawi, received 2000 new egg-layers a few days before Christmas. The SANOVO TECHNOLOGY GROUP supported project is aiming at increasing the women's income through egg production and sale on the nearby market.

In the village we are warmly welcomed by the Mtoso Women Group. Led by a growing group of children we walk to see one of the two chicken houses and after washing our shoes, we enter. And there they are, the new stock of layers, nervously running around on the hay that is spread out on the entire floor.

JOYCE AND THE VISION

Later, in the shadow of a big mango tree, Joyce Khofiman tells about her involvement in the project, and as her lively gestures show, she is excited to tell about the changes and challenges the group have gone through and are facing: *"In the time before we got involved in the chicken project we didn't have enough money to pay for our children's school fees. During the years of no rain, when our harvest failed, we couldn't buy enough food, so we were starving from time to time. But it's not like that anymore."* She says with a smile on her face.

Since 2009 the Mtoso village group has increased from 28 to 36 members and the group has raised about 219,000 MKW which are saved safely in the bank until the women have collected enough to build a maize mill. That is the vision of the women group. *"It is not just our dream"*, as Joyce says *"but it is our plan to be fulfilled in three years time."*

The egg sale gave several of the women enough money to buy more acres of land. The land has enabled the women to achieve the right to own productive assets. Control and access to productive assets, especially by women, has a strong bearing on household food security. *"In the beginning we were just a group of uncertain women and without the support we would never have even considered this project."* Says Joyce, adding that *the project has empowered the women, thus they are no longer depending economically on their husbands.*

THE CHICKENS IMPROVE THE HARVEST

Joyce is pointing to the fields of maize that are surrounding the village and tells about the great importance of a good harvest. The chickens are also a part of achieving that. *"From the chickens we also get a lot of manure that we spread on the fields and in our kitchen gardens. We didn't do that systematically before the training but we can see that creating good manure increases the maize and vegetable production and in that way we are improving the soil every season."*

TRAINING HELPS US OVERCOME CHALLENGES

Joyce says that the women are hardworking and proud of what they have achieved. But there have been challenges and Joyce knows that more will come. The list of risks challenging the group's plans is long. Joyce tells that due to climate changes the rain is coming later every year and the risk of the chickens catching diseases is also very likely to happen. None the less Joyce feels that they are well prepared and trained for the challenges to come and says: *"Without the training we couldn't have achieved all of this. The training and supervision is helping us to make the egg production more efficient and to plan how to organize our work and business. With the training we know how to minimize the risk and hygiene is of high priority."*

Joyce and the rest of the women are looking forward to the harvest. It is said to be good this year and with the many eggs to sell on the market the women believe in a brighter future: *"Now we believe we can go the extra mile and follow our vision!"*

Joyce Khofiman (46) has been in the project since 2008



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A woman with a baby on her back is changing the feed while the rest of the woman proudly show us the new boxes they have made for the chickens. Hopefully, in a few weeks from now, the chickens will start laying eggs in the boxes

FAST FACTS

- 1 EURO is worth 205 Malawi Kwacha (MKW)
- In average one egg can be sold on markets at the price of 30MKW.
- One layer gives a little less than one egg a day (100 layers give around 80 eggs a day.)
- Three out of four eggs are sold at the market and the rest are shared between the women and their families in the villages.
- The groups received one bicycle each which they are using to transport eggs to market and feed ingredients from source