

SOUTHERN AFRICA REGIONAL

IMPACT

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**INNOVATIONS
THAT DRIVE IMPACT**

Solidaridad

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WHO WE ARE

Solidaridad

Solidaridad is an international civil society organization with 55 years of experience in developing solutions to make communities more resilient - from our early roots supporting repressed communities in Latin America to our current work fostering more sustainable supply chains. We currently work in over 40 countries, on five continents, through seven independently supervised regional offices.

REGIONAL FOCUS



3,762

farmers with increased income



150,652

hectares under sustainable management



111,446

farmers obtain new or improved services



THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDING PARTNERS:



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EXECUTIVE FOREWORD

In the beginning...

Author: Humphrey Nxumalo, Head of Programmes



LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF PROGRAMMES

Solidaridad Southern Africa is a Regional Expertise Centre (REC) of the Solidaridad Network, a global civil society organization with over 50 years of experience in fostering sustainable and inclusive supply chains.

In 2024, we operated in Malawi (cotton, tea, and soy), Mozambique (cotton, tea, fruit and vegetables, and soy), South Africa (fruits and vegetables), Zambia (livestock, leather, cotton, fruit and vegetables, and soy), and Zimbabwe (livestock and leather).

Our mission is to enable farmers, producers, and workers to build a future where businesses operate sustainably, and local communities thrive. We drive innovative solutions that balance the needs of people, the environment, and the economy, ensuring that smallholder farmers and agribusinesses can create long-term wealth while addressing pressing global challenges such as climate change, food security, and social equity.

As we reflect on the past year, I am immensely proud of the strides we have made in advancing sustainable and inclusive agriculture across Southern Africa. Solidaridad Southern Africa has continued to champion farmer-centric solutions, leveraging digital tools, strategic partnerships, and innovative models to create meaningful impact in the lives of smallholder farmers.

From driving financial inclusion in the cotton sector through digital payments to strengthening value chains for cotton, soy, tea, livestock, leather, and horticulture, our initiatives have been transformative. In this inaugural issue of our REC Impact magazine, we showcase the resilience of the farmers, the dedication of our partners, and the innovative spirit that drives our work.



Above all, we extend our sincere thanks to our funding partners, including, among others, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (now known as the Gates Foundation), The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, The HEINEKEN Africa Foundation, the European Union through SADC, the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa, the AFR100 Initiative, the German Postcode Lottery, Schmitz Stiftungen, Milkywire, Crossroads International, and ADVZ Mozambique for enabling us to deliver impact that matters.

As we look ahead, our commitment remains unwavering: to empower farmers and commodity sectors to advocate for sustainable practices, and build economies that work for all. Together, we are making progress towards a future where prosperity and sustainability go hand in hand.

Regards,

Humphrey Nxumalo

EDITORIAL

It is written...

Author: Talentus Mthunzi, REC Southern Africa, Head of Programme Quality and Impact



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Success stories are more than just narratives; they are testaments to the resilience, determination, and transformation of the communities we serve. At Solidaridad Southern Africa, we believe in the power of storytelling as a catalyst for change.

This magazine captures the impact of our work across Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi, showcasing the tangible outcomes of our interventions and the lives that have been changed.



We are proud to present these stories, knowing they inspire action, influence policy, and ignite hope.

Each article in this publication reflects a journey of growth, farmers breaking barriers, communities embracing sustainable agriculture, and partners collaborating to drive systemic change. We are proud to present these stories, knowing that they inspire action, influence policy, and ignite hope for a more sustainable future.

As you read through the pages, we invite you to join us in celebrating these successes, learning from the experiences shared, and committing to continued collaboration in shaping a resilient and inclusive agricultural sector. Thank you for being part of this journey.

Sincerely,

Talentus Mthunzi





AFRICAN-AGRI

Data revolution for transformation

Author: Candice Kroutz-Kabongo, Regional Digital Innovations Lead



DIGITAL INNOVATION BLURP

The future of Africa's agricultural sector hinges on its ability to leverage data for innovation, efficiency, and resilience. Across the continent, smallholder farmers, who produce 70-80% of the region's food, face mounting challenges.

From climate change which includes, but is not limited to, increased frequency of extreme weather events, soil degradation, loss of biodiversity and changing ecosystems; to volatile market dynamics including limited market options and very little bargaining power.

In response, digital tools and data-driven solutions have emerged as powerful catalysts for agricultural transformation. However, a critical roadblock threatens to undermine this potential: the adoption of Western-style data ownership models that prioritize individual control over collective benefit.



If African governments fail to implement a collective consent approach to data governance, one that recognizes the unique realities of African agriculture, then the promise of an open data ecosystem will remain out of reach.

Unlike in Western economies, where digital literacy and widespread connectivity enable individuals to actively manage their personal data, Africa's digital divide presents a starkly different reality.

Many farmers operate in low-connectivity regions, with limited access to digital platforms or the technical know-how to navigate complex data policies. Enforcing individual consent-based models in this context risks excluding the very people who should be the primary beneficiaries of agricultural data innovations.

Instead, Africa must embrace a governance model that enables farmer cooperatives, local institutions, and trusted intermediaries to collectively manage data access and use in a way that aligns with the continent's socio-economic realities, leveraging social assets that fuel collective gain within the smallholder farmer sector. This can include various forms of social capital, networks, and shared resources that enable farmers to improve productivity, resilience, and market access.



DATA REVOLUTION CONTINUED...

The urgency of this shift cannot be overstated. With climate change accelerating risks to food security and market imbalances keeping smallholders at a disadvantage, an open data ecosystem, rooted in collective governance, can unlock efficiency gains, drive innovation, and ensure that smallholder farmers are players in this digital ecosystem. It is imperative that they get to define their collective interest and retain control over how data serves their interests.

If Africa is to harness the power of data for agricultural transformation, its governments must craft policies that are context-sensitive, inclusive, and built on shared ownership rather than isolated individualism.

THE POTENTIAL OF AN OPEN DATA ECOSYSTEM

An open data ecosystem has the power to revolutionize Africa's agricultural sector by addressing systemic inefficiencies that currently undermine farmer support initiatives.

At present, farmer-facing organizations, ranging from government extension services to NGOs and agribusinesses, operate in silos, each gathering and managing data independently. This fragmentation leads to duplication, inefficiency, and suboptimal decision-making, ultimately failing to deliver the impact that farmers need.



One glaring inefficiency is the repetitive process of farmer registration. Many smallholder farmers are required to provide their personal and farm-related information multiple times to different organizations, each maintaining its own separate records.

Not only is this an administrative burden on farmers, but it also results in inconsistent and incomplete datasets that fail to capture a farmer's full history of engagement with support programmes. Without a centralized and shared data infrastructure, organizations lack visibility into past interventions, making it difficult to tailor support effectively.

This lack of coordination extends to agricultural training and extension services, where competing organizations often deliver conflicting advice. Farmers may receive contradictory recommendations on soil management, pest control, or crop selection, leading to confusion and poor adoption of best practices.

A well-integrated data system would enable farmer support organizations to align their messaging, ensuring consistency and maximizing the effectiveness of interventions. Moreover, historical data on past interventions could inform which strategies work best in different contexts, allowing for more evidence-based decision-making.

An open data ecosystem has the power to revolutionize Africa's agricultural sector by addressing systemic inefficiencies.

Another critical challenge is the cost of data collection. Gathering, verifying, and maintaining farmer data is an expensive process, and given the continually shrinking funding budgets, farmer support organizations must find more cost-effective and collaborative ways to manage data.

Rather than duplicating efforts, organizations can pool resources and share data, reducing the financial burden while increasing the reach and impact of agricultural programmes. A shared data ecosystem would allow different stakeholders (governments, NGOs, and the private sector) to leverage existing information, eliminating redundancy and directing funds towards higher-impact initiatives.



EMPOWERING FARMERS THROUGH OPEN DATA

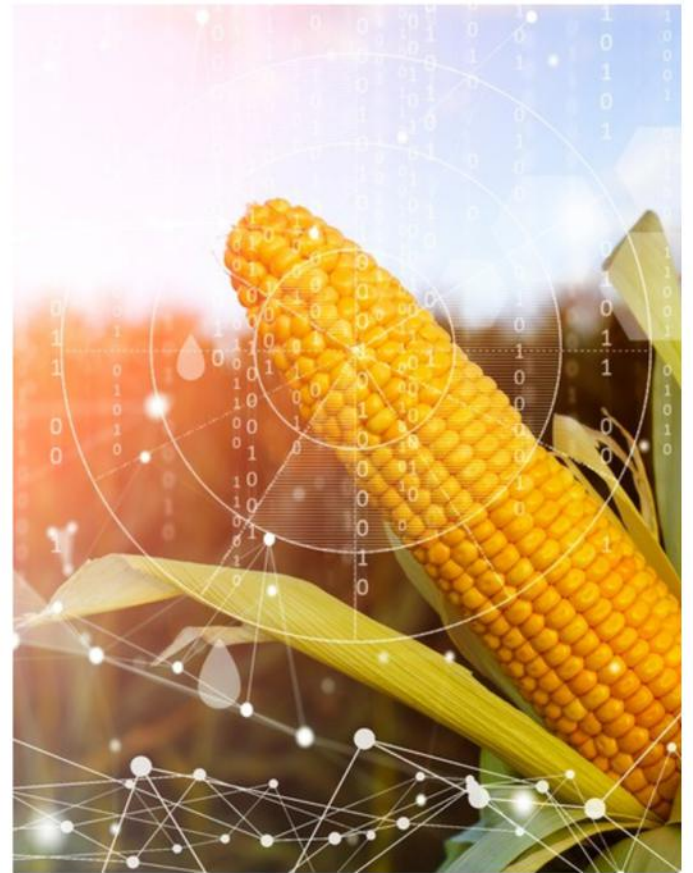
While the benefits of an open data system extend to organizations, farmers stand to gain the most from a more coordinated and transparent agricultural data ecosystem. Currently, many smallholder farmers have little access to data that could help them make better farming and market decisions.

Under a collective data governance model, farmers - either individually or through cooperatives - could access insights on market prices, climate trends, and best agricultural practices, enabling them to make informed choices about their crops, inputs, and selling strategies.

Moreover, open data could unlock new services tailored specifically to farmers' needs. Fintech companies could use aggregated farming data to develop credit scoring models, making it easier for smallholders to access loans and insurance.

Precision agriculture startups could design affordable advisory tools that use real-time data to optimize planting schedules and resource use. Rather than being passive recipients of fragmented interventions, farmers could become active participants in a digital agricultural ecosystem that works for them.

A shared data infrastructure would also enhance farmers' bargaining power. With greater transparency in pricing, supply chains, and demand trends, smallholders would be less vulnerable to market exploitation and would have stronger leverage in negotiations with buyers and input suppliers. Additionally, cooperatives and farmer groups could use data to advocate for better government policies, resource allocation, and infrastructure investments that directly impact their livelihoods.



A COLLECTIVE DATA GOVERNANCE MODEL

Beyond streamlining existing support mechanisms, an open data ecosystem could drive new waves of innovation and entrepreneurship. With better access to sector-wide insights, tech startups and agribusinesses could develop tailored digital solutions, from precision farming tools to financial services that cater to farmers' specific needs. Governments, too, would stand to benefit, using aggregated data for more accurate policy planning, resource allocation, and climate adaptation strategies.

By embracing a collective data governance model, Africa can create an agricultural landscape where data serves as a shared asset, unlocking efficiencies, fostering collaboration, and ultimately driving sustainable growth for both farmers and the organizations that support them. However, for this to succeed, farmers must be at the center of the data revolution to ensure that digital tools, platforms, and policies are built to empower them first and foremost.

A shared data infrastructure would also enhance farmers' bargaining power.



FROM CONCEPTS TO PRACTICE

How digital solutions are revolutionizing farming

Author: Lydia Banda, Regional Operations Manager, Kvuno



WEALTH TO THE FARMERS, NOW!

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

This African proverb rings true for smallholder farmers across Southern Africa. Agriculture remains a key driver of economic growth, yet many farmers continue to struggle with access to finance, technology, and markets.

At Kvuno, we believe that the future of farming lies in digital innovation and strategic partnerships. By integrating mobile-based services, soil-testing technologies, and input loan schemes, we are shifting farmers from subsistence to prosperity.

Our collaboration with Solidaridad has been instrumental in scaling these solutions. Through data-driven decision-making and digital registration systems, we have connected over 50,723 farmers in Malawi alone to financial services and markets.



The introduction of unique farmer identity cards has streamlined transactions, eliminated inefficiencies, and improved access to much-needed agricultural inputs. By adopting technology, we are closing the gap between farmers and the resources they need to thrive, ensuring that no farmer is left behind in the digital revolution.

Technology is not a silver bullet, but it is a powerful equalizer. Across our programmes, we have seen how digital tools enable farmers to make informed decisions, choosing the right crops, securing better prices, and accessing weather data for climate-smart agriculture.

A farmer who once depended solely on intuition can now use precise data to maximize yields and profitability. The impact is undeniable: increased incomes, improved food security, and a growing generation of agripreneurs who see farming as a business rather than a last resort.

As we move forward, the challenge is not just in developing these solutions but in ensuring they reach every farmer who needs them. The digital divide remains a significant hurdle, particularly in remote areas where connectivity is limited.

Our vision is to create a future where every smallholder farmer in Africa is connected to the tools, knowledge, and financial support necessary to build sustainable wealth. By working together, we can turn agriculture into a pathway to prosperity for millions.



DATA FOR IMPACT

Making data work for farmers

Author: Garikai Zinumwe, Impact Assessment and Data Expert



[SOIL] KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

"*Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.*" This African proverb captures the essence of why research must be actionable.

Data is a powerful tool, yet in the agricultural sector, it is often underutilized. Research is conducted, reports are written, but too often, the findings do not translate into real-world impact for smallholder farmers.

At Solidaridad, we are changing this narrative by ensuring that our research directly informs farmer training programmes, government policies, and sustainable business models. One of the most impactful areas of our research has been in soil health and climate resilience. Studies show that over 65% of African soils are degraded, leading to declining yields and farmer incomes.

By analyzing soil health data, we have been able to provide farmers with tailored soil management solutions, increasing their productivity by up to 30%. Additionally, our studies on market dynamics have shaped interventions that connect farmers to profitable value chains, ensuring that they earn fair prices for their produce.

By analyzing soil health data, we have been able to provide farmers with tailored soil management solutions.





DATA THAT ANSWERS THE CRY OF FARMERS

Research must go beyond academic journals; it must be accessible, practical, and farmer-centric. That is why we are investing in participatory research methods, where farmers are not just subjects of study but co-creators of solutions.

By combining indigenous knowledge with scientific insights, we develop strategies that are both culturally relevant and scientifically sound. This approach is bridging the gap between research institutions and farming communities, making knowledge a tool for empowerment rather than an abstract concept.

Moving forward, our goal is to ensure that every piece of data collected is not just stored in reports but actively used to drive transformation in the agricultural sector.

Policymakers, agribusinesses, and financial institutions must harness data to design more inclusive and impactful programmes. By prioritizing actionable insights, we are making research work for those who need it most (our farmers). When farmers thrive, economies grow, and food systems become more resilient.



By prioritizing actionable insights, we are making research work for farmers.



EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

Helps African smallholder farmers fight soybean rust



FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED

A new partnership between Solidaridad, Kvuno, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), and the Soybean Innovation Lab is bringing hope to smallholder farmers in Southern Africa. The goal is to tackle one of the most serious challenges they face: soybean rust, a disease that can destroy their crops.

As the climate changes, the risk of soybean rust, a destructive fungal disease, is quickly spreading. This disease threatens the food security for many farmers. To help farmers manage the disease, we are promoting an Early Warning System (EWS) to notify farmers in real-time about potential rust outbreaks and provide advice on how to protect their crops.

"Our mission is to create sustainable supply chains that are not only prosperous but also in harmony with nature and inclusive of all stakeholders. By prioritizing farmers and workers, we ensure that every step in the supply chain is accountable and drives positive impact from the ground up.

"As we empower farmers with real-time data and tools to combat diseases like soybean rust, we're strengthening the resilience of smallholder farmers across Southern Africa. This Early Warning System is a crucial step towards sustainable farming practices that protect both livelihoods and food security in our region," says Shungu Kanyemba, former Managing Director, Solidaridad Southern Africa.

WHAT IS SOYBEAN RUST?

Soybean rust is a disease caused by a fungus that can reduce crop yields by up to 80% if it is not controlled. Smallholder farmers, who often rely on just one or two crops for their livelihood, are particularly at risk. EWS will allow farmers to detect the disease early, giving them time to act before it spreads.

"We encourage smallholder farmers across Southern Africa to adopt the Early Warning System. This system, developed by IITA and the Soybean Innovation Lab with support from Kvuno and Solidaridad Southern Africa, uses special *sentinel plots*, which are in essence small areas of land that are monitored closely to detect signs of rust early.



ONE STEP FOR SOYBEAN FARMERS

"When rust is detected, farmers receive alerts on their mobile phones through a simple app," said Dr Harun Murithi, Crop Health Specialist at IITA and Soybean Innovation Lab.

LET'S ADD LEADING EXPERTS TO THE MIX

The EWS works by planting soybeans in a small plot a few weeks before the main crops. When rust is detected in the small plot, farmers receive alerts and can take action, such as applying fungicides, to protect their main crops before it's too late.

"As we expand the use of this Early Warning System, it is essential that farmers receive timely alerts. This system is changing how we fight soybean rust, and we look forward to seeing how it will help farmers across the region," added Dr Murithi.

As part of this initiative, sentinel plots have been set-up in key farming regions in Malawi, Zambia, and Mozambique. These plots are monitored closely to detect rust outbreaks, providing farmers with early warnings so they can protect their crops. This system is a major step forward in managing soybean rust and could soon be expanded to other countries in Southern Africa.



PROTECTING SOUTHERN AFRICAN SOYBEAN FARMERS

By using digital tools and sending timely alerts, the EWS is helping farmers take control of rust management and improve their crop yields, securing food for their families and communities.

We invite smallholder farmers to participate in this EWS and take advantage of the real-time alerts to protect their crops. Agricultural organizations are also encouraged to support this initiative, helping us reach more farmers and protect more crops across the region.

ABOUT IITA & THE SOYBEAN INNOVATION LAB

IITA has been working in Africa since 1967 to help farmers grow more food and improve their livelihoods. With decades of experience in farming and research, IITA is working closely with farmers to bring new tools like EWS to Southern Africa.

Similarly, the Soybean Innovation Lab works to improve food security and nutrition by offering proven solutions, tools, and technologies that help farmers produce soybeans profitably across Sub-Saharan Africa.

By using digital tools and sending timely alerts, the Early Warning System is helping farmers take control of rust management.



SPEAKING UP

Solidaridad Southern Africa called for robust digital innovations at AGRF 2024



LEARNING THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

Solidaridad Southern Africa participated at the Africa Food Systems Forum (AGRF) 2024, which took place in Kigali, Rwanda from 4-6 September 2024. During this prestigious event, Solidaridad used the opportunity to shed light on *Building Resilience in Agri-system Investments* as a means of exploring the transformative role of youth-led digital solutions in Southern Africa's agricultural landscape.

