

Opportunity International in Malawi

Your Program Impact Report, Spring 2024

ENABLING SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN MALAWI

- ▶ Reaching people living in ultra poverty and equipping them with the skills and resources they need to build sustainable livelihoods.
- ▶ Helping farmers diversify their crops and lessen their dependence on growing tobacco.
- ▶ Connecting farmers to fair markets, buyers, and suppliers.

OUR GRATITUDE

A partnership that makes an impact: thanks to your belief and your investment, families living in ultra-poverty in Malawi have the resources and hope that fuel their journey to sustainable, healthy livelihoods. Thank you to the people of Malawi for showing us what opportunity really is; thanks to you for funding true change.



Family participating in Malawi Graduation

THE NEED

- ▶ 80% of Malawians experience food insecurity.
- ▶ Over 70% of people in Malawi live on less than \$2 a day; Malawi has the fourth highest percentage of people living in extreme poverty in the world, almost all of whom rely on small-scale farming for their livelihoods.
- ▶ 43% of the population in Malawi are under the age of 15.

THE SOLUTIONS

In our continued desire to reach people who have been overlooked, who are living in the deepest areas of poverty, we are focused on lifting up the people of Malawi through specific interventions including livelihood training, financial literacy, and improved agricultural practices. The **Graduation** program provides two years of training, support, and resources—two years of work that will impact literal generations to come. Our **Agriculture Finance** work equips farmers with the tools and knowledge they need to diversify their crops, increase their yields, and better support their families.

PROGRESS ON OUR WORK

Graduation: Moving out of Extreme Poverty

Opportunity has over fifty years of experience working with people in poverty; we continue to extend our outreach to and deepen our impact on people living in what some call ultra or “invisible” poverty: families that can barely afford one meal a day; parents who have no job skills or income-generating activities; homes that barely protect toddlers from the elements. In Malawi, many of these families live in geographic and/or social isolation. Poverty is cyclical and generational, as families scramble to meet immediate and basic needs with no plans or resources for the future.

The Graduation program (also known as “The Rise” in Malawi) is a proven intervention that provides:

- Financial help to kickstart a business
- Business coaching and training
- Financial skills training
- Expert local support
- Basic needs covered for the family so they can focus on building an income-generating business

The program works with government, community leadership, and development structures to ensure alignment with the district and community development plans.

In the summer of 2023, we launched a cohort of 200 families who are participating in this two-year comprehensive intervention to establish resilient and sustainable pathways out of extreme poverty. As of December 2023, the following milestones have been achieved in this Malawi Graduation cohort:

- ▶ **Productive asset:** Each of the 200 targeted households received four goats, strategically chosen as the primary productive enterprise to generate immediate household income.
- ▶ **Livestock management training:** Families participate in a comprehensive training program encompassing livestock management practices and guidance on constructing and maintaining proper goat housing.
- ▶ **Business training:** Intensive business training equipped participants with the necessary skills to effectively manage their new small enterprises.
- ▶ **Organic fertilizer making and backyard garden training:** Households learned the production of Mbeya manure, a specific kind of local fertilizer and a valuable resource for enhancing the productivity of their backyard gardens and other crop plots. They learned effective methods for productive home vegetable gardens.
- ▶ **Monthly consumption support and health insurance:** To meet immediate survival needs and allow families to focus on the work of the program, participants began receiving monthly food support via mobile money transfers. Participants were also registered under Abwenzi Health Insurance to manage the challenges of access to qualified health resources.

The Graduation model is rooted in a financial resource with accompanying training and support:

A market-viable asset (in Malawi, goats) is transferred to a client, along with a larger package of comprehensive services such as crisis relief; training in life skills and financial literacy; access to health and education; introduction to formal or informal financial services.

Community-based case workers provide support to Graduation participants and work with Opportunity staffers:

Each case worker supports 20 households, helping families stay on track in making substantial life changes, providing links to services not provided by the program, and providing psycho-social care.