"It is time to unpack how bundled services, such as soil testing, weather data, insurance, and financial products, delivered through digital platforms, are improving access to essential services for smallholder farmers. This model provides a scalable and efficient approach to strengthening agricultural systems, making these services more affordable and accessible. Solidaridad aims to demonstrate the potential of digital platforms to revolutionize agriculture across Africa," said Shungu Kanyemba, former Managing Director for Solidaridad Southern Africa, while speaking to media at the Kigali International Convention Centre in Rwanda, to emphasize the importance of digital solutions in fostering agricultural resilience.

According to Kanyemba, Solidaridad believes that the future of African agriculture lies in leveraging innovative digital tools. He continued to mention that the mission is to empower smallholder farmers with the resources and services they need to enhance their productivity and incomes while ensuring that these solutions are sustainable and inclusive. He stated that by prioritizing youth and women, it is possible to accelerate progress toward a food-secure future.





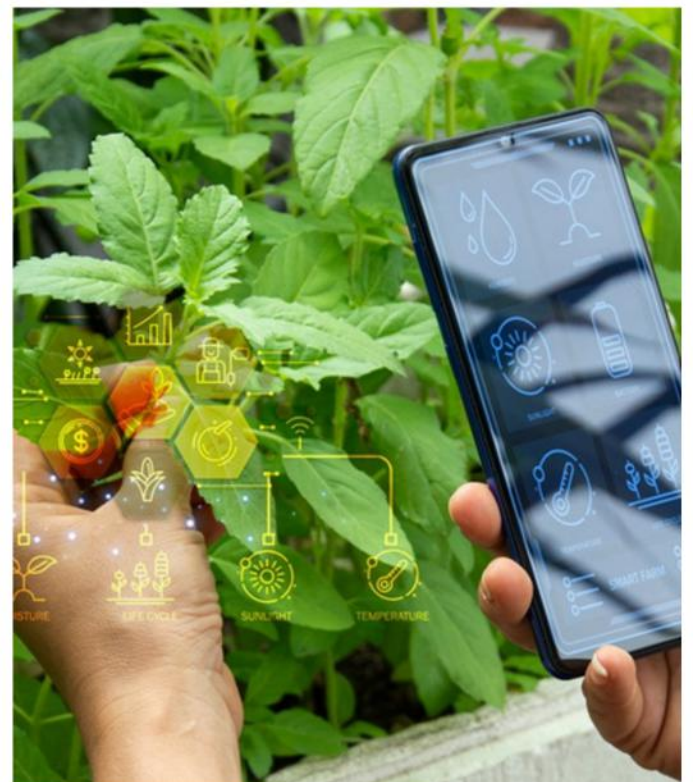
NOTHING BEATS THE POWER OF INNOVATION

The message shared by Solidaridad at AGRF 2024 was on the power of digital innovations in enhancing agricultural service provision for smallholder farmers. This was done through showcasing the success of Solidaridad's bundled services model in enhancing the productivity and resilience of smallholder farmers.

This approach aligns with Solidaridad's strategic pulse, which focuses on creating sustainable supply chains that are prosperous, inclusive, and in balance with nature. The bundled service model facilitates partnerships between farmers, businesses, and governments, fostering a supportive business ecosystem that drives progress in African agriculture.

Digital platforms deliver affordable services to farmers. The organization highlighted the scalability and efficiency of bundled services for farmers and service providers. Data-driven digital tools support better monitoring and decision-making.

"Digital tools not only streamline access to essential services but also enable better data collection and monitoring. This empowers African countries to track agricultural progress and make informed decisions for policy development. We are proud to contribute to innovations that are making a tangible difference in the lives of farmers across the continent," concluded Candice Krutz-Kabongo, Regional Digital Innovations Lead, Solidaridad.



Digital platforms delivered affordable services to farmers.





COP29

Strengthening agri-food systems

Author: Nonsikelelo Nkomo, Regional Business Development Manager



TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE

Solidaridad, in partnership with TrustAfrica, the World Resources Institute (WRI), and the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) Partnership, hosted a pivotal session at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, titled *Strengthening Agri-Food Systems: Opportunities to Fast Track NDC Implementation Goals*.

As climate change continues to threaten Africa's food systems, Solidaridad and its partners sought to showcase innovative, locally-led solutions that support small-scale farmers in building resilience.

Smallholder farmers produce over 70% of Africa's food supply, but remain some of the most vulnerable to climate impacts. A recent study by Solidaridad revealed that 75% of African farmers lack access to the resources needed to adapt effectively to climate change.

"Smallholder farmers are not just victims of climate change; they are central to its solutions. By providing tools, finance, and technology, we can transform their potential into scalable climate action," said Nonsikelelo Nkomo, Regional Business Development Manager, Solidaridad.

The session spotlighted strategies to unlock climate finance, transfer agri-technologies, and introduce and roll out digital tools to accelerate the achievement of NDCs. Discussions also emphasized the critical role of women, youth, and marginalized communities in co-creating equitable and climate-resilient food systems.

"This session is a call to action. The future of agriculture in Southern Africa depends on building systems that are not only resilient but inclusive. Women and youth must be at the heart of this transformation," said Talentus Mthunzi, REC Southern Africa, Head of Programme Quality and Impact, Solidaridad.

SPEAKERS INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:

- Beatrice Makwenda, Programme Lead, Southern Africa, TrustAfrica
- Denis Jean Sonwa, Research, Data, and Impact Director, Africa, WRI
- Sweeny Binsari, Regional Climate Change Lead, Solidaridad East & Central Africa
- Nonsikelelo Nkomo, Regional Business Development Manager, Solidaridad Southern Africa



INNOVATING TO EMPOWER AFRICAN FARMERS

Highlighting the importance of linking local solutions with global goals, Sweeny Binsarin said: "Innovations like climate adaptation finance and carbon credit systems can incentivize and unlock transformative opportunities for smallholder farmers. These tools not only empower communities but also accelerate global climate targets."

This conversation was particularly relevant for Africa, where agriculture remains a cornerstone of livelihoods and economies. By fostering collaboration and innovation, the continent can transform its agri-food systems into resilient engines of growth that contribute meaningfully to global climate goals. Solidaridad and its partners drive action for inclusive, sustainable, and climate-resilient agriculture in Africa.

Smallholder farmers are not just victims of climate change; they are central to its solutions.



SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE

Telling African impact stories, by African for Africans

Author: Phindiwe Nkosi-Hlase, Regional Public Relations and Communications Specialist



COMMUNICATIONS CORNER

For too long, African agricultural success stories have been framed through an external lens, often missing the authenticity and lived experiences of the very people driving transformation.

As the African proverb goes, *"until the lion learns to write, every story will glorify the hunter."* At Solidaridad, we are committed to amplifying Southern African voices with impact storytelling and lesson harvesting, ensuring that the narratives shaping the future of agriculture are told by those who live them.

When stories are told by Africans, for Africans, they carry a depth of understanding that resonates beyond statistics and policy briefs. By capturing firsthand accounts from farmers, agripreneurs, and rural communities, we ensure that their successes and challenges are accurately represented.

In 2024, Solidaridad Southern Africa achieved over 100 media mentions, with a total reach of 39.7 million people.



This is not just about storytelling; it is about advocacy. A well-told farmer's journey from struggle to success has the power to inspire change, influence policy, and attract investment that supports African-led agricultural transformation.

The digital revolution has created new opportunities for African storytelling. Through videos, podcasts, social media, and documentary features, we are making sure that these impact stories reach wider audiences of farmers, investors, and policymakers alike.

The rise of digital platforms means that a farmer in Zambia can inspire another in Malawi, and a young agripreneur in South Africa can share insights with a cooperative in Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

In 2024, Solidaridad Southern Africa achieved over 100 media mentions across print, digital, TV, and radio, with a total reach of 39.7 million people, — a staggering 11242% increase from the previous reporting period (Meltwater Media Tracker).

Media houses, development organizations, and agribusinesses must invest in African voices, ensuring that the people shaping the continent's food systems are also shaping the conversations around them. That is because when Africa tells its own stories, it not only documents its progress, but also paves the way for an even brighter future.



MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

Journalism and agri-transformation

Authors: Phindiwe Nkosi-Hlase and Thato Mpshe, Communications Department



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

The role of media in agricultural development cannot be overstated. In Southern Africa, journalists have become crucial partners in bridging the gap between farming communities and policymakers. "A single conversation across the table with a wise man is better than ten years of study," says an African proverb. Accordingly, media plays the role of facilitating crucial conversations, ensuring that knowledge flows where it is most needed.

Through strong collaborations with predominantly regional national broadcasters, community radio stations, and local media across Southern Africa, we've brought critical issues, from climate adaptation to farmer success stories, into the spotlight. In 2024, Solidaridad Southern Africa reached nearly 40 million people across radio, TV, digital, and print platforms (Meltwater Media Tracker).





TELLING STORIES THAT ARE SO MUCH MORE

These partnerships were instrumental in telling stories that moved the needle. For example, Solidaridad's digital payment pilot in Malawi received national broadcast coverage and led to increased interest from financial institutions in rural fintech. The story of Mozambican women winning gold at the Africa Specialty Tea Expo made international headlines, opening market opportunities for the tea cooperative.

In South Africa, the story of resilient young agripreneurs in an environment plagued by high youth unemployment was shared by YOU Fm, Bizcommunity and Top Africa News to inspire hope. Meanwhile, Solidaridad's biochar and livestock management work in Zambia, was featured by Engineering News, Kilimo News and Zodiak TV, drawing praise for linking climate resilience to rural livelihoods.

Journalism has the power to turn statistics into stories, policies into people-driven movements, and challenges into action plans. When a smallholder farmer's struggles are broadcast on national television, it puts pressure on policymakers to act.

When the success of a youth-led agribusiness is featured in a leading newspaper, it inspires others to follow suit. The media, therefore, is not just a reporting tool; it is a driver of change.

NEVER SIDELINE THE POWER OF A STORY...

By continuing to work with the media in rural fields, trenches, and boardrooms, we ensure that the voices of farmers are heard at the highest levels, influencing decisions that shape the future of sustainable agriculture in the region.

Our goal is to strengthen these collaborations further. By investing in journalist training, building newsroom partnerships, and ensuring that agricultural journalism is not just reactive but proactive, we are doing our bit to shape the food systems narrative across Southern Africa.

In 2024, Solidaridad Southern Africa reached nearly 40 million people.



MOZAMBIQUE:

Country Spotlight

Author: Francisco Nhanale, Country Manager



EXEC COUNTRY FOREWORD

Mozambique's story is one of transformation, from subsistence farming to market access, from forgotten tea fields to award-winning exports. Solidaridad's projects across Manica, Boane, and Gurué have revitalized the cotton, horticulture, peri peri, and specialty tea sectors.

As part of these efforts, we have registered 11,337 farmers, connecting them to training, markets, and sustainable farming practices that are driving meaningful change in rural communities. The Promoting Regenerative Agriculture for Sustainable Livelihoods (PRASL) project alone supports over 4,000 farmers in adopting regenerative agriculture, with a strong emphasis on women and youth.

We have registered 11,337 farmers, connecting them to training, markets, and sustainable farming practices.

Smallholder farmers in Mossurize are now exporting award-winning specialty teas, while others are boosting income through vegetable and peri peri production. With support from funding partners such as Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The HEINEKEN Africa Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (now known as the Gates Foundation), and ADVZ Mozambique, our work in Mozambique demonstrates the value of local-global collaborations.

Mozambique speaks to the region by showing how smallholders, when equipped with the right skills, market access, and technical support, can compete on global platforms. The impact is clear; 60% average income increases in peri peri value chains, 25% adoption rates of regenerative practices, and growing digital inclusion. This is agriculture as a driver of dignity, sustainability, and shared prosperity.

Sincerely,

Francisco Nhanale





PRASL BASELINE STUDY

Factsheet: Did you know?

Author: Garikai Zinumwe, Impact Assessment and Data Expert



SPUDDING LIKE POTATOES...

Promoting Regenerative Agriculture for Sustainable Livelihoods (PRASL) is a project funded by The HEINEKEN Africa Foundation that aims to enhance climate change resilience and improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, with a focus on adopting regenerative agriculture practices to ensure long-term sustainability and productivity. The project specifically targets farmers in Boane District, Mozambique, with a strong emphasis on gender equality and youth empowerment.

As part of our project inception activities, we carried out a baseline assessment to establish a clear picture of existing conditions and identify areas where our interventions could make the most impact. The findings offer valuable insights that are shaping our strategies going forward.





TEST YOUR KNOW WITH THESE *DID YOU KNOW?*

Below are some highlights from the baseline that shed light on the realities on the ground:

- **Smallholder Farmers' Climate Change Resilience:** Did you know that only 17% of households in the Boane District are classified as climate-resilient? This resilience is evaluated using the *3As model*, which measures anticipatory, absorptive, and adaptive capacities.
- **Low Food Security Rates:** About 89% of farmers in the Boane District reported eating less than they thought they should due to a lack of resources. This indicates the widespread issue of food insecurity, especially among female-headed households.
- **Gender Disparities in Food Security:** Women in the Boane District face greater challenges in food security, with only 9% of female farmers considered food secure, compared to 25% of male farmers.
- **Youth and Education:** Youth farmers (ages 18-34) are generally better educated, with 59% completing secondary school compared to lower educational attainment among older age groups.
- **Regenerative Agriculture Adoption:** Did you know that 25% of smallholder farmers have adopted three or more regenerative agriculture practices? These include techniques like integrated pest management and tree planting, though adoption rates are lower among women.
- **Challenges with Crop Yields:** Around 72% of farmers reported a decline in harvests, primarily due to drought, with women and youth being the most affected.



- **Limited Market Access for Women and Youth:** Women and youth face significant barriers in accessing markets. Only 5.5% of youth farmers sell produce to fair and sustainable markets, a stark contrast to 15.2% of male farmers.
- **Income Diversification:** Men are more likely to diversify their income sources, and on average, they earn more than women and youth farmers. This points to the economic inequalities within farming households.
- **Household Size and Farming Resources:** The average household size among farmers is six members, with some households having as many as 24 members. Larger households tend to own more farmland, though access to resources remains uneven.
- **Digital Access Among Farmers:** Did you know that digital tools are increasingly available to farmers in the Boane District? However, only a small proportion currently utilize these tools to access agricultural and financial services.



Men are more likely to diversify their income sources, and on average, they earn more than women and youth farmers.





BREWING MARKETS

Winning specialty tea in Mozambique

Author: Nozipho Ndlovu, Regional Programme Manager



BREWING WINNING ACTIONS...

Mussorize Small Tea Growers, based in Manica Province, Mozambique, have long relied on informal cross-border trade with Zimbabwe to sell their tea leaves. However, when Zimbabwe's economy collapsed, payments shifted from cash to barter exchange using essential goods like oil, sugar, and soap, rendering tea production unsustainable.

Many farmers abandoned their plantations, leaving the region's tea-growing potential untapped. Recognizing this challenge, Solidaridad stepped in with a strategic intervention to restore the tea industry and create sustainable livelihoods.

THE RISE OF RECLAIMING BACK SUSTAINABILITY

Through the RECLAIM Sustainability! (RS!) programme funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Solidaridad collaborated with Engineers Without Borders and Tumoi Teas Kenya to train farmers in Orthodox Tea production. This training was conducted to address the value addition gap for small tea growers in Mussorize, Mozambique, who are left depending on green leaf tea sales informally across the border in Zimbabwe and receiving in-kind payment for this tea.





SPILLING THE TEA TO TEACH WINNING WAYS

Following a feasibility assessment for a value addition facility which recommended a cottage specialty tea business model, the Small Tea Growers were then equipped with the skills to process and package green, black, and white tea independently, eliminating their reliance on Zimbabwe's factories. The farmers embraced this newfound knowledge, recognizing it as a viable path to financial stability and resilience. The initiative empowered them to view tea not just as a crop but as a business, enabling them to access new markets without the constraints of informal trade.

The impact of the intervention was immediate and profound. After training with Kenyan Specialist, Boaz Katah, the Mussorize Tea Growers participated in the African Specialty Tea Conference and Expo in Kenya, where they won first place in the Emerging Specialty Tea category for their hand-produced Silver Needle tea.

This international recognition opened doors to global markets in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia. This highlights the quality of Mozambique's organic tea, which is grown without chemical fertilizers or herbicides. "Winning first place with our Silver Needle tea is a testament to the quality and uniqueness of Mozambican tea," said Esitta Simbi, Tea Farmer. "We are excited to take this knowledge and inspiration back to Mossurize and explore ways to enhance our tea production and market reach," added Simbi.

Despite this success, challenges remain. Many farmers had already abandoned or uprooted their tea plantations before the project's intervention, and rebuilding the industry requires continued advocacy, marketing, and investment. Solidaridad's RS! programme is addressing these gaps by strengthening smallholder tea grower associations, advocating for inclusive business models, and facilitating connections with global trade platforms.



"The challenges farmers face include currency issues, unfavorable prices, and inconvenient payment terms, which have led many farmers to abandon their tea fields," said Nozipho Ndlovu, Regional Programme Manager for the Tea RECLAIM Sustainability! at Solidaridad Southern Africa.

Looking ahead, the programme aims to expand its impact beyond Mussorize, with plans to replicate similar initiatives in other regions of Mozambique and explore opportunities within Malawi's tea sector. By fostering market access, promoting sustainable practices, and integrating women and youth into the tea value chain, Solidaridad is positioning Mozambique's tea growers as key players in the specialty tea industry through the finalization of work on the development of an ongoing Mozambique National Tea Strategy.

The success of the Mussorize Small Tea Growers serves as a powerful reminder of the potential within Africa's tea sector and the importance of reclaiming sustainability for long-term economic growth.

Winning first place with our Silver Needle tea is a testament to the quality and uniqueness of Mozambican tea.





TEA TIES

From labour to ownership

Authors: Gilberto Nhantumbo, Project Manager and Piheter Supinho, Senior Projector Coordinator



A SECTOR AT A PIVOTAL CROSSROAD

The tea industry in Mozambique has long faced systemic challenges, most critically, a chronic labour shortage that has led to production delays, rising costs, and in some cases, the abandonment of plantations. Seasonal workers often lack stable income, while tea companies bear the weight of unsustainable operational models.

Yet, a new vision is taking root. In a groundbreaking partnership, Solidaridad and Sociedade Desenvolvimento da Zambézia (SDZ) are poised to launch a bold and inclusive business model that will transform tea workers from seasonal labourers into empowered producers with a stake in the value chain.



LAYING DOWN THE GROUNDWORK FOR CHANGE

At the heart of this transformation is a proposed outgrower system, a model designed to integrate local communities into tea production through shared ownership and responsibility. The initiative, developed through continuous engagement between Solidaridad, SDZ, and district governments, will formally launch once a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is signed by all parties.

The MoU will formalize commitments around land access, roles and responsibilities, and market guarantees, setting a firm foundation for the model's rollout. Once implemented, 652 workers are expected to transition into independent tea producers.

Each will be allocated approximately 2.5 ha, totaling 1,500 ha under cultivation. These farmers will manage all aspects of production and sell directly to the SDZ factory under a fair and transparent pricing structure, with farmgate prices ranging from MZN 7.00 to MZN 12.00/kg, and a minimum price of MZN 4.00/kg for field purchases.





A MODEL BUILT ON SUSTAINABILITY

With average yield projections of 1,200 kg per hectare, this could translate to an annual income of MZN 36,000 per producer, marking a significant shift from wage dependency to income generation based on entrepreneurship. The outgrower system is not just an economic arrangement, it is a reimagining of how the tea sector can work for everyone involved.

The model aims to:

- Increase productivity through direct ownership and incentive structures
- Strengthen local economies by embedding value creation in communities
- Ensure business sustainability by lowering labour costs and securing raw material supply
- Promote fairness and inclusion by formally recognizing workers as producers

The pending MoU outlines a governance and accountability framework to ensure effective implementation, conflict resolution, and long-term viability of the initiative.



A SHARED VISION, READY FOR TAKE-OFF

Both SDZ and Solidaridad are fully prepared to implement the model. Trainings, systems, and technical support structures have already been designed to support farmers as they transition into ownership roles.

“This is not just a policy shift, but a new era for tea farming in Mozambique,” says Gilberto Nhantumbo, Project Manager (Mozambique), Solidaridad. “We are ready to activate this model the moment the MoU is signed. It’s time to build a tea sector that benefits all, leaf by leaf, hectare by hectare.”

This upcoming transformation holds immense promise: a fairer, more resilient tea economy where producers have agency, companies remain competitive, and rural livelihoods are strengthened.

Mozambique’s tea sector may soon become a model of shared prosperity, one that demonstrates the power of partnerships, inclusive design, and a vision for lasting change.

At the heart of this transformation is a proposed outgrower system, a model designed to integrate local communities into tea production through shared ownership and responsibility.





SIPPING RESILIENCE

Diversification boosts tea sector

Author: Pita Johane, Project Manager and Evlizy Neves, Acting Regional Head of Gender & Social Inclusion



A SECTOR IN NEED OF REVIVAL

For decades, Mozambique's tea sector, particularly in the districts of Gurúe (Zambézia) and Mossurize (Manica), has struggled with deep-rooted challenges. Aging plantations, low yields, weak market access, and fragmented stakeholder engagement have stifled growth. In Mossurize, the absence of local processing facilities has further excluded smallholders from meaningful participation in the tea economy.

Recognizing the need for transformation, Solidaridad launched the Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) Tea Project, a seven-year initiative (2023–2029) with funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aligned with Solidaridad's global strategy and complemented by the RECLAIM Sustainability! programme.

A STRATEGY ROOTED IN OPPORTUNITY

P2P's design addressed both the structural and systemic barriers facing the tea sector. Solidaridad registered 2,623 smallholder farmers and grouped them into training teams of 30 to strengthen learning and monitoring. In a landmark move, the project brokered a Memorandum of Understanding with Sociedade Desenvolvimento da Zambézia (SDZ), granting smallholders access to 500 hectares of underutilized tea estates. Encouragingly, an additional 400 hectares have been earmarked, pending farmer performance.

To boost yields, the high-performing PC168 tea variety capable of producing up to 5,000 kg per hectare was introduced from Malawi. A tea platform was also established to improve coordination and communication among industry stakeholders.

Yet, the full harvest potential of tea takes up to four years. To ensure farmers remained engaged and economically resilient during this waiting period, Solidaridad adopted a bold and practical strategy: income diversification.





FROM VEGETABLES TO VEHICLES OF CHANCE

A dedicated group of 51 farmers was supported to produce short-cycle vegetables: kale, cabbage, tomatoes, and lettuce, which mature in just three months. Seeds were provided, and farmers were trained in crop management and marketing.

The results were remarkable. Within a single season:

- Kale: 8,995 kg → €3,212.50
- Cabbage: 31,223 kg → €2,885.91
- Tomatoes: 5,281 kg → €2,263.29
- Lettuce: 3,125 kg → €669.64

A total income of €9,031.34 was generated and shared equally, with each of the 51 farmers receiving approximately €177.09.

This income not only bridged financial gaps but also sparked transformative personal stories across the community.

SEEDS OF IMPACT: STORIES OF CHANGE

One such story is that of Anifo Duarte, a young farmer who, inspired by project entrepreneurship training, saw the potential in his underused land. With technical support, he established a fish hatchery and is now raising over 1,000 fingerlings, laying the foundation for a new aquaculture business in the region.

Another one is that of Valéria Silvestre, a single mother of five, used her share of horticulture income to significantly improve her household's welfare. With her earnings, she enrolled all her children in school, turning agricultural support into a platform for education and dignity.

Meanwhile, Flávia Mbo Mutipo, a small roadside vendor, leveraged project trainings and diversification profits to expand her business from a street stall into a fully stocked convenience shop, redefining what rural entrepreneurship looks like for women.

With technical support, he established a fish hatchery and is now raising over 1,000 fingerlings...



LOOKING AHEAD: FROM RESILIENCE TO SCALE

While the project faced initial skepticism from SDZ and lacked infrastructure like greenhouses, consistent community engagement and quick income gains helped overcome these hurdles.

Looking to the future, the P2P project is considering:

- Introducing greenhouse technology to modernize seedling production for tea and vegetables.
- Establishing a revolving investment fund in collaboration with Kvuno, a social enterprise, to provide accessible capital for farmers.
- Scaling the national tea platform to expand domestic and international market access and improve quality standards.

WE ARE BREWING MORE THAN TEA

Through its integrated approach, combining access to land, modern tea varieties, income diversification, and inclusive capacity building, the P2P Tea project is not just cultivating tea. It is cultivating resilience, entrepreneurship, and equitable growth in Mozambique's rural communities.

From idle plantations to vibrant vegetable markets, from young aquapreneurs to empowered women entrepreneurs, this is a story of how tea and trust, can grow prosperity from the ground up.



REGENERATION, NOW!

Biochar doubles cotton yields for Mozambican farmers

Author: Gilberto Nhantumbo, Project Manager



FIGHTING BACK WITH BIOCHAR

In 2024, Solidaridad Southern Africa's bold vision for regenerative agriculture took root in Mozambique, demonstrating that climate-smart innovation, when paired with advocacy and local ownership, can transform the cotton sector and smallholder livelihoods. At the heart of this transformation is a simple, yet powerful soil enhancer: biochar.

FROM COTTON STALKS TO SOIL GOLD

Cotton farmers in Mozambique typically burn post-harvest stalks, losing valuable organic matter and adding to carbon emissions. Through the biochar programme, Solidaridad introduced a new approach: convert these residues into biochar and apply it to fields to improve soil fertility, water retention, and long-term productivity.

In 2024, 1,200 farmers in Moamba district, many of them women, were trained to produce and apply biochar using low-cost, scalable *con-pit methods*. The results were dramatic. Cotton yields increased from 350 kg/ha to 600 kg/ha - a 71% improvement in productivity and potential income.

TRAINING THAT EMPOWERS

Solidaridad's biochar trainings were more than technical sessions; they were community-building, rights-based education experiences. Farmers learned not only how to make and apply biochar, but why it matters for the future of farming in a changing climate.

This work is built on Solidaridad's broader Smart Agriculture Framework, which integrates:

- Soil diagnostics through digital tools,
- Climate-smart extension services,
- Gender-inclusive farmer mobilization, and
- Advocacy for recognition of regenerative inputs.

ADVOCACY FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Behind the scenes, Solidaridad has also advanced conversations with Mozambique's agriculture institutions on the formal recognition of biochar as a viable agricultural input. By connecting smallholder results to national climate priorities, Solidaridad is helping create a policy environment where regenerative practices can scale sustainably and equitably.



REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE, REAL RESULTS

This is more than a story about cotton. It's a story about restoring degraded soils, increasing farmer incomes, and reimagining what's possible when communities lead the way in solving climate and productivity challenges.

"Before biochar, I harvested only enough to get by. Now, my cotton plot feeds my family and funds my children's school fees," says Maria L, one of the early adopters in Moamba.

Cotton farmers in Mozambique typically burn post-harvest stalks, losing valuable organic matter.



LOOKING AHEAD, TOGETHER...

In 2025, Solidaridad plans to:

- Expand biochar training to an additional 1,500 cotton farmers, and
- Push for biochar integration into national climate-smart agriculture strategies.

With innovation in their hands and policy on their side, Mozambican cotton farmers are not just surviving, they're regenerating their land, restoring their yields, and reclaiming their future.





RAISING STANDARDS

Market-driven financing mechanisms

Author: Dioniso Novele, Project Manager



BURNING WITH FARMING HOPE

Solidaridad observed that farmers in Boane, Mozambique, were primarily engaged in subsistence farming. To shift towards a more market-oriented approach, Solidaridad launched the RECLAIM Sustainability! (RS!) Africa Foods project funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in partnership with Kvuno (a social enterprise) and Maxamba, Lda (a market off-taker).

This initiative aimed at promoting the adoption of MozBopa, a food safety voluntary standard, by empowering farmers through capacity building and providing them with access to inputs and output markets. The project also ensured daily technical assistance from Solidaridad and Kvuno, with additional fortnightly support from Maxamba, Lda, guiding farmers through the entire production process until harvesting, collection, and payment processing.

TACKLING THE ROOT CAUSES OF LOW YIELDS

To implement this transformation, Solidaridad collaborated with Maxamba, Lda and Kvuno to finance and support the *25 de Setembro* cooperative. Farmers received production inputs on credit, with the agreement that they would cultivate peri peri until it was collected and processed by Maxamba, Lda. Revenue from the processed product was used to repay the credit, enabling a sustainable financing cycle. This intervention provided farmers with the resources and knowledge needed to transition from subsistence to commercial farming, thereby improving their economic stability.





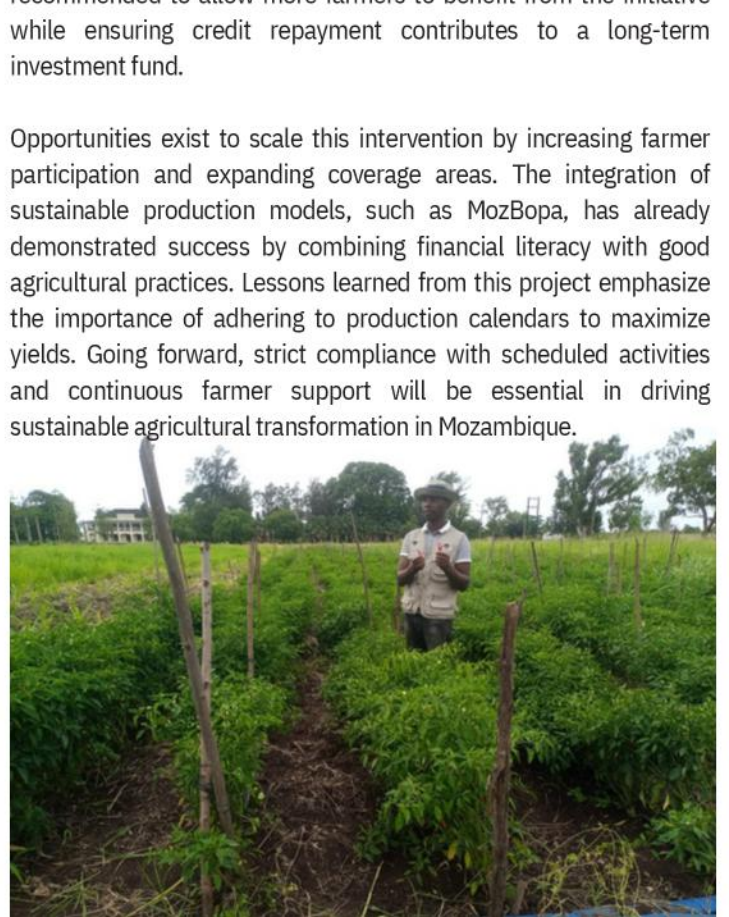
Contract farming arrangements with Maxamba, Lda led to a 60% increase in income from 1,005,000 to 1,608,000 MZN (about 13,354.59 Euro to 21,367.34 Euro).



The project has already yielded positive results. Farmers adopted better agricultural practices, recorded activities and expenses throughout the production cycle, and improved their financial management skills. Contract farming arrangements with Maxamba, Lda led to a 60% increase in income from 1,005,000 MZN (about 13,354.59 Euro to 21,367.34 Euro), driven by tailored production support and a reliable market. However, challenges such as excessive rainfall led to some crop losses, although many farmers still achieved good yields. This experience highlighted the need for climate resilience strategies in future interventions.

Stakeholders recognize the potential of this initiative in fostering self-sustainability among farmers. There is a growing interest in shifting from traditional practices to more structured, market-driven agriculture. Farmers believe that continued behavioral change and financial literacy training will be crucial in sustaining the project's impact. Additionally, a rotating provision of production kits is recommended to allow more farmers to benefit from the initiative while ensuring credit repayment contributes to a long-term investment fund.

Opportunities exist to scale this intervention by increasing farmer participation and expanding coverage areas. The integration of sustainable production models, such as MozBopa, has already demonstrated success by combining financial literacy with good agricultural practices. Lessons learned from this project emphasize the importance of adhering to production calendars to maximize yields. Going forward, strict compliance with scheduled activities and continuous farmer support will be essential in driving sustainable agricultural transformation in Mozambique.





HOME GARDENS

Growing Food Security and Resilience

Author: Pita Johane, Project Manager



IT BEGINS WITH A SEED, AT HOME

In Mozambique's Mossurize and Vanduzi Districts, Solidaridad's Acting Now project is driving a quiet agricultural transformation. By equipping smallholder farmers with practical knowledge, quality agricultural inputs, and financial literacy, and linking them to markets, the initiative is addressing food and nutrition insecurity while improving household incomes and resilience.

FEEDBACK FROM MOSSURIZE DISTRICT

In Mossurize, farming was once marked by poor soil management, lack of quality seeds, and limited financial know-how. Many small-scale farmers struggled to produce enough food for their families, let alone generate income. That's beginning to change.

With the support of Acting Now funding by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, farmers received hands-on training in producing high-value crops, using certified seeds, applying the right fertilizers, managing pests, and understanding cost-benefit analysis. As a result, farmers like Mr. Mucora have significantly increased their productivity. "Before the trainings, we just planted without knowing what we were doing wrong," he says. "Now, I can sell my produce and have enough for my family's needs."

Mr. Mucora now grows tomatoes, cabbage, kale, corn, and onions, selling up to 2,000 cabbages every quarter and earning approximately 100,000 MZN (about 1,475 Euros). The income helps cover food security needs, household items, children's school fees, and he also reinvests into his garden.

Solidaridad also facilitated access to agro-dealers and introduced post-harvest improvements, including a new community granary. These changes have reduced food losses and ensured a more stable, nutritious food supply year-round.

FEEDBACK FROM VANDUZI DISTRICT

In Vanduzi District, farmers faced similar challenges of low yields, limited use of certified seeds, and poor knowledge of sustainable farming techniques. Solidaridad introduced demonstration plots and organized field days to show best practices in action. Farmers learned about soil testing, fertilizer use based on soil analysis, and effective pesticide application.

"Before the project, we didn't know how to use pesticides or when to apply fertilizers," says Ana Chikunda, a local farmer. "Now, we understand what to use, when, and why. It's like night and day."

Thanks to the adoption of improved practices, maize yields have increased from 1,000 to 1,500 kg/ha to between 5,200 and 8,000 kg/ha. Similarly, potato yields have grown from 4,000 to 5,000 kg/ha to an impressive 18,000 to 25,000 kg/ha. The favorable market prices go for around 15 MZN/kg for maize and up to 40 MZN/kg for potatoes, and have further increased incomes and encouraged farmers to continue using the new techniques.

Importantly, many Vanduzi farmers have begun independently purchasing inputs and consistently applying what they've learned. This shift is not only enhancing food security but also reducing the region's reliance on maize imports.





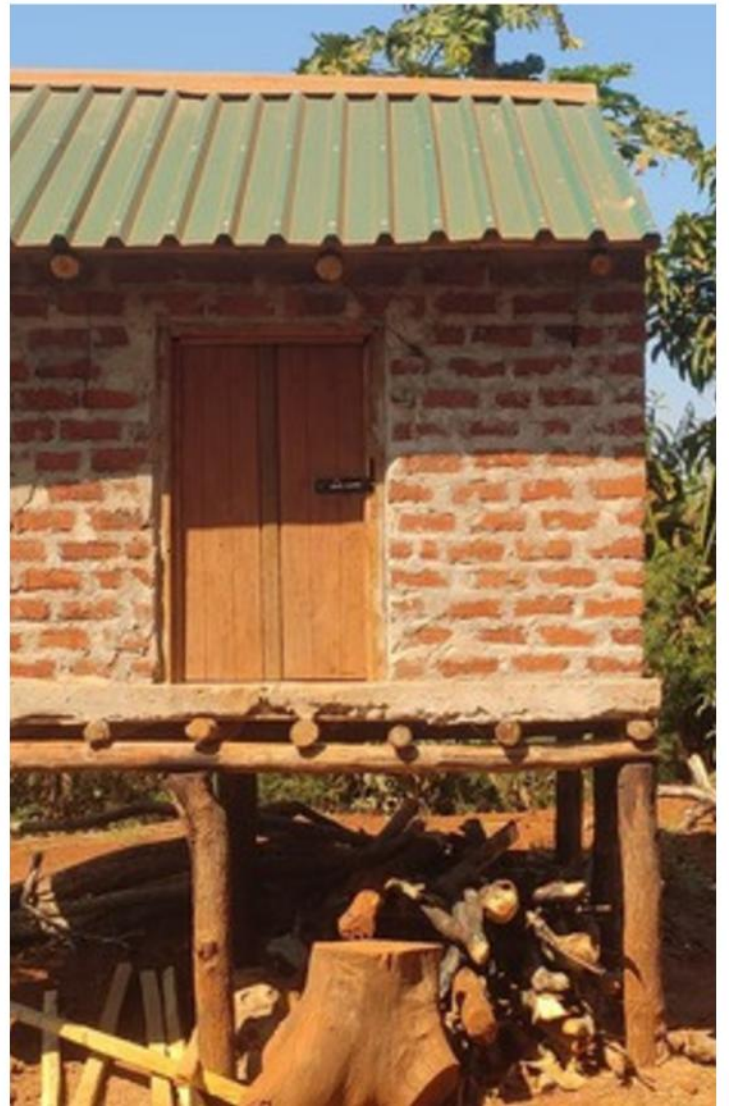
By equipping smallholder farmers with practical knowledge, quality agricultural inputs, and financial literacy, the initiative is addressing food and nutrition insecurity.



WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE...

Across Mossurize and Vanduzi, the Acting Now project is proving that food and nutrition security begins with empowered farmers. By improving agricultural practices, strengthening post-harvest systems, and promoting farming as a business, Solidaridad is helping rural communities build lasting resilience.

These are more than just home gardens, they are engines of nutrition, income, and opportunity. With continued support, they offer a sustainable path toward healthier families and more food-secure futures.



Helping African smallholder farmers fight Soybean rust now!

Published November 1, 2024

Share 5 Min Read



A new partnership between Solidaridad, Kvuno, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), and the Soybean Innovation Lab is bringing hope to smallholder farmers in Southern Africa. The goal is to tackle one of the most serious challenges they face: soybean rust, a disease that can destroy their crops.

SMALL TEA GROWERS FROM MOZAMBIQUE WIN FIRST PLACE AWARD AT INAUGURAL TEA CONFERENCE

Small tea growers from Mozambique have won first place in the Emerging Specialty Tea category at the African Specialty Tea Conference and Expo in Kenya. The meeting of tea producers from across Africa was an opportunity for small tea farmers to connect with global markets, and the award highlighted the potential of tea from Mozambique.



Celebrating the award-winning tea from Mozambique at the Inaugural African Specialty Tea Conference and Expo in Kenya.

The African Specialty Tea Conference and Expo, held in the coastal town of Mombasa, Mozambique, marked a significant milestone for the small tea producers of Mozambique, Mozambique, and provided them with a platform to showcase their specialty teas.

Mozambican Small Tea Growers Take First Place at the First African Specialty Tea Conference and Expo

By World Tea News
Jun 28, 2024 4:00pm

Share Mozambique African Specialty Tea Conference and Expo



Samuel Mwanuzi presenting the first place tea from the African Specialty Tea Conference and Expo.

The African Specialty Tea Conference and Expo, held last month in Nairobi County, Kenya, marked a significant milestone for the small tea growers of Mozambique, Mozambique. This inaugural event brought together tea producers across Africa, providing a platform to showcase specialty teas and explore global market opportunities.

RELATED

Inside the Tea Industry with Sharyn Johnston: The First-Ever African Tea Expo

Representing Mozambique at the conference were two farmers, Samuel Marante and Estita Simba. Their participation was made possible through the support of the RECLAIM Sustainability programme in



“Moçambique Precisa de Produzir 355 Mil Toneladas de Arroz Para Auto-Suficiência”- Governo

Agência de Notícias - Notícias de Notícias

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O País necessita de aumentar a produção de arroz para 355 mil toneladas com vista a alcançar a auto-suficiência e reduzir as importações, reforçando a segurança alimentar e nutricional, informou esta quinta-feira (25) o jornal Notícias.

O Ministério da Agricultura e Desenvolvimento Rural (MADER) visa a procura de financiamento para apoiar os pequenos agricultores dedicados à produção de arroz. A informação foi dada por Lídia Luciano, directora nacional de Apoio ao diálogo político multissetorial sobre economia agrícola na África Austral.

O nosso esforço é obter para a quantidade de arroz, consumo desta cultura tem estado a aumentar e a produção nesta, não é auto-suficiente, uma vez que



Mozambique's women in agriculture in combating global food waste crisis

By Zohra Syed | 2024-04-24 10:00 AM

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Women sorting food waste under the Ashing for Food project in Mozambique.

World Waste Day on 24 April 2024, Mozambique, in partnership with women in Gurue and Mussanze, recognizing their invaluable contributions to rural development in Southern Africa.

The heels of Mozambique's Women's Day which highlighted the pivotal role of



MALAWI:

Country Spotlight

Author: Given Phiri, Country Manager



EXEC COUNTRY FOREWORD

Malawi continues to lead on climate-smart agriculture and digital transformation. Solidaridad's work in Malawi focuses on enhancing value chains in cotton, soybean, tea, and red meat, supporting over 100,000 farmers through bundled services, digital registration, and early warning systems.

Agriculture is a vital part of Malawi's economy, accounting for 39% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing 64% of the workforce, while generating 83% of foreign exchange earnings and supplying 70% of raw materials to the manufacturing sector. Key achievements for 2024 include a pioneering digital payment pilot in the cotton sector, unlocking financial inclusion and transparency for hundreds of smallholder farmers. Dare I not forget the registration of all cotton farmers onto the Cotton Management System (COTMIS) digital platform.

We are pressing for the distribution of 140 metric tons of cotton seed to 21,000 farmers nationwide as part of the seed multiplication programme in collaboration with Kvuno, Masapa Ginners and the Malawi Cotton Council. Provision of tea seedlings to smallholder farmers through nurseries to enhance production and improve yields, Sentinel plots for soybean rust monitoring, in collaboration with IITA and Kvuno, are strengthening climate resilience and crop health. Our commitment to gender equality remains strong, with 60% women participation across core projects.

Solidaridad's work in Malawi focuses on supporting over 100,000 farmers through bundled services...

Malawi speaks to the region by demonstrating how innovation and inclusion can work hand in hand. From soybeans to cotton and tea, our seed multiplication initiatives aim to boost crop yields, increase farmers' incomes, and enhance their livelihoods. Our approach connects agriculture to livelihoods, nutrition, and empowerment.

As we continue to scale bundled digital services, our vision is to ensure that every farmer, especially women and youth, has access to the knowledge, tools, and markets they need to thrive. We extend our gratitude to our valued funding partners, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Gates Foundation for their unwavering support.

Sincerely,

Given Phiri



LEADERS MEET FARMERS

Solidaridad International Supervisory Board visits Malawi



SHOWCASING LOCAL IMPACT

Malawi proudly hosted the International Supervisory Board (ISB) of Solidaridad, marking a historic moment in Solidaridad's 5 years of operation in Malawi. Selected among over 40 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Malawi was recognized as a good example of our work in Southern Africa to transform supply chains into inclusive, resilient systems.

A GLOBAL NETWORK CONVERGED IN MALAWI

Solidaridad operates across continents to support small-scale farmers, workers, and miners while addressing global supply chain challenges. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Solidaridad implements on-the-ground projects to foster sustainability, while in Europe, North America, China, and Japan, it builds corporate and donor relationships to promote sustainable product uptake. The ISB visit in December 2024 reflected Malawi's growing significance in this expansive network.

"This visit underscores Malawi's role as a leader in sustainable agricultural practices. Through our impactful projects here, we have demonstrated that smallholder farmers are not just beneficiaries but key players in transforming global supply chains into equitable systems," said Shungu Kanyemba, former Managing Director of Solidaridad Southern Africa.

HIGHLIGHTING SOLIDARIDAD'S WORK IN MALAWI

Solidaridad's work in Malawi started with the transformative initiative called the Practice for Change (Pfc) Soybean Project, which empowered over 8,500 smallholder farmers with improved farming techniques. It is continuing with the RECLAIM Sustainability! (RS!) Tea Initiative which examines policies in the sector. There is also the Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) Cotton Project, a groundbreaking initiative that integrates financial services, seed multiplication, and market access for farmers.



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Training over 2,400 farmers in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) through the Pfc Soybean Project.
- Supporting the Cotton Sector to produce 160 tons of cotton seed which were distributed to 40,000 farmers.
- Establishing 15 demonstration plots under the P2P Cotton project to showcase sustainable cotton farming practices.
- Launching a digital payment system to reduce risks in the cotton sector, benefiting over 20,000 registered farmers.
- Giving over 80,000 tea seedlings to more than 10,000 tea farmers in Malawi.
- Supporting the development of occupational safety and health policies in the tea sector and policies that promote equitable gender practices.

Andre de Freitas, Executive Director of the Solidaridad Network, emphasized the strategic importance of Malawi's contributions: "Malawi has some strong examples of agricultural practice and work on sector transformation that are innovative, resilient and have a direct and positive impact on the lives of small-scale farmers. Some of the projects here have the potential to be scaled globally. This visit allows the International Supervisory Board to witness firsthand the specific features of Solidaridad's work in Southern Africa."



MALAWI'S MOMENT OF RECOGNITION

The selection of Malawi as the host for this visit highlighted its achievements in the Solidaridad Network, focused on:

- Promoting good practices among farmers and workers.
- Establishing supportive business systems to enhance productivity and income.
- Creating an enabling policy environment for sustainability.
- Encouraging increased market uptake of sustainable products.

"The work of Solidaridad in Malawi contains some good examples of what can be achieved through partnerships, innovation, and community-driven solutions. These projects are exemplary for our work regionally, ensuring that smallholder farmers remain at the heart of sustainable supply chains," concludes Humphrey Nxumalo, Solidaridad Southern Africa's Head of Programmes.



Through our impactful projects here, we have demonstrated that smallholder farmers are not just beneficiaries.





COTTON COMEBACK

Over 140 metric tons of cotton seed

Author: Greem Sichone, Project Manager



COTTON ROOTS, STRONGER FUTURES

Through the Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) programme, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Solidaridad and its partners have made a significant impact in Malawi by distributing 140 metric tons of cotton seed to over 21,000 farmers across all cotton-growing districts, covering 67% of the seed used in the 2024–2025 season.

The seed multiplication programme tackles a key challenge faced by smallholder cotton farmers; limited access to high-quality seeds. By providing improved seeds and crucial training, we help farmers boost productivity, increase income, and bridge the resource gap, ultimately fostering sustainable livelihoods in Malawi's cotton sector.

HOW THE MODEL WORKS: A JOINT SEED SYSTEM

At the heart of this initiative is a robust and collaborative Cotton Seed System Model designed to ensure seed security and sustainability. Led by Solidaridad as the main implementer, the model brings together a range of stakeholders including Kvuno, which profiles farmers and distributes inputs; Masapa Ginners, who process and return seed to farmers; and other ginners, who provide seed on credit and extension services. The Seed Services Unit (SSU) ensures seed quality through inspections and certification, while the Cotton Council of Malawi regulates industry standards. Farmer organizations such as the Cotton Farmers Association of Malawi mobilize and represent farmer interests, and the Ministry of Agriculture provides policy support and technical training.

This ecosystem is further strengthened through structured interventions which includes the selection of seed multipliers, provision of basic seed and inputs, field training, and market linkages. These interventions are designed to increase yields, streamline cotton sales, and build a sustainable seed system for Malawi's cotton sector.

BRIDGING THE GAP WITH VITAL RESOURCES

For five years, Malawian cotton farmers relied on Indian hybrid seeds, but at \$35/kg, they were costly and inaccessible to many smallholders. Solidaridad's stepped in and incorporated a locally anchored seed supply model under the P2P project to distribute 149 metric tons of cotton seed to over 28,000 farmers. This reduced the cost of seed from \$35/kg to \$5/kg.

This transformative intervention covered 67% of national seed use and translated into an estimated EUR 4 million in input savings for nearly 29,000 farmers.



This transformative intervention covered 67% of national seed use and translated into an estimated EUR 4 million in input savings for nearly 29,000 farmers. The model's significance lies not only in cost reduction, but in its contribution to sector autonomy by shifting control of critical inputs closer to farmer-led systems.



By supplying certified cotton seed we're empowering farmers to boost productivity and sustainably improve their livelihoods.



Smallholder farmers often can't afford quality cotton seed. "By supplying certified cotton seed we're empowering farmers to boost productivity and sustainably improve their livelihoods," says Green Sichone, Project Manager for Solidaridad (Malawi).

SUSTAINABLE FARMING THROUGH TRAINING

Solidaridad's support extends beyond cotton seed provision, investing in the sector's long-term viability through targeted training and resources that promote efficient crop management, enhanced productivity, and environmental stewardship.





MARKET ACCESS

Digital payments and COTMIS

Author: Candice Kroutz-Kabongo, Regional Digital Innovations Lead



OPENING UP MARKET ACCESS

In Malawi, Solidaridad is spearheading a digital transformation in the cotton sector by introducing innovative tools that empower farmers, enhance market access, and promote financial inclusion. Through the integration of e-payment systems and the rollout of the Cotton Transaction and Management Information System (COTMIS), Solidaridad is enabling smallholder cotton farmers to participate more fairly and securely in the value chain.

The cotton industry in Malawi has long relied on cash-based transactions, which exposed farmers to various risks including theft, delayed payments, and exploitative practices. To tackle these systemic challenges, Solidaridad, in partnership with the Malawi Cotton Council, launched a secure e-payment system and digitized data management platform. The initiative targets over 100,000 smallholder cotton farmers by 2027, aiming to improve transparency, ensure timely payments, and build trust across the cotton ecosystem.

The COTMIS model works through a carefully coordinated, multi-agent process at the point of cotton buying. It begins with a check-in by a Kvuono Agent, who issues a slip detailing any outstanding loan balances and the farmer's maximum allowable cotton volume. The farmer then proceeds to a Ginner Agent for weighing and pricing, followed by another Kvuono Agent who captures all transaction data, including photos of the slips, and synchronizes it in the system.

DIGITAL MEANS HELP THE COTTON INDUSTRY

A Cotton Farmers Association (COFA) Agent on site maintains a control sheet to verify that each transaction has passed through all necessary stages. Before final payment, twelve layers of checks are performed—verifying farmer identification, quantities, prices, signatures, and more. Once verified, payments are processed directly to the farmer's mobile wallet or bank account by the Cotton Council of Malawi.

The impact of this system is already clear. Farmers now receive their income securely and promptly, without fear of loss or manipulation. The separation of duties ensures ginner agents no longer control the payment process, reducing bias and improving negotiation power for farmers. Meanwhile, the Cotton Council is able to track real-time volumes and collect levies based on verifiable data—something previously impossible under a cash-based system. The inclusion of COFA ensures farmers are represented throughout, creating a feedback loop that reinforces accountability.





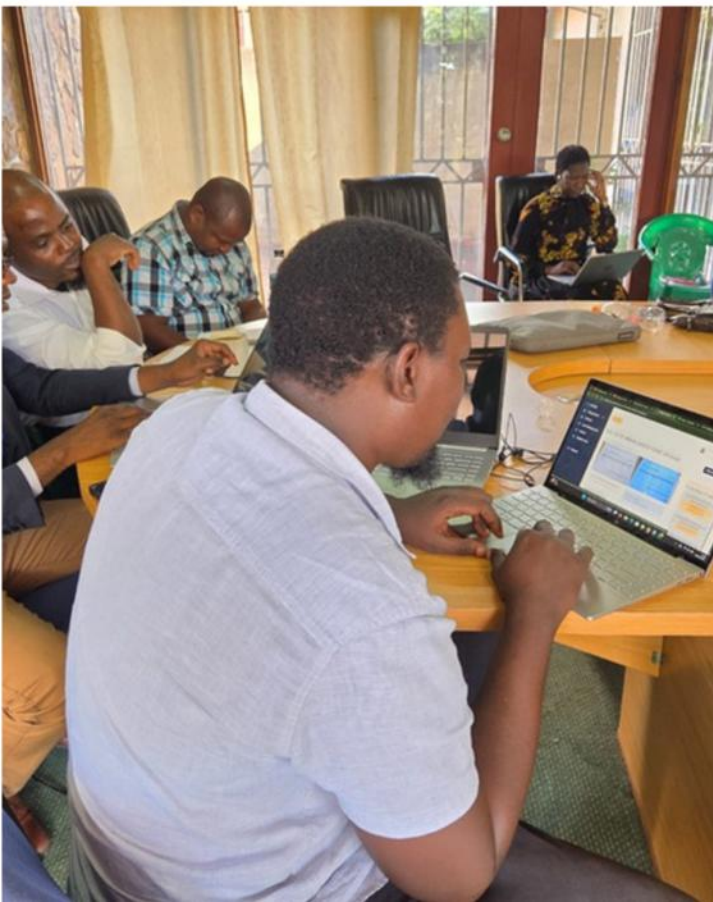
USING TECHNOLOGY TO UNLOCK POTENTIAL

For farmers, this transition to e-payments represents more than convenience; it's a pathway to inclusion and empowerment. With digital records and timely payments, they can plan their finances better, access other financial services, and build long-term economic resilience. The system has also attracted greater interest from youth, who view the digital model as more transparent and forward-looking than traditional cotton trading practices.

“Technology is the key to unlocking the full potential of Malawi’s agricultural sector,” says Given Phiri, Country Manager for Solidaridad in Malawi. “Through e-payments, we are ensuring that farmers receive their hard-earned income securely and efficiently, thereby fostering trust and economic inclusion.”

Echoing this sentiment, Humphrey Nxumalo, Head of Programmes for Solidaridad Southern Africa, adds: “We’re not just removing cash, we’re restoring dignity, transparency, and inclusion to the farmer. This is transforming how business is done in the cotton sector.”

As Solidaridad and its partners continue scaling the initiative, the model is poised to redefine how cotton is marketed in Malawi. With stronger data integrity, financial security, and inclusive participation, COTMIS is setting a new standard for digital transformation in agriculture, one that puts the farmer at the center of the solution.





AGROFORESTRY ARISE

Agroforestry and Conservation Agric

Author: Misozi Magaleta, Project Manager



AGROFORESTRY IS CHANGING THE GAME

Malawi's tea industry is undergoing a transformation as smallholder farmers adopt sustainable farming practices to combat climate change and boost profitability. With extreme weather events such as cyclones, droughts, and rising temperatures severely affecting tea yields, Solidaridad, through its Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) project funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is supporting farmers through agroforestry, conservation agriculture, and value addition.

By integrating trees into their farms, tea growers are enhancing soil conservation, improving biodiversity, and creating alternative income streams, thereby building long-term resilience in the sector.

"Malawi's tea industry has immense potential. Through technology and capacity-building, we are equipping farmers with the skills and market linkages they need to thrive in the global tea sector," emphasized Given Phiri, Country Manager (Malawi) at Solidaridad.

The P2P project has facilitated the co-creation of an agroforestry system developed in collaboration with farmers and local stakeholders, ensuring ownership and practical impact. So far, 300 smallholder farmers have planted more than 11,900 agroforestry species such as *Gliricidia sepium* to improve soil fertility, provide shade, and enhance carbon capture. These interventions not only improve the farmers' climate resilience but also promote more sustainable tea production across the region.

TREES ARE INCORPORATED INTO TEA FARMS

"The agroforestry system implementation has been a game-changer for smallholder farmers. By incorporating trees into their tea farms, they are protecting their crops, improving soil health, and securing a more sustainable future," said Misozi Magaleta, Project Manager, P2P Tea at Solidaridad.

As climate challenges intensify, the integration of agroforestry and conservation agriculture is proving essential to safeguarding Malawi's tea industry. Through innovative, farmer-led approaches supported by Solidaridad and its partners, smallholder farmers are not only adapting to climate change but also reshaping the future of tea farming, one resilient, green step at a time.

Malawi's tea industry has immense potential. Through technology and capacity-building, we are equipping farmers with the skills and market linkages.





SEEDS OF CHANGE

Over 80,000 tea seedlings for Malawi

Author: Misozi Magaleta, Project Manager



RAISING A CUP TO HOPE...

In a major step towards empowering smallholder farmers in Thyolo, Malawi, Solidaridad has provided over 80,000 tea seedlings to more than 1,000 farmers across two tea growers associations (Chizunga and Msuwazi), as well as Mtendere cooperative.

In addition to the seedlings, Solidaridad supported these farmers with tea nursery construction and management materials such as wires, hoes, shovels, wheelbarrows, watering cans, planting pots, nails, and fertilizers. Solidaridad is also offering training on nursery management to equip them with the knowledge of good nursery management practices so they can produce good quality tea seedlings.

This is to address the challenge faced by smallholder farmers of lacking access to good quality seedlings which can help them produce more quality tea with the likelihood of being sold at a good price.

Tea seedlings are often expensive and difficult to source for smallholder farmers.



Most of the tea growers still have old varieties, which result in low production and poor-quality tea leaves. By offering farmers construction materials, fertilizer, and essential training to boost productivity, it helps to bridge the gap in resource access, and create sustainable livelihoods in Malawi's tea sector.

PROVIDING VITAL RESOURCES TO FARMERS

Tea seedlings are often expensive and difficult to source for smallholder farmers. Solidaridad's support aims to bridge this gap by delivering over 80,000 high-quality seedlings, giving farmers the means to expand and improve their tea crops. This initiative is designed to help farmers boost their production and overcome the financial barriers that previously limited their growth.

Many smallholder farmers simply don't have the financial means to purchase quality seedlings. By providing these seedlings, along with construction materials and fertilizer, we are enabling farmers to increase their productivity and improve their livelihoods in a sustainable way," says Given Phiri, Country Manager (Malawi), Solidaridad.



SUSTAINABLE FARMING FOR FARMERS, NOW!

Beyond the provision of seedlings, Solidaridad is investing in the long-term sustainability of the tea sector by offering specialized training and resources. Farmers are learning how to manage their crops more efficiently, using modern techniques that enhance productivity and environmental sustainability. The construction materials provided also allow farmers to build storage facilities and infrastructure, helping prevent post-harvest losses.

"Providing seedlings is just one part of the solution. Farmers also need the skills and resources to cultivate and maintain their crops effectively," explains Misozi Magaletta, Project Manager Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) Tea, Solidaridad. "The training and materials we provide are essential in ensuring that the farmers can realize the full potential of their tea fields and support their families," adds Magaletta.

GENDER INCLUSIVITY IN MALAWI'S TEA SECTOR

Solidaridad's initiative includes a strong emphasis on gender inclusivity, ensuring that women farmers are fully integrated and empowered in this process.

"Women play a critical role in tea farming in Malawi and often they are the ones performing the majority of labor in the fields. However, they frequently face challenges in accessing quality resources, training, and market opportunities, which limits their potential for economic empowerment. This initiative actively addresses these barriers by ensuring that women tea farmers have equitable access to seedlings, training on nursery management, and resources needed to establish and sustain successful tea enterprises," added Nozipho Ndlovu, Regional Programme Manager of the RECLAIM Sustainability! Tea Programme, Solidaridad.



IMPACTING THE LIVES OF MALAWIAN FARMERS

This initiative is part of Solidaridad's broader commitment to creating sustainable supply chains that are prosperous, inclusive, and in balance with nature. As demonstrated in Solidaridad's strategic pulse, the programme not only benefits farmers and workers but also strengthens supportive business ecosystems and enabling policy environments.

Through good practices, market uptake, and collaborative stakeholder engagement, Solidaridad is helping to build resilient supply chains that improve livelihoods and promote sustainability across the region. By empowering farmers, fostering inclusivity, and supporting sustainable frameworks, Solidaridad's efforts are driving positive, systemic change within Malawi's tea sector and across Southern Africa at large.



Women play a critical role in tea farming in Malawi and often they are the ones performing the majority of labor in the fields.



Solidaridad empowers Thyolo tea farmers with 80,000 seedlings

By Malawi Voice - October 5, 2024

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Move to revitalise Malawi's dying cotton industry

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Malawi Business - 11 December 2024

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Limbeke, Malawi - Malawi is proud to host the International Supervisory Board (ISB) of Solidaridad, marking a historic moment in Solidaridad's 5 years of operation in Malawi. Selected among over 40 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Malawi is recognised as a good example of our work in Southern Africa to transform supply chains into inclusive, resilient systems.

Malawi: Programme spearheads equality efforts in agriculture

In Malawi, like many countries in Africa, inequality persists as a significant challenge, particularly in agriculture.

ESF Africa

19 April 2024

Cotton farming is one of the sectors the programme is engaging with, to improve livelihoods.

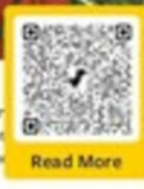


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From Malawi's tea sector to Southern Africa - Solidaridad breaks barriers for women across the region

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ESF Africa



Read More

As Women's Month - which is celebrated in August - draws to a close, Solidaridad South Africa reaffirms its commitment to empowering women, not only in Malawi but throughout the Southern African region.

MALAWI TEA SECTOR CREATES A COMPETITIVE EDGE THROUGH PEER LEARNING

27 February 2024

Solidaridad's RECLAIM Sustainability programme is collaborating with Malawi tea producers as they face new challenges and prepare to transform the country's tea sector. Through technology and automation, Malawi hopes to inspire other southern African countries as it makes plans to implement a comprehensive tea sector overhaul.



BREAKING BARRIERS FOR WOMEN IN MALAWI AND ACROSS SOUTHERN AFRICA

26 September 2024

A groundbreaking gender policy has been launched in Malawi's tea sector. With a goal of creating safer workplaces for all, the programme includes the training for gender champions and the distribution of an anti-harassment manual. The initiative sets a precedent for other agricultural sectors and demonstrates the importance of gender policies that create inclusive work environments free from discrimination.



From Fields to Gifts: Kvuvo Empowers Farmers with Zwady Points Redemption Programme

21 May 2024



Bicycles, solar-powered radios, insecticides, t-shirts, gloves, and sprayers – These were some of the gifts displayed by small-scale farmers in Lilongwe, Malawi, awarded to the farmers in exchange for practicing good agriculture through the reward platform called Zwady.

Kvuvo, a leading provider of digital empowerment solutions for smallholder farmers, is proud to announce its transformative vision aimed at inspiring and empowering farming communities across Southern Africa. With a focus on bridging the digital divide, Kvuvo is revolutionizing how farmers engage with innovations, turning learning behavior change into a tangible reality. Zwady is not just offering gifts, it is uplifting lives. Don't take our word for it, these farmers speak for themselves. We call on local and international stakeholders to partner with us so that we can scale to transform even more lives," says Lydia Banda, Regional Manager at Kvuvo.

Zwady – Kvuvo's adaptive platform – is at the forefront of this mission. With its increasing uptake, "good gifts" Zwady is changing the landscape of farmer engagement in Southern Africa by providing motivational nudges that spark action. Recognizing that true transformation begins with motivation, Zwady's platform is meticulously crafted to foster enthusiasm among farmers, inspiring them to adopt sustainable practices and enhance their livelihoods.

Women embrace technology to improve crop yields

21 May 2024

Virginia Francis, 42, is one of the pioneer farmers in Traditional Authority (TA) Katsinda, Lilongwe, to embrace digital innovation to revolutionize the agriculture industry.

Using the Zwady App on her smartphone, she manages her farm operations by among others maintaining detailed farm records, conducting precise farm mapping and tracking access to essential farm inputs and markets.

Some of the women holding their phones

Under the Pathways to Prosperity Programme implemented by Kvuvo, a social enterprise working in partnership with Solidaridad, the local farmer boasts she has not only improved her farming processes, but also enhanced productivity.

Solidaridad is an international organization supporting

Francis says: "I have experienced a tremendous increase in my crop yields since I started using this application when the programme was launched in 2021."

Malawi lauded for empowering smallholder farmers

21 December 2023



A few years ago, Chibond Ngulwe, a cotton farmer from Yansu

SOUTH AFRICA:

Country Spotlight

Author: Mohau Mailula, Country Manager



EXEC COUNTRY FOREWORD

South Africa, a country rich in diversity and agricultural potential, continues to confront persistent challenges in youth unemployment, food insecurity, and inequality. As of Q4 2024, youth unemployment stood at 59.6%, one of the highest globally. Through the Social Employment Fund (SEF) operating in South Africa, Solidaridad is changing this narrative.

In 2024, over 2,000 youth and women were engaged across Gauteng and surrounding areas in structured agricultural employment, with 9,000 school learners and 1,300 smallholder farmers also benefitting from SEF-linked initiatives.

The SEF programme represents more than job creation. It is a springboard for long-term transformation. Through urban farming, food diversity, and hands-on horticulture training, participants have used this skills development opportunity to get into industries of choice, some have launched micro-enterprises, established school gardens, and are driving local food system resilience.



Over 2,000 youth and women were engaged across Gauteng and surrounding areas in structured agricultural employment.

These stories, featured throughout this magazine, are more than anecdotes. They are tangible proof that empowering youth through agriculture creates pathways to stability, skills development, and community upliftment.

South Africa speaks to the region as a hub of innovation, urban food systems, and youth-focused intervention. The SEF model is now being referenced across the continent as a case study in linking employment with sustainable agriculture. From urban plots in Mohlakeng to cooperative farms in Winterveldt, the success of SEF underlines Solidaridad's ability to bridge unemployment and food insecurity through practical, scalable solutions.

A special thanks to our donor, the Industrial Development Corporation. Through your support, we are changing lives.

Regards,

Mohau Mailula



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Strengthening local food systems through urban farming and food diversity



STRINGING ALONG TO NEW LANDS...

South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 envisions eliminating poverty and reducing inequality, with economic growth and employment at its core. Among its initiatives, the Social Employment Fund (SEF), a collaboration between the Department of Trade and Industries, the IDC, and Solidaridad, stands out as a transformative force. By blending job creation with structural solutions like strengthening local food systems and building agricultural capacity, SEF empowers participants to drive economic and social change within their communities.

In a country grappling with high unemployment, grassroots interventions like SEF offer more than temporary relief. They provide participants with immersive agricultural training, equipping them with the skills to become future farmers, entrepreneurs, or employees in other sectors. Participants internalize sustainable, market-oriented agronomic practices through hands-on learning, blending traditional farming methods with innovative, climate-resilient techniques. By transitioning from subsistence farming to agribusiness, participants not only sustain themselves but also contribute to food diversity and accessible local food systems.



A REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE OF TRANSFORMATION

Emily Monchwe, a 37-year-old mother of three from Mohlakeng, is a shining example of SEF's impact. Overwhelmed by financial pressures and uncertain about her future, Emily joined the programme and gained essential farming skills, such as crop selection, soil preparation, irrigation, and pest management. With this newfound knowledge, she created a thriving 400m² crop garden that generates R700 to R1,000 weekly. Her garden not only supports her family but also supplies fresh vegetables to disadvantaged students in her community.

Monchwe's story exemplifies how agriculture can transform lives and communities. Her garden reduces dependence on expensive, urban-sourced produce and improves food accessibility for her neighbors. By addressing both the economic and nutritional needs of her community, she showcases the profound ripple effect of localized food systems.

SEF's approach transcends individual stories, positioning farmers as catalysts for social development. By prioritizing marginalized groups, the programme addresses systemic inequities and reduces social exclusion. It creates supportive networks among farmers, trainees, and stakeholders, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing. This collective effort strengthens rural economies, enhances agricultural outputs, and drives demand in related industries.



SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

Moreover, by making fresh produce available at fair prices, SEF disrupts the urban-centric supply chains that inflate costs and limit access. Communities benefit from reduced reliance on boxed, nutrient-poor foods, promoting healthier lifestyles and building resilience against food insecurity.

Agriculture, when approached through initiatives like SEF, becomes a powerful catalyst for socio-economic change. It not only addresses unemployment and inequality but also bridges generational and social divides, fostering collaboration and community empowerment. By prioritizing inclusivity and sustainability, SEF is redefining the role of agriculture in building resilient local economies and accessible food systems.

In a world where the challenges of unemployment, inequality, and food security are deeply interconnected, SEF's success proves that small, focused efforts can create seismic shifts. The combination of skills training, resource access, and community support paves the way for sustainable development. As Monchwe's journey shows, with the right tools and opportunities, agriculture can be the cornerstone of a brighter, more equitable future, one garden at a time.

SEF's success proves that small, focused efforts can create seismic shifts.





EMILY MONCHWE

Turning challenges into growth

Author: Sade Balogun, Programme Manager



MOTHER OF THREE REWRITES HER SCRIPT

Emily Monchwe, a 37-year-old mother of three from Mohlakeng, Randfontein, faced tremendous challenges when her husband was retrenched and their household relied solely on her R1,800 income from phase 2 of the programme, her mother's old-age grant, and child support grants. Struggling to pay for essentials like electricity, municipal services, groceries, and school expenses, Monchwe saw the SEF programme as an opportunity to improve her family's situation.

Monchwe developed game-changing skills through the programme. From crop selection and soil preparation to irrigation and pest management, she mastered the essentials of farming. These skills enabled her to establish a thriving 400m² crop garden at a school premises, which now generates R700 to R1,000 weekly. Beyond providing her family with a stable income, Monchwe's garden also supplies fresh vegetables to disadvantaged students, demonstrating her commitment to uplifting her community.



YOU CAN ACHIEVE ANYTHING YOU ASPIRE TO

With the monthly allowance and income from the garden easing financial stress, Monchwe could pay household bills, purchase groceries, and even lay-by school uniforms for her children. The confidence she developed through the programme empowered her to make meaningful decisions for her household and inspired her long-term vision of adopting all school gardens in Mohlakeng.

Monchwe reflects on her journey with pride and determination, advising others to embrace the skills and knowledge from programmes like SEF: "You can go far in life and create your own income if you value what you learn." For Monchwe, the first step to success has already been taken, and her future is filled with promise.





SEUN MOKWENA

Growth in the SEF route

Author: Sade Balogun, Programme Manager



ENDING CONTRACT MARKS BEGINNING

Seun Mokwena, a 30-year-old from Rabie Ridge, joined the SEF programme with a passion for agriculture and community development. Having previously worked as an Assistant Agricultural Practitioner with the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), Mokwena was responsible for planning production and facilitating training for farmers.

After his contract ended, he saw an opportunity to continue his work by joining Solidaridad as a SEF Phase 2 participant. His dedication and leadership skills soon earned him the role of timekeeper, where he played a crucial role in supporting local farmers to adopt good agricultural practices that enhanced both the quality and yield of their produce.

Before joining the programme, Mokwena faced financial challenges after his contract ended. The monthly allowance provided by SEF helped him cover his personal needs and provided a sense of financial stability. More than just financial support, SEF became a platform for Mokwena's personal and professional growth.

Through the programme, he developed strong leadership and interpersonal skills, which significantly improved his confidence and ability to engage with others. His role as a timekeeper helped him refine his administrative skills, opening the door to further career growth. Today, he has progressed from being a timekeeper to a SEF Site Administrator under Solidaridad, a role that allows him to take on more responsibilities and contribute even more to the success of the programme.

A JOURNEY OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT AND JOY

Mokwena's journey with SEF has ignited his passion for continuous learning and self-improvement. He now aspires to become a commercial farmer and believes that the skills and knowledge he is gaining will help him achieve that goal.

Reflecting on his experience, he advises others to always give their best when opportunities arise, as hard work and dedication can lead to even greater possibilities. His story is a testament to how SEF empowers individuals, not only by providing employment but also by fostering long-term career development and personal growth.





LUCKY MAZIBUKO

The road to more secure employment

Author: Onkarabile Mathobela, PMEL Officer



THE RIDE OF LUCKY'S QUEST FOR GOOD

At 39, Lucky Mazibuko from Mayfield, Daveyton, was at a crossroad. After losing his job, he faced the harsh reality of providing for his family. However, joining the SEF programme changed his trajectory. With no prior farming experience, Mazibuko learned essential agricultural skills such as planting, soil testing and analysis, and pest management.

"Be patient, even through hardships, something always turns up," he advises. His monthly allowance allowed him to save for a driver's license so he could upskill. Mazibuko now envisions a future in agriculture, where he feels valued and fulfilled.

Today, Mazibuko works on the farm as a driver, where he was retained post the second phase of the programme, contributing actively to its productivity. He also mentors newer participants who are just beginning their agricultural journey. His dedication and strong work ethics have made him a respected figure among his peers.

As he gains more experience, Mazibuko hopes to eventually manage his own piece of land, expanding his knowledge into agribusiness and further contributing to food security in his community.

His dedication and strong work ethics have made him a respected figure among his peers.





AGNES NKOSIYAPHANSI

From struggle to stability

Author: Onkarabile Mathobela, PMEL Officer



ONE PERSON CAN TRANSFORM MANY

At 56, Agnes Nkosiyaphansi from Mayfield, Daveyton, is the head of a household of seven, including her husband, brother, and four children. Before being part of SEF, she faced the daunting challenge of providing for her family with no stable income. Unable to afford school uniforms, lunch money, or even basic groceries, she sought an opportunity to turn her situation around.

Through the SEF programme, Nkosiyaphansi gained advanced farming techniques that transformed her approach, building on her experience in the Eastern Cape. The monthly allowance became a lifeline, enabling her to provide for her children's school needs, ensure food security, and even save R7,000 (about €336) to build a home for her family.

Her newfound skills, including knowledge of poultry farming, have boosted her confidence and reignited her aspirations. Agnes dreams of owning her farm and advises others to practice patience and make decisions with a clear mind.

Through the SEF programme, Nkosiyaphansi gained advanced farming techniques that transformed her approach.





LETLHOGONOLO SEKGOPI

Cultivating a new path to success

Author: Carnatia Mpapele, Site Administrator



SINGLE MOTHER SHOWS UP AND WINS

Letlhogonolo Sekgopi, a 26-year-old single mother of two from Michaview, Kgabalatsane, has transformed her life through the SEF agricultural programme. Previously struggling to provide basic necessities for her children due to unemployment, Sekgopi found a new path forward. The programme equipped her with essential farming skills, including soil preparation, irrigation techniques, and quality planting.

Through SEF, Sekgopi gained not only practical knowledge but also confidence and leadership abilities. The monthly allowance was a lifeline, enabling her to furnish her home, pay off debt, and provide food and school supplies for her children. Moreover, she started her own tissue-selling business with R500 from her stipend and partnered with Botle Botle, a direct-selling company supporting budding entrepreneurs.

Now, Sekgopi has set her sights on furthering her education in agribusiness, exploring new opportunities in the agricultural sector. Her journey has instilled confidence in her decision-making and leadership abilities, extending beyond her household to her business ventures. Reflecting on her experience, Sekgopi encourages others to pursue their dreams with determination, advising, "Invest in what you want and take action on your desires."

With resilience and newfound skills, Sekgopi is cultivating a brighter future for herself and her children, demonstrating the transformative power of targeted support and individual determination.

Sekgopi has set her sights on furthering her education in agribusiness, exploring new opportunities in the agricultural sector.





SHIMANE MOSANE

Farming for a brighter future

Author: Dumisani Ngonyama, Project Officer



SECURING DREAMS, BIRTHING VISION

Shimane Mosane, a 30-year-old from Jericho, Brits, knows firsthand the struggle of providing for his loved ones. As the head of his five-member household, he shared decision-making responsibilities with his older sister. However, despite his passion for agriculture, Mosane faced immense challenges in making ends meet.

With no steady income, basic needs like groceries and clothing seemed like insurmountable tasks. That all changed when Mosane joined the SEF programme. The monthly allowance brought much-needed financial relief, allowing him to save, invest, and fund training as a security guard. This turning point marked the beginning of Mosane's transformation.

Through SEF, Mosane gained invaluable skills, mastering farming techniques, equipment operation, and as a team leader, he developed essential people skills, becoming adaptable in managing diverse personalities. Mosane's vision of becoming a successful commercial farmer is gradually becoming a reality.



FUTURE PLANS ARE TO ACQUIRE LAND

He plans to acquire land for his own farming operation and to pursue a career as a police officer, building on his security guard certification. Reflecting on his journey, Mosane encourages others to never give up and seize every opportunity that comes their way. With determination, he believes anything is possible.

Today, Mosane's story serves as a testament to the power of perseverance and the impact of supportive programmes like SEF. His journey inspires others to stay committed to their goals, no matter the challenges, and proves that success is within reach.





TONIC MOSHOBANE

Building a future in farming

Author: Luvo Mbangeli, Site Administrator



IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO START OVER

Tonic Moshobane was a participant in Phase 2 of the SEF programme and part of its enterprise development initiative, where she and a team of three received support in the form of equipment and inputs to establish their farming venture.

They worked together to build a sustainable operation, but their progress came to a halt when their equipment and supplies were stolen. Faced with this devastating loss, the rest of the team chose to walk away. However, Moshobane refused to let the setback define her future.

Determined to start over, she sought guidance from the SEF project officer, whose support, along with her strong passion for agriculture, helped her navigate the challenges of rebuilding. She recently secured new land, and within a month, had set up her farm and started planting. She now cultivates spinach, green peppers, covo, and China spinach, steadily working toward her goal of running a thriving farming business.



A REMINDER THAT SETBACKS ARE NOT THE END

Starting alone was not easy. The biggest challenge she faced was the lack of labor, but rather than giving up, she used her own resources to hire help, ensuring that her farm remained operational.

Moshobane's vision extends beyond just personal success, she hopes to expand her farm and create job opportunities for young people in her community. With ongoing dedication and the foundation of skills and support she received through SEF, she is building something lasting, not just for herself but for those around her.

Her journey serves as a powerful reminder that setbacks are not the end, but rather an opportunity to rebuild stronger. As she puts it, "Never give up on your dream. Work hard, pursue your passion, and keep going, no matter the obstacles."





BOITSHEPO KONE

From uncertainty to opportunity

Author: Nokulunga Gumede, Site Administrator



STRINGING ALONG TO NEW LANDS...

Boitshepo Kone, a 25-year-old resident of Bosplaas, lives with his father, stepmother, grandmother, and younger sibling in a household of five. While his father is the head of the family and primary decision-maker, Kone has taken strides to contribute meaningfully and improve their living conditions.

Before participating in the SEF programme, Kone faced a challenging period of unemployment and struggled with low confidence and poor communication skills. When the programme was introduced in his community, he saw an opportunity not only to earn an income but also to learn and grow personally.

Through the programme, Kone gained critical skills, including chemical and fertilizer application, drip irrigation installation, and teamwork. These skills not only helped him launch a backyard garden spanning 35 x 50 meters but also allowed him to prepare the land by hiring a tractor and acquiring a second-hand irrigation pipe. With these resources, Kone has taken his first steps toward sustainable farming.



STURDY BUT MODERATE GROWTH PATCHES

The monthly allowance offered by the programme has been life-changing. It enabled him to contribute to his household's needs while funding his garden project. In addition to farming, Kone has found another creative outlet: music. As an aspiring amapiano artist, a genre born in South Africa, he is working to establish himself in the music industry while growing his agricultural ambitions.

The programme has significantly boosted Kone's confidence. Once shy and reserved, he now communicates effectively with his managers and peers, and feels capable of advising others and addressing challenges directly. Looking ahead, he dreams of expanding his garden or leasing land to scale his farming operations.

Reflecting on his journey, Kone encourages others to seize opportunities in agriculture, emphasizing its sustainability despite its risks. His advice: "Grab the opportunity with both hands because this is a very sustainable business, although risky, as any business can be." With determination and new skills, Kone is cultivating a brighter future for himself and his family.





GADIFELE PHATSWANE

Growing dreams

Author: Mzokhona Mjwara, Site Administrator



THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP...

At 41, Gadifele Phatswane from Rabokala has embraced her passion for farming to uplift both her household and her future. Living with her 86-year-old grandmother, who serves as the head of their household, and two other family members, Phatswane shares decision-making responsibilities and actively contributes to improving their living conditions.

Prior to the SEF programme being implemented in her village, Phatswane faced financial constraints that left her unable to afford basic toiletries or contribute to household groceries. Despite these challenges, her love for farming and her desire to perfect her backyard garden motivated her to join the project. With the monthly allowance, she could purchase toiletries, groceries, and seeds for her garden, significantly improving her household's food security and quality of life.

The training and mentorship provided by SEF have been a game-changer for Phatswane. She has learned essential skills such as soil preparation, crop spacing, and timing, all of which have enhanced her agricultural practices. The project has also taught her the value of teamwork, helping her grow as both an individual and a contributor to her community. These skills have boosted her confidence, allowing her to apply newfound knowledge to her home garden and share her experience with others.

CROP AND LIVESTOCK DIVERSIFICATION

Phatswane's dedication extends beyond crop farming. She and her partner manage a livestock farm with 30 pigs, 18 chickens, and 13 goats. While this enterprise was not initiated through the programme, they have significantly improved their livestock management thanks to SEF's training and support at the farm she was placed at, resulting in healthier animals and greater income stability.

Looking ahead, Phatswane aspires to become a successful commercial farmer, leveraging the knowledge and experience gained through SEF. Reflecting on her journey, she emphasizes the importance of staying open to learning and adapting. "I'd advise people to have room to learn," she says, grateful for the opportunity to turn her passion into a sustainable livelihood.

Phatswane's success serves as a powerful example of how agricultural initiatives can equip individuals with the tools to transform their lives, secure their families' well-being, and pursue ambitious objectives.





MARTINA KONAITE

A path to stability and growth

Author: Seun Mokwena, Site Administrator



THE VOICE OF THE VOICELESS IS RISING

Martina Konaite, a 28-year-old resident of Kutlwanong, Bosplaas in the North West Province of South Africa, lives in a bustling household of 10 members, including her mother, two sisters, nieces, nephew, and her three young children. Though her mother is the head of the household, Konaite shares the role of decision-making, striving to ensure their shared home thrives despite challenges.

Unemployment and financial constraints had weighed heavily on Konaite before joining the SEF programme. She struggled to provide for her children's basic needs, from food to clothing, and felt disconnected from their education because she couldn't afford mobile data to communicate with their school. Desperate for change, she joined the project not only to find a source of income but also to build her skills in agriculture, a field that always interested her.

The monthly allowance provided Konaite with a financial foothold that allowed her to start a small business selling perfumes, earning a R200 commission for every 10 bottles sold.

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE - ASK KONAITE!

With each sale, she allocates a portion to purchase seeds for her family's backyard garden, ensuring they have fresh produce for home consumption. For the first time, she could contribute meaningfully to her household, providing her children with food and clothing, and reclaiming her role as a present and active mother.

Through SEF, Konaite has gained valuable skills, from soil preparation and composting to effective communication and teamwork. These new abilities have boosted her confidence, empowering her to lead within her household and build her entrepreneurial venture. The project has not only given her income but also reignited her belief in her capabilities, making her determined to save and further her education to become a prominent farmer.

Reflecting on her journey, Konaite shares advice born from her experiences: "You can achieve anything you set your mind to with your hands." With her drive and newfound skills, she's building a future where she can continue providing for her family and growing her passion for agriculture into a flourishing career.



ALBERT TLALA

Turning challenges into opportunities

Author: Onkarabile Mathobela, PMEL Officer



FROM LOSING A JOB TO GAINING HOPE

Albert Tlala, a 46-year-old from Mmakaunyane in the North West, has turned life's challenges into a pathway for growth and sustainability through his passion for agriculture. As a husband and father to three sons aged 23, 16, and 8, Albert shares household leadership with his wife, working together to secure a stable future for their family.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unexpected difficulties when Albert lost his job at a gambling machine company, leaving him unable to provide for his household. However, the arrival of the SEF programme in his community presented a chance to rekindle a long-held interest in agriculture that began during his school years. Seeing it as a long-awaited opportunity, Albert eagerly joined the program to learn and apply modern farming techniques.

The monthly allowance has been a lifeline, allowing Albert to meet his family's basic needs, purchase groceries, and support his children's education. Beyond his immediate household, it has enabled him to continue contributing to a gentlemen's social club, helping maintain important community ties.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY WITH SEF

Tlala's journey with SEF has been transformative. He has learned vital farming techniques, including soil preparation, composting, and irrigation methods. Additionally, the programme has fostered his personal growth, helping him develop communication skills and build stronger connections with others. These lessons have instilled confidence in his abilities, which is evident in the success of his thriving backyard garden.

Beyond the programme, Tlala supplements his income by building houses on request, showcasing his resourcefulness and determination to support his family. With his sights set on the future, he plans to help his children pursue their studies while also returning to school himself to deepen his knowledge in agriculture.

Reflecting on his journey, Tlala encourages others to focus on learning rather than short-term benefits. "Don't focus on the stipend, but learn as much as you can and better yourself for the long run," he advises. With a renewed sense of purpose and a growing belief in the sustainability of farming, Tlala is determined to turn his aspirations of becoming a successful farmer into reality.



DOREEN MODIBA

Reaping hope

Author: Onkarabile Mathobela, PMEL Officer



SOLE PROVIDER SETS A GOOD EXAMPLE

At 35, Doreen Modiba from Winterveldt found herself as the sole provider for her household, which included her brother and two children aged 14 and 17. Struggling with a lack of income, Modiba felt idle and despondent, unable to provide for her children's needs or even engage in school activities that brought them joy. Despite her situation, Modiba held onto a deep passion for agriculture, a love sparked at age 13 while learning from her grandmother.

Modiba joined the SEF programme in search of an income and to build on her agricultural knowledge. The project gave her not only a monthly allowance but also the chance to rediscover purpose and stability. With the stipend, she could finally buy groceries instead of relying solely on her home garden. She could also afford her child's matric farewell costs, a milestone that brought immense pride to the family.

Through SEF, Modiba honed her technical farming skills, learning new planting and harvesting techniques. Working with others improved her patience and leadership, enabling her to guide her team effectively. These opportunities have boosted her confidence, not just as a provider but as a leader. "My confidence is boosted because I'm a provider and a leader at the farm I'm currently working at," she says.

Despite her situation, Modiba held onto a deep passion for agriculture, a love sparked at age 13 while learning from her grandmother.

Beyond the project, Modiba supplements her income by assisting with packaging and grading vegetables at the Mabopane Central City market. She now dreams of going back to school to study agribusiness and is actively negotiating a lease for four hectares of land to expand her farming activities.

Looking ahead, Modiba is determined to enhance her home garden and transform the land she plans to lease into a thriving farm. Reflecting on her journey, she shares, "I am content with my pursuits, and I'd advise people to follow their hearts to do something that works for them in a convenient way."

Modiba's story is one of resilience and growth, showcasing how opportunities like SEF can empower individuals to rebuild their lives, support their families, and chase their dreams.

CELEBRATING THE TRANSFORMATION OF HORTICULTURAL VALUE CHAINS IN SOUTH AFRICA

19 August 2024

A closing ceremony in South Africa celebrated the country's Social Employment Fund as the project came to a conclusion. Hands-on training and mentorship transformed the lives of project participants and boosted the agricultural sector. The project encouraged the development of entrepreneurial ventures among unemployed youth, and contributed to a sustainable future for the country's horticulture industry.



Solidaridad drills farm workers with horticulture essential skills

By Maravi Post Reporter - June 15, 2024

Like 0



By Brighton Tcheogwe

LILONGWE-(MaraviPost)-Solidaridad Organization in partnership with the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) has successfully concluded the Social Employment Fund (SEF) Project.

Solidaridad launches employment fund to boost food security, employ youth

Solidaridad, in collaboration with the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (IDC) and the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) has launched the Social Employment Fund Project, a significant initiative that aims to tackle economic stimulation, reduce unemployment and enhance food security by engaging South Africa's unemployed youth.

Like 0



View Source

In South Africa, unemployment remains a pressing issue, with particularly dire consequences for young people. According to *Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Force Survey*, the official unemployment rate was 31.5% in the third quarter of 2023. While this indicates some progress, youth unemployment remains a significant concern in South Africa, underscoring the need for targeted interventions and sustainable solutions to create more employment opportunities for young people.

A call for action

"The question presented by the Social Employment Fund is whether we can effectively absorb the unemployed population within rural and semi-rural areas. One significant barrier to scale for most smallholders is the access to mechanisation, a benefit often enjoyed by commercial farmers, which emerges as a critical input in the business case for scaling up smallholder production."

"Through initiatives like the Social Employment Fund Project, in 2023, we engaged 1,262 horticulture smallholder farmers with the same number benefiting from digital inclusion initiatives. Involving 2,514 young individuals in agricultural projects. The progress is promising for 2024," says Mphahlele, Solidaridad country manager for South Africa.

Solidaridad Southern Africa Empowers Smallholder Farmers and Enhances Food Security

By Agriculture Economy - 10 September 18, 2024 - 10:00 AM UTC

Like 2



Smallholder farmers

Wabitshe, North West, South Africa - Solidaridad Southern Africa has announced the successful completion of Phase 2 of its transformative agricultural programme.

Currently, in Phase 3, this initiative has empowered smallholder farmers across South Africa through sustainable farming practices, improved market access, and provided direct employment opportunities. The project, providing jobs, strengthening food security, and building resilient farming communities.

As part of Phase 2 of the SEF program, this has created 2,000 job opportunities, generated agricultural produce, and provided direct employment opportunities for smallholder farmers. Additionally, more than

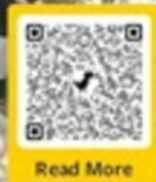
Solidaridad Southern Africa empowers smallholder farmers and enhances food security

10 September 2024



Solidaridad Southern Africa has announced the successful completion of Phase 2 of their transformative agricultural program. Currently, in Phase 3, this initiative has empowered smallholder farmers across South Africa through sustainable farming practices, practical training, and improved market access.

The program has made a notable impact, providing jobs, strengthening food security, and building resilient farming communities.



ZAMBIA:

Country Spotlight

Executive Foreword by Sheila Garakara, Country Manager



EXEC COUNTRY FOREWORD

Zambia's agricultural sector continues to evolve through innovation, policy engagement, and farmer empowerment. Solidaridad's work in Zambia spans food safety, sustainable value chains, regenerative agriculture, and climate-smart farming. With only 14% of Zambia's 40 million hectares of arable land under cultivation, according to the International Trade Administration, the opportunity to expand sustainable production is immense.

Key 2024 highlights for Zambia include the successful gazettement of Zambia's first Good Agricultural Practices (ZAMGAP) standard, ensuring safer horticultural produce for consumers. In Mongu, over 1,300 farmers have been trained in sustainable leather and livestock practices, boosting income generation through value addition.

Cotton farmers in various districts of the Southern Province were trained in biochar production using cotton stalks and subsequently reapplied the biochar into their fields, resulting in increased yields of the various crops cultivated during the 2024/2025 season.



Highlights for Zambia include the successful gazettement of Zambia's first Good Agricultural Practices (ZAMGAP) standard.

Zambia's story speaks to the region through its bold policy advancements and farmer-centred innovation. Solidaridad's model here combines research, advocacy, and farmer capacity-building to tackle poverty, poor productivity, and post-harvest losses. Together with our partners, we are showing how investment in standards, knowledge transfer, and climate-smart farming delivers long-term food security and economic empowerment.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our funding partners, namely, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, the AFR100 Initiative, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (now known as the Gates Foundation), the German Postcard Lottery, Schmitz Stiftungen, Milkywire, and Crossroads International. Your contributions have been instrumental in advancing sustainable agriculture practices, enhancing food security, and fostering long-term resilience.

Together, we are making a meaningful difference in the lives of many. We look forward to strengthening our partnership as we continue this vital work and scale even greater impact in the seasons ahead.

Yours truly,

Sheila Garakara

WASTING AWAY

The social and economic consequences of post-harvest losses

Author: Sheila Garakara, Country Manager



TO WASTE NOT IS TO WANT NOT

Zambia has approximately 40 million hectares of arable land but less than 14% of this is cultivated.¹ This may seem like an opportunity to scale-up production but numerous challenges within the agricultural sector hinder the country from cultivating more of its land, adversely affecting livelihoods and food security in the Southern African nation.

Most of Zambia's farmers are smallholder farmers, and they produce close to 80% of the country's food.² However, climate change, inaccessible financial services and poor production practices negatively affect productivity and profitability. Over the years, this has resulted in a decline of agriculture's contribution to GDP from 9.4% in 2010 to 3.09% in 2022.³

Producing below capacity isn't the only problem faced by the land-locked country as only a fraction of harvests complete the journey from farm to fork. Currently, post-harvest losses range between 30% and 40%.⁴ Post-harvest losses jeopardize the income and livelihoods of farmers and other stakeholders in the value chain, negatively affecting rural and economic development.

Food security, already severely strained by climate change, is further compromised by post-harvest losses. Moreover, food waste contributes to climate change by emitting greenhouse gases, creating a vicious cycle.





SUSTAINABLE FARMING FOR FARMERS, NOW!

Most post-harvest losses occur on the farm due to poor harvesting techniques and inadequate storage infrastructure. Fruits and vegetables require optimal storage and transportation conditions without which they will most likely spoil before reaching the consumer, if they make it to market in good condition to begin with. In food manufacturing, significant waste occurs during handling and processing of raw products and by discarding edible by-products, especially in smaller facilities where the agro-processors rely heavily on manual labour.

The state's underdeveloped transport network and poor road conditions severely hinder the timely delivery of farm produce, as most farms are located far from markets and food processors. This remoteness, combined with inadequate infrastructure, results in prolonged journeys, therefore increasing waste through food spoilage and physical damage to goods during transportation.

Additionally, it drives up the cost of transport and several farmers elect to sell their produce in closer but limited markets, where demand falls below supply and vendors are forced to lower prices to avoid losses because these markets do not have proper storage facilities. Since early 2024, the country has had rolling blackouts which started with three hours of power cuts daily and progressively worsened to 18 to 36-hour blackouts presently. Loadshedding has aggravated food waste since most businesses and households cannot afford alternative sources of power to store and cook food and have had to regularly discard rotten food.

The factors causing post-harvest losses are complex and interdependent but there are some low-hanging fruits we can pick to maximize the farmers' and country's earning potential. Training farmers and handlers on improved harvesting, handling and packaging techniques will ensure that a higher quantity and quality of the harvest is available to the market. This requires civil society organizations and the government to take a coordinated approach in their capacity-building efforts, sowing seeds of knowledge far and wide, while engaging private sector actors to leverage their resources and post-harvest management expertise.



IMPACTING THE LIVES OF ZAMBIAN FARMERS

To address infrastructural problems such as cold storage facilities and other large equipment, farmers should be encouraged to cluster and source financing to erect shared facilities. The clustering has two benefits: the first is that formal financial institutions hardly lend to individual smallholder farmers, and when they do, individual smallholder farmers cannot afford the cost of borrowing. By forming a cooperative or similar formal group, farmers can access formal financial services and share the cost.

Secondly, they can also jointly utilize equipment and reduce the individual costs of maintenance. A further reduction of post-harvest losses can be achieved by teaching farmers simple on-farm value addition methods like smoking and dehydration. Finally, agro-processing is the biggest manufacturing sector in Zambia,⁵ so there is a large appetite for fresh and dry produce. Linking smallholder farmers to processors guarantees the farmers a stable income, and the manufacturer benefits from the reduced cost of locally sourced inputs.

The basket of mid to long-term solutions that will alleviate post-harvest losses includes several items. Improving market access is key in eliminating losses; thus, local governments should allocate space and capital to build more markets and equip both new and existing markets with sufficient and sanitary storage structures. Our national government can lessen losses by intervening at various points along the value chain.

Firstly, by improving ICT connectivity in rural areas so farmers can utilise mobile apps and sensors to support production and post-harvest processes. Secondly, they need to invest in developing the rail and road networks to facilitate the efficient transportation of food, resulting in more affordable transport costs and less spoilage.



Currently, post-harvest losses range between 30% and 40%. Post-harvest losses jeopardize the income and livelihoods of farmers.





THERE IS A NEED FOR ROBUST POLICIES

Lastly, the formulation of robust post-harvest management policies and regulations can aid the reduction of post-harvest losses. The immediate benefit of lowering post-harvest losses is higher earnings and improved livelihoods for all participants in the value chain, who are approximated to be 70% of the population.⁶

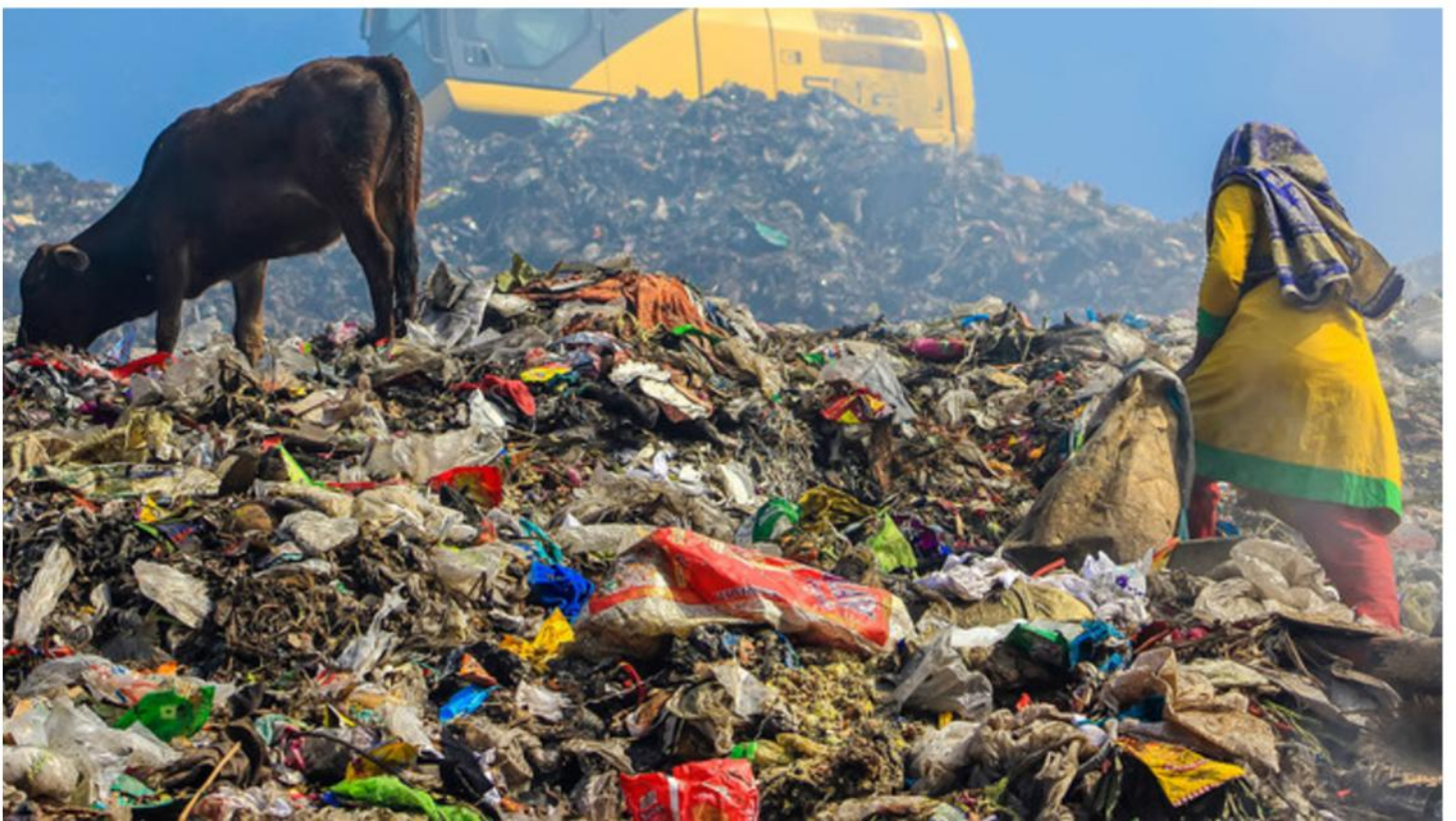
These earnings gradually translate to rural and economic development in the low-income country. Reducing post-harvest losses alleviates food insecurity and food scarcity, consequently improving the affordability of staple and other food. When local demand for nutritious food is satisfied the surplus can be exported, taking advantage of continental and global trade agreements, on condition that transport network challenges are adequately addressed. An overall reduction of post-harvest losses can enhance food security and accelerate the agricultural sector's contribution to Zambia's GDP.



KEY REFERENCES QUOTED IN THE ARTICLE

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The immediate benefit of lowering post-harvest losses is higher earnings and improved livelihoods for all participants.





REVIVING COTTON

Advocacy spurs policy shift in Zambia

Author: Pamidzai Bota, Regional Programme Manager



ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE...

Through strategic policy advocacy, Solidaridad drives the momentum to amend Zambia's Cotton Act, empowering smallholder farmers and laying the foundation for sector transformation.

In Zambia, cotton is more than just a cash crop; it's a lifeline for over 250,000 smallholder farmers who grow cotton. But for over a decade, outdated policies have stifled the sector's growth. As it stands, over 250,000 smallholder farmers grow cotton in this region. Farmers have endured poor yields, volatile prices, and weak institutional support, all under the framework of the Cotton Act of 2007, a law that has not kept pace with the realities of today's agricultural and economic landscape.

THEN ENTERS SOLIDARIDAD...

With a clear-eyed understanding of policy as a lever for systems change, Solidaridad has positioned itself as a catalyst for reform. Through the RECLAIM Sustainability! (RS!) programme, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Solidaridad led a bold, coordinated policy advocacy campaign to revise the Cotton Act; redefining how inclusive, transparent, and responsive agricultural legislation can be driven from the ground up.

At the heart of this effort was the creation and institutionalization of the Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP) for the cotton sector. Spearheaded and supported by Solidaridad, the MSP brought together actors across the value chain - government ministries, the Cotton Board of Zambia, farmer associations, ginners, civil society organizations, and technical experts - into a single, unified forum for dialogue, negotiation, and consensus-building. Solidaridad's advocacy strategy was deliberate, inclusive, and effective.

- The organization facilitated quarterly policy dialogues, ensuring that farmer voices and field-level realities shaped the national agenda.
- It supported the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), providing evidence-based justification for reform.
- It mobilized grassroots consultations, aligning local experience with legislative goals.
- Most critically, it helped draft and refine the amendment bill, ensuring that the revised Cotton Act would be practical, just, and future-focused.





ADDRESSING PRESSING CHALLENGES

The proposed amendments address the sector's most pressing challenges:

- A transparent, fair pricing model to protect farmers' incomes
- Regulated lint exports to promote local value addition
- Access to certified planting seed to boost productivity
- Harmonized extension services for consistent farmer support
- Stronger institutional oversight and governance

With the Cotton Bill now awaiting tabling in Parliament, Solidaridad is not backing down. Together with the Cotton Association of Zambia, the organization has launched a nationwide advocacy campaign to sustain pressure, raise public awareness, and call for the urgent reading and enactment of the bill. The campaign amplifies farmer voices and links cotton sector reform with national priorities such as rural development, job creation, and the revival of Mulungushi Textiles.

"This is not just policy work. It's about shifting power back to the farmers, who for too long have operated without protection or predictability. Advocacy is how we make sustainability real," says a Solidaridad Programme lead.

This success story affirms a core part of Solidaridad's strategic pulse: real transformation requires structural change in policies, practices, and institutions. Through smart, inclusive advocacy, Solidaridad has laid the groundwork for a stronger cotton economy that benefits the majority.

With the right legislation, Zambia's cotton sector could contribute up to 25% of national GDP by 2027, proving that well-targeted advocacy doesn't just influence policy, it unlocks prosperity. Solidaridad is not just participating in policy. We are shaping it.



Through smart, inclusive advocacy, Solidaridad has laid the groundwork for a stronger cotton economy that benefits the majority.





STEPPING UP

Harmonized Cotton Extension Manual

Author: Pamidzai Bota, Regional Programme Manager



PARTNERED TO PROPEL FORWARD

Solidaridad, in partnership with the Cotton Development Trust and the Ministry of Agriculture, is proud to announce the launch of the Harmonized Cotton Extension Manual, an innovative tool designed to tackle the persistent challenges faced by small-scale cotton farmers in Zambia. Developed under the RECLAIM Sustainability! (RS!) Cotton and P2P Cotton Project, this manual represents a significant step toward unifying Zambia's fragmented extension services and improving farmer productivity.

The manual was co-created by technical experts under the Cotton Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP) and includes both a comprehensive guide for extension officers and a simplified Farmer Guide in layman's language to promote practical adoption. Its goal is to ensure that all farmers across Zambia's cotton production areas have access to clear, consistent, and evidence-based guidance on good agricultural practices.

"For years, the cotton sector has grappled with inconsistent messaging, which has hindered farmers from reaching their full potential. The Harmonized Cotton Extension Manual addresses this by providing unified, evidence-based guidance that will undoubtedly enhance productivity and sustainability across Zambia's cotton landscape," said Pamidzai Bota, Solidaridad's Regional Programme Manager for RS! Cotton and Textile.

THE MANUAL THAT CONNECTS A SECTOR

Zambia's cotton sector, which once supported over 250,000 smallholder farmers, has suffered a sharp decline. By the 2024/25 season, the number of active cotton farmers dropped below 100,000, and national production fell to just 5,000 metric tons, a dramatic decrease from the previous season's 10,000 MT and the 30,000 MT in 2022/23. Historically, Zambia produced between 60,000 and 100,000 MT annually. This decline is attributed to poor agronomic practices, inconsistent extension services, climate change impacts, and unfair market pricing.

"This manual is more than a document; it is a bridge connecting knowledge to action. By harmonizing extension practices, we ensure that all farmers, regardless of their location, have access to consistent and effective guidance. This is a pivotal moment for Zambia's cotton sector," added Humphrey Nxumalo, Head of Programmes, Solidaridad Southern Africa.





A PATHWAY TO PRODUCTIVITY GAINS

The Harmonized Cotton Extension Manual is poised to change the game. Zambia's current smallholder yields average 300 kg per hectare, far below the sector's potential. With the adoption of good practices promoted in the manual, such as land preparation, timely planting, integrated pest management, and post-harvest handling, farmers could potentially raise yields to 800–1,000 kg/ha.

For instance, if just 20,000 smallholder farmers adopt the manual and each cultivates 1 hectare, national production from this group alone could grow from 6,000 MT to 16,000–20,000 MT. If scaled to 50,000 farmers, the country could reach 40,000 MT within a few seasons, an eightfold increase from current levels. This recovery would not only restore Zambia's cotton industry to its former strength but also revitalize rural livelihoods and strengthen export competitiveness.

Beyond yields, the manual will also help reduce input waste, improve cotton quality for better market pricing, and enhance income security. By equipping extension agents and lead farmers with the right knowledge, Zambia can begin to close the productivity gap and build resilience in the face of climate uncertainty.

AN OPEN BOOK TO EMPOWER FARMERS

Lwisya Silwimba, Director of the Cotton Development Trust, praised the collaborative effort behind the manual: "This showcases the strength of partnerships in driving sector-wide improvements. The standardized approach ensures extension officers and farmers alike are equipped to transform the cotton sector."

Sunduzwayo Banda, CEO of the Cotton Board of Zambia, emphasized the manual's accessibility. "This book is designed with the farmer at its core. It simplifies processes step-by-step, from zero to 100, to minimize confusion and make things easier for our farmers."

Dr. Chizumba Shepande, Director in the Ministry of Agriculture, described the launch as a "significant milestone in Zambia's cotton sector." He emphasized that cotton is more than just a crop; it's a pillar of rural economies, and this manual offers a path to doubling or even tripling yields through improved agronomic practices. With enhanced cotton quality and sustainability, Zambia's farmers can gain better access to domestic and international markets—promoting environmental conservation and long-term prosperity.

The launch event in Lusaka brought together government officials, farmer representatives, and private sector partners. Demonstrations showcased how the manual would be used in the field—turning knowledge into action.

PROVEN METHODS AND PRACTICES

In closing, Dr Chizumba Shepande, Director - Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture (Zambia) described the launch of the Harmonized Extension Manual and Farmer's Cotton Guide as "a significant milestone in Zambia's cotton sector." He added that cotton is not just a crop, but a livelihood for thousands of families and a pillar of the nation's rural economies.

"By adopting the methods and practices outlined in this manual and guide, we can achieve higher yields, doubling and even tripling productivity through improved agronomic practices. We can also achieve enhanced quality, producing cotton that meets international standards, thereby increasing market competitiveness and sustainability, promoting environmentally friendly practices that preserve our soil and ecosystems for future generations," concluded Dr Shepande.

The launch event in Lusaka was attended by key stakeholders from the agricultural sector, including government officials, private sector representatives, and farmer leaders. Demonstrations of the manual's practical applications were a highlight, illustrating how it will be implemented in the field to improve yields and livelihoods.

The Harmonized Cotton Extension Manual embodies Solidaridad's commitment to empowering smallholder farmers through sustainable, inclusive, and innovative solutions.

For instance, if just 20,000 smallholder farmers adopt the manual and each cultivates 1 hectare, national production from this group alone could grow from 6,000 MT to 16,000–20,000 MT.





WASTE TO WONDER

New partnership embraces biochar

Author: Friday Siwale, Programme Manager



NEW OPPORTUNITIES FIRE UP

Solidaridad (Zambia), Kvuuno, and Planboo have formed an alliance to bring biochar technology to Zambian smallholder farmers. This collaborative effort aims to enhance soil health, increase crop yields, and mitigate climate change by sharing sustainable agricultural practices with farmers and communities for a more resilient future.

For years, farmers in Zambia burned cotton stalks in line with government policy aimed at breaking pest and disease cycles, an approach that led to the burning of over 200,000 hectares of land annually. Recognizing the missed opportunity, the alliance is now equipping farmers to convert this waste into a powerful resource: biochar.

Biochar is created by heating plant material at high temperatures without oxygen, a process called pyrolysis. This yields a lightweight, porous charcoal-like substance that locks in carbon and can dramatically improve soil structure, water retention, and nutrient availability. For smallholder farmers, biochar is not just an input, it is a game changer.



SEEING RESULTS ON THE GROUND

The impact of biochar is already visible in Zambia's cotton fields. Traditionally, cotton yields in the region have ranged between 300 kg to 600 kg per hectare, well below the variety's full potential of 2.5 tons. However, with the integration of biochar, some farmers are now recording yields as high as 800 kg to 1.5 tons per hectare, more than doubling their output in some cases.

For early-maturing maize varieties, the average yield has typically hovered between 1 to 2 tons per hectare. The introduction of biochar has pushed yields even further, with some farmers now harvesting 4 to 5 tons per hectare, a major leap toward the 8-ton potential of these varieties. These figures highlight biochar's role not only in improving food security but also in increasing incomes and reducing vulnerability to climate shocks.

BUILDING ON SUSTAINABLE FOUNDATIONS

Solidaridad is already working in Ghana to promote the use of biochar in cocoa production, and in Zambia, this innovation is being integrated into the cotton sector through the Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) programme. P2P, a seven-year initiative (2023-2029) supported by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, promotes climate-smart farming systems such as intercropping, water-use efficiency, and conservation agriculture, with biochar now a critical addition to this toolkit.



PARTNERING TO FIRE UP SOLIDARITY

“Biochar represents an important step toward sustainable agriculture in Zambia, and we’re thrilled to partner with Planboo to empower farmers with this sustainable practice,” said Shungu Kanyemba, former Managing Director of Solidaridad Southern Africa.

Planboo, an organization dedicated to scalable and impactful biochar solutions, brings its technical expertise to the partnership, helping ensure that biochar production is not only environmentally sound but also economically viable for farmers.

“Biochar is more than just a soil enhancer; it’s a tool for climate action,” noted Eilidh Dempsey, Supply Coordinator of Planboo. “By adopting biochar technology, Zambian farmers can increase their crop yields, remove thousands of tonnes of CO₂, and generate vital carbon finance in the region.”

Kvuno, the third partner in the initiative, plays a key role in farmer outreach and training. As a social enterprise committed to inclusive innovation, Kvuno equips farmers with biochar production skills and connects them to sustainable markets.

“Kvuno is committed to equipping farmers with tools that transform their livelihoods,” said Lydia Banda, Regional Operations Lead at Kvuno. “This partnership will enable farmers to improve soil health, increase yields, and benefit from carbon credits. It’s a win for both the environment and the community.”



SUSTAINABLE FUTURE TAKES ROOT

The introduction of biochar in Zambia is more than a technical intervention, it’s a powerful convergence of climate resilience, economic opportunity, and community empowerment. As farmers witness the visible improvement in their yields, the shift from burning to biochar is gaining momentum, lighting a path toward more sustainable and profitable agriculture.

The collaboration with Kvuno and Planboo builds a strong foundation for future work to promote sustainable agriculture and combat climate change. With continued scale-up and integration into national policy and extension systems, biochar could soon become a cornerstone of Zambia’s transition to climate-smart farming.



By adopting biochar technology, Zambian farmers can increase their crop yields, remove thousands of tons of CO₂.





RANGELANDS

Hooves for Sustainability programme in Zambia



Authors: Mushota Chansa, Project Manager & Chilekwa Kunda and Gabriel Mwanza, Project Coordinators



RESTORING THE GRASSLANDS

The Hooves for Sustainability (H4S) programme, funded by The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust and implemented by Solidaridad Southern Africa in Zambia, is a beacon of transformation in rangeland and livestock management. Operating in Mazabuka, Namwala, and Monze districts, the project empowers communities through the adoption of climate-smart grazing systems, local governance, and infrastructure development, leading to a shift in mindset that is redefining rural livestock economies.

By the end of 2024, the programme had trained 1,118 farmers, 546 men and 572 women, in practices such as communal rotational mapping and grazing, holistic land and livestock management, compost making, livestock disease prevention, and basic veterinary first aid. A significant outcome is that rotational grazing has been implemented by over 75% of the targeted 2,429 households, benefiting an estimated 10,000 additional households in all three project sites.

One standout case is Chunka Village, Monze district, where rotational grazing was formally launched by the Permanent Secretary and the Chief Representative. Today, the entire village adheres to structured grazing cycles. Similarly, in Itebe Village, Mazabuka district, the community has reported five consecutive years without grass burning except for special reasons and with permission from the traditional leaders, leading to visible regeneration of native grasses and the return of biodiversity such as rabbits, antelopes, butterflies in the Kafue Flood Plains and other palatable species not seen for years such as Rice grass (*Oryza longistaminata* A. Chev & Roehr) and Paspalum (*Paspalum notatum* Flügge).

GOVERNANCE IN ACTION: BACKED BY CHIEFS

A rangeland ecology consultant, Mr. Kawonga Kalipochi, confirmed an increase in species diversity across the Kafue Flats between 2019 and 2024, attributed directly to the rotational grazing practices. To date, over 82,000 ha of land have been put under sustainable management.

The improved ecological conditions have boosted livestock productivity and incomes. Calving rates have increased by 85%, livestock body conditions have improved, and disease incidences have dropped. As a result, milk production has surged, leading to the establishment of two new milk collection centers in Itebe village, which are generating regular income for farmers. In economic terms, cattle are now fetching up to 60 ZMW/kg in the informal market, double the standard 30 kwacha/kg, due to their improved condition. Some heifers aged 1.5 to 2 years are consistently selling at 37 ZMW/kg. Farmers report that this income enables them to buy school uniforms and pay fees for their children, purchase food, and invest in farming infrastructure such as livestock holding pens, as well as community market centre facilities like caretaker houses, among other improvements.





CHANGING LIVES ONE HOOF AT A TIME

The programme also supported the formation of 12 governance committees: eight in Namwala, two in Monze, and two in Mazabuka. Each site has two committees, a Natural Resource Committee and a Marketing Committee, each with 10 members trained in leadership, financial literacy, and rangeland management. These committees introduced community bylaws with traditional leaders' backing.

Examples of these include:

- 500 ZMW fines for grazing animals in resting zones
- 1,000 kwacha fines for burning grass or illegal fishing
- Mandatory spraying of livestock, with 50 kwacha fines per animal for non-compliance
- Vaccination by-laws for diseases like Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and a penalty of 50 ZMW per animal for non-compliance

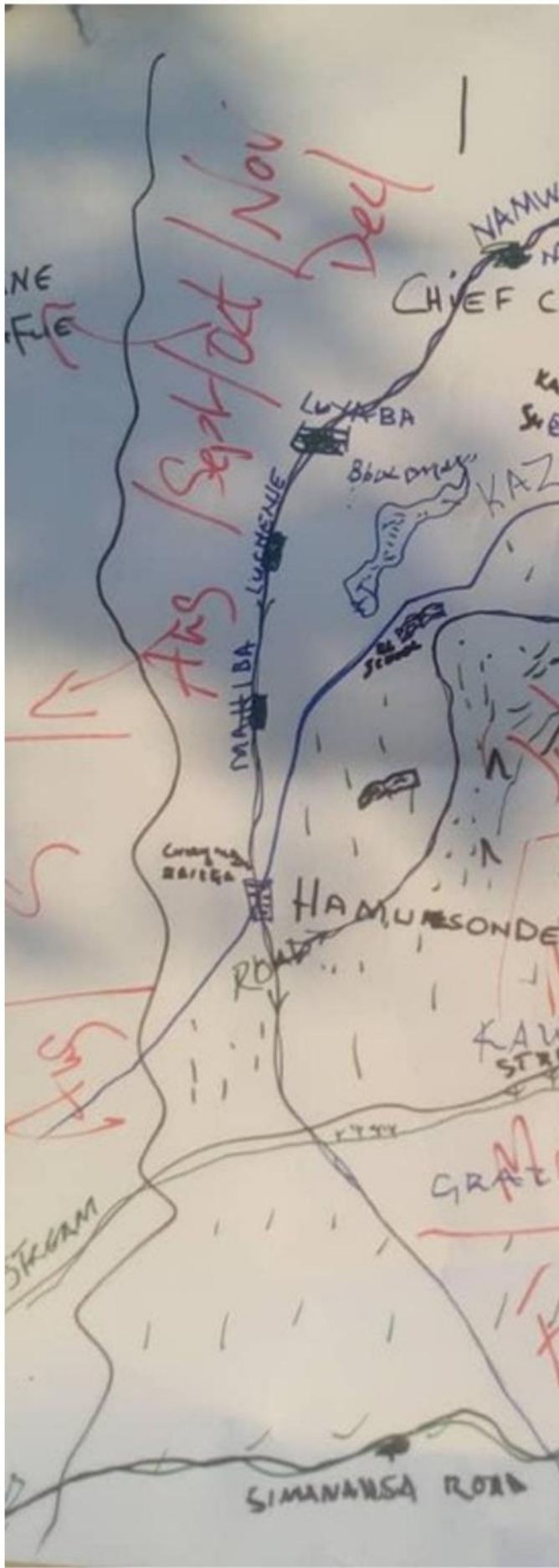
Importantly, enforcement is taken seriously, even Chiefs and other prominent individuals have been fined for violations, reinforcing accountability. In Bambwe Village, the Natural Resource Committee introduced a rotational bylaw mandating seasonal livestock movement from the lowlands to the uplands between 15 February and 15 May 2024. This system has significantly reduced overgrazing and improved water conservation.

The community's strong organization also enabled some of our groups from Itebe Village to secure a ZMW 1.5 million grant through the World Bank-supported Zambia Agribusiness and Trade Project. Once disbursed, the funds will be used to expand market centre infrastructure by installing an additional water tank alongside the one provided by the project, constructing a livestock holding pen, and setting up a sunflower oil sheller, further strengthening the agricultural value chain.

Beyond infrastructure, the transformation is social and psychological. The Itebe farmers now see livestock as a source of income and security, not just cultural pride. The mindset shift has seen communities self-fund Dip chemicals used in spray races for the past 3 years, re-invest market center income, and take pride in environmental stewardship.

Look-and-learn visits, including a trip to the Africa Centre for Holistic Management in Dimbangombe, Zimbabwe played a catalytic role in shifting mindsets. The visits included six Chiefs, one Chief's representative from Zambia's Southern and Western Provinces, three government officials, and the project team. Chiefs like Chief Mukobela of Bambwe Village and Chief Nalubamba of Namwala District, who were initially hesitant, are now champions of rotational grazing.





BENEFITS OF THESE TRANSFORMATIONS

Chief Nalubamba has gone a step further by proposing and committing to lead a workshop for fellow Chiefs and senior headmen, helping to drive rangeland reform from the top down. Meanwhile, Chief Mukobela has implemented rotational grazing on his own farm, setting an example that has inspired his community to follow suit.

The benefits of these transformations are rippling outwards. H4S project sites were not affected by the 2024 anthrax outbreak that devastated many other areas, a testament to improved land and cattle health practices. Buyers like Furrer Foundation are targeting these communities for sourcing 2,000 healthy heifers, and government stakeholders are considering designating these areas as beef export zones to markets like Angola.

The improved marketing infrastructure in Itebe Village and economic activity have attracted services like mobile money booths, and veterinary supply outlets are emerging at market centers, further strengthening the ecosystem. Due to the outcomes and impact of the project, the H4S project has gained great visibility across the country and partners and stakeholders such as Grassroots Trust Foundation, Rescope Organisation, GIZ, Melindika, Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAABS), the Government of Zambia, Furrer Foundation, ADRA and NGO Wash Forum have shown keen interest in the project.

The H4S initiative is not merely a project, it is a movement that is restoring ecosystems, improving incomes, and instilling dignity and agency in rural livestock communities. The results reflect what happens when local knowledge, inclusive governance, and strategic support converge to create change that truly matters.

Farmers are not just preserving the environment – they're improving their livelihoods. According to Chilekwa Kunda, cattle now fetch premium prices: 1.5 to 2-year-old heifers are selling for up to ZMW 60/kg in informal markets, a marked increase from the previous ZMW 30/kg. Milk production has surged, prompting the establishment of two new collection centers.

The improved body condition of livestock and higher calving rates have enabled farmers to see cattle as business assets. "Farmers are using income to buy food, uniforms for their children, and reinvest in their farms," Kunda reported. Disease outbreaks have significantly reduced; notably, project areas remained untouched by the national anthrax outbreak due to strict spraying and rotational practices.



KALOLO & SONS

Smallholder avocado farming morphs into a thriving enterprise in Zambia

Author: Vincent Mofya, Senior Project Manager



GREATNESS IS LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

In Zambia's Chongwe District, one farmer's journey is redefining the potential of sustainable agriculture. Mr. Goodson Kalolo, a 75-year-old avocado farmer, has transformed his land and livelihood through organic farming practices, supported by Solidaridad's Practice for Change project funded by the Sustainable Economic Development Department (DDE) of the Netherlands. This success story highlights how embracing environmentally friendly methods not only enhances productivity but also empowers communities whilst conserving the environment.



ADOPTING SUSTAINABILITY

The results of the organic farming practices were immediate. By 2021, Mr. Kalolo had sold 12 tonnes of avocados. In 2022, that number increased to 18 tonnes, with each avocado averaging 300 grams, up from 250 grams the previous year. "It's a huge difference," he says. "Not only am I making more money from the fruit, but I'm also selling 12,000 seedlings and 6,000 scions a year, which gives me an additional income stream."

With the current market price of avocados at ZMW 10 per fruit and seedling prices ranging between ZMW 120 and ZMW 155, Mr. Kalolo's enterprise continues to grow steadily and generate significant income annually. These earnings represent more than just commercial success, they signify a model of resilience and empowerment built on climate-smart agriculture.

The impact of the project has gone beyond improving his avocado production. By adopting these practices, Mr. Kalolo has become a leader in his community, sharing his knowledge with other farmers. His farm has also served as a demonstration plot, showcasing how sustainable farming practices can boost both productivity and income.





SHARING KNOWLEDGE WITH OUR FARMERS

Solidaridad's approach not only focuses on individual success but also on building community capacity. Mr. Kalolo, now a leader-farmer, has become a role model, guiding fellow farmers in adopting best practices. His farm has grown from just a subsistence operation to a thriving enterprise since 2017 as a result of Solidaridad's focus on creating entrepreneurial farmers.

"Mr. Kalolo's success has become a shining example of how smallholder farmers can improve their productivity sustainably," says Sheila Garakara, Solidaridad's Zambia Country Manager. "By focusing on holistic practices, we not only increase yields but also empower farmers to become leaders in their communities."

The financial success of the Kalolo enterprise has not merely increased household income, it has redefined what is possible for a smallholder farmer in Zambia. With significant annual income from fruit, seedlings, and scions, Mr. Kalolo has used this momentum to build an ecosystem of growth, dignity, and opportunity.

At the heart of his transformation is strategic reinvestment. He purchased a residential plot in Chongwe's peri-urban area and constructed a 7-roomed, fully furnished home, offering his family a secure and dignified lifestyle. At his rural homestead, where the avocado enterprise was born, he built a second three-bedroom house, installed a solar system, and sunk a borehole to ensure a reliable water supply.

To enhance nursery productivity, he invested in a micro-jet irrigation system. He also acquired two delivery vehicles, which are operated by his son, enabling them to reach customers across Zambia efficiently. These investments have improved production efficiency and market reach.

Significantly, Mr. Kalolo has used his income to pay university tuition fees for his grandchildren, demonstrating the intergenerational impact of his success. He also employs women in his nursery to graft seedlings, creating local jobs and promoting gender inclusion in agribusiness. His enterprise is not only transforming his family's economic status but also contributing to community development.

Not only am I making more money from the fruit, but I'm also selling 12,000 seedlings and 6,000 scions a year, which gives me an additional income stream.



PASSING ON GENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

One of the most inspiring aspects of Mr. Kalolo's story is his dedication to passing on his agricultural knowledge to the next generation. His son, Kelly Kalolo, and two grandchildren are now actively managing the family enterprise. Under his mentorship, Kelly leads consultancy services, provides grafting and budding expertise, manages the farm, and oversees marketing and logistics.

Mr. Kalolo's family has become a national reference point in avocado farming, offering paid training and technical support to other farmers and organizations. This is part of a growing replication movement, with NGOs and institutions adopting the Solidaridad-supported Kalolo model as a blueprint for sustainable farming.

CO-CREATING A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ALL

Today, Mr. Kalolo's farm is thriving. His increased income has allowed him to support his family's educational needs, acquire assets, and reinvest in his business. Looking forward, he plans to continue scaling his operation while passing down his farming knowledge to the next generation.

His story is a testament to how sustainable farming can improve both financial well-being and community resilience. Through Solidaridad's support, smallholder farmers like Mr. Kalolo are not just growing crops; they are cultivating a future of prosperity, sustainability, and shared success.





INFLUENCING POLICY

Cultivating safe food systems

Author: Friday Siwale, Programme Manager



FOOD SAFETY IS A RIGHT FOR ALL OF US

For years, Zambia's horticulture sector has struggled with power imbalances, weak policies, and poor resource management, leading to unsafe food in markets and homes. At times, soil may contain pathogens through poor soil management arising from the application of untreated manure and when crops come into contact with contaminants in the soil, particularly leafy and root vegetables, they can also absorb these contaminants and hence leading to unsafe food for consumption.

Furthermore, pesticide residues on fresh produce pose serious health risks, while smallholder farmers lack access to fair markets and technical knowledge on safe food production. Recognizing these challenges, Solidaridad steps in to create lasting change.

Through its RECLAIM Sustainability! Africa Foods (RS! Africa Foods) project, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Solidaridad convened multi-stakeholder dialogues to draft Zambia's first-ever Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) standard, ZAMGAP, ensuring that fruits and vegetables are produced sustainably and safely.

The initiative engaged key players, including the Zambia Bureau of Standards (ZABS), Zambia Agricultural Research Institute, and the University of Zambia, to set a benchmark for safe food production. Solidaridad also partnered with AAU Technical to train lead farmers and extension officers, while research institutions conducted chemical residue analyses to assess contamination levels.

A STEP TOWARDS SAFETY...

The impact is expected to be transformative. With ZAMGAP now approved and gazetted by the ZABS Board of Directors, farmers will have clear guidelines to adopt safe production methods, ensuring healthier food reaches consumers.

"This milestone is not just about policy change, it's about protecting lives," says Sheila Garakara, Zambia Country Manager for Solidaridad. "Farmers now have the tools to grow safe food, and consumers can trust that what's on their plates won't harm them. This is how we build a sustainable food system."

Despite challenges such as ethical clearance delays and limited local laboratory facilities, Solidaridad's commitment never wavered. "Collaboration was key. By bringing together government agencies, researchers, and the private sector, we've created a roadmap for safer food production. Now, our focus is on driving implementation and scaling up, and ensuring that every farmer in Zambia has access to these standards," Garakara adds.

With ZAMGAP paving the way, Zambia is on the path to a safer, more sustainable food future. We're working with the Zambia Bureau of Standards (ZABS) and the Ministry of Agriculture to train extension officers who can then train farmers nationwide. Together, we can do our bit to bring sustainable agricultural change in Zambia.

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Civil society organisation enhances Zambian agriculture sector

By David Hombach
Features Reporter

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International network and civil society organisation Solidaridad is making headway in overcoming food security challenges in the Zambian agriculture sector by providing climate, financial and technical support to small-scale farmers and small and medium-sized and enterprises (SMMEs). To avert the impacts of climate change on agriculture – such as droughts and floods that contribute to food insecurity – Solidaridad, in partnership with smallholder farmer service provider Kvuno, is giving smallholder farmers and women in agriculture better access to input, training, services and market opportunities, says Solidaridad Zambian country manager Sheila Garakara.

Solidaridad To Present On Strengthening AGRI-FOOD Systems At COP29 In Azerbaijan

November 22, 2024

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Zambia farmers to benefit from sustainable livestock management practices project

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By Kilimo News July 5, 2024



Biochar initiative to support Zambia smallholder farmers

Home » Science and technology » Biochar initiative to support Zambia smallholder farmers

By Kilimo News December 25, 2024



Ruffling [Gender Norm] feathers to promote inclusivity and empowerment in Zambian agriculture

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Published July 5, 2024



POULTRY POWERS CHANGE FOR WOMEN IN ZAMBIA

By Kilimo News

In Zambia, development partners Kvuno and Solidaridad renew efforts to sustain smallholder farmers and build out value chains for small and medium-sized businesses. Sheila Garakara, Solidaridad's Country Manager for Zambia, has put a special focus on women's participation in her work to support 'impact investments' in the country's future.



ZIMBABWE:

Country Spotlight

Author: Nozipho Ndlovu, Regional Programme Manager



EXEC COUNTRY FOREWORD

Zimbabwe stands at the crossroads of innovation and resilience. Amid economic volatility, Solidaridad Southern Africa's work has focused on enabling smallholders to tap into regional markets, digital platforms, and inclusive value chains.

Through the SADC SIPS programme, entrepreneurs in the leather and footwear sectors, many of them women and youth, are gaining skills, accessing finance, and formalising their businesses.

The national footprint is expanding. In 2024, more than 120 entrepreneurs benefitted from digital design training, improved market access, and exposure to cross-border trade opportunities.

From rural cooperatives to virtual design studios, these interventions are turning local talent into export-ready enterprises. Zimbabwe's strategic location and participation in regional industrialization make it a vital link in Solidaridad's Southern African impact chain.

More than 120 entrepreneurs benefitted from digital design training, improved market access, and exposure...

Zimbabwe speaks to the region as a case study in resilience, especially in linking enterprise incubation to regional value chains. We would like to thank our funding partner, the European Union through SADC SIPS, for enabling us to make a difference.

Whether it's designing footwear or processing hides, the country's story underscores the power of inclusive innovation and structured enterprise development to reduce poverty and create sustainable livelihoods.

Regards,

Nozipho Ndlovu





MAGICAL HEELS

A life-changing pair of shoes

Author: Liberty Muleya, Project Coordinator



IT'S NEVER TOO LATE FOR NEW GROWTH

A pair of shoes can change your life: ask Cinderella, David Manatsa (35), Nicole Sibanda (22), and Philisiwe Sibanda (24). Unlike in the internationally acclaimed magical fairy-tale, Manatsa and the Sibandas from Zimbabwe are living testament to the power of dreaming awake, gaining exposure, validation and victory.

All instigated by a pair of shoes and empowerment by the Support to Industrialization & Productive Sectors (SIPS) Programme funded by the European Union (EU) through Southern African Development Community (SADC) and implemented by Solidaridad.

“I won’t complain about the money that we made in the four days of exhibiting at the 2024 Zimbabwe International Trade Fair. Even better, we won a prize for our contributions there! Having the SIPS umbrella was a huge advantage because it allowed clients to trust us. It gave clients the backing that we were the real deal and would not dash off with their money after placing orders.

A pair of shoes can change your life – ask Cinderella, David Manatsa (35), Nicole Sibanda (22), and