- ▶ **Savings groups methodology training for caseworkers:** Caseworkers, instrumental in the program's success, participated in training on forming and managing savings groups (sometimes called Village Savings and Loan Associations).
- ▶ **Savings groups formation:** Program teams formed 12 savings groups, each managed by a caseworker overseeing two savings groups, and equipped with all the necessary tools.
- ▶ **Ongoing monitoring:** Rigorous monitoring mechanisms were implemented, with the management team regularly presenting progress reports to village development committees. District council officials were also invited to conduct on-site monitoring, fostering collaboration and ensuring accountability at the community level.

Farmer Support Agents

A critical intervention is Opportunity's Farmer Support Agents (FSAs), local community leaders who provide digitally enhanced trainings to the hardest-to-reach farmers on a range of topics (e.g., good agricultural practices, financial literacy, agronomy, mentorship, environmental care), high-quality agricultural inputs, and linkages to affordable financial services.

Farmer Support Agents continue to use smart phones and tablets to train farmers in successful, sustainable farming. **As of January 2024, in Malawi we have 609 Farmer Support Agents supporting 142,425 farmers, representing the greatest reach in the five African countries** supported by Opportunity's FSAs. FSAs in Malawi currently are focused on good agricultural practice training as the wet season started in December; the late start to the rains, as well as erratic rainfall patterns, have created some concern among clients as we could be for a tough season.

Financial Institution Partnerships

AgFinance also plays a central role in facilitating loan repayments to financial institution partners through a range of digital channels that allow farmers to repay loans using mobile money and rural bank agent networks. Farmers can access banks without having to travel directly to bank branches, which is often a time- and resource-consuming activity as the branches are far away from where farmers live and work. Between October 2023 and January 2024, in Malawi, **4,041 ag loans had been disbursed at a value of \$1M.**



Ruth Molosoni is a farmer and a Farmer Support Agent based in Mlomba who supports 80 other farmers.

She had a successful harvest even though she planted her soya on less than one acre of land. She learned from—and now teaches other farmers—the training module called “Farming as a Family Business.” Previously she saw farming simply as a way of growing food, but now she sees that it can generate good profits if done correctly.

With the money earned from her harvest, she has been able to pay school fees for her children. She also has been able to build three tombstones for her late mother and other relatives which is something she has been wanting to do for some time.

She has also purchased two bags of fertilizer in preparation for the coming growing season.

Her dream for this coming season is to be able to buy corrugated iron sheets for her house.

Innovation: Gender Equity and Financial Action Learning for Sustainability at Scale



August 2023 workshop: Empowering Gender Transformation for Food Security and Nutrition in Malawi

In a significant stride towards gender transformation and sustainable development, Opportunity International successfully completed a three-day workshop introducing the innovative Financial Action Learning for Sustainability at Scale (FALS@Scale) methodology. This approach aims to catalyze positive change through the integration of lessons from the Gender Action Learning System and the Financial Action Learning System.

This methodology is being piloted within the Joint Programme on Gender Transformative

Approaches, a collaborative effort between three United Nations Rome-based agencies—the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the World Food Programme—with support from the European Union.

Our efforts center around using the FALS@Scale approach in local savings groups to effectively extend the reach of gender transformation in remote and underserved regions of Malawi. The ultimate goal is to make significant contributions to enhanced food security and improved nutrition, and to foster long-standing and transformative impacts.

What truly sets this workshop apart is its community-driven nature. Empowered community members, known as champions, are at the forefront. Their firsthand experience with the FALS@Scale methodology equips them to educate relevant stakeholders on the methodology. These community members embody the transformational power of the methodology, revealing how collaborative visioning with their families has led to remarkable improvements in their households.

Opportunity International Malawi's goal is to empower Malawians to build sustainable livelihoods. To do this, we know that we need a diverse array of government, non-profit, civic, and community partners. We also need to holistically address issues of women's empowerment, family food security, child nutrition, and education.

Our brothers and sisters in Malawi show us every day what it means to embrace opportunity with vigor, heart, and grace. Thank you for making our work possible; thank you for your unwavering belief in the transformative power of hope and hard work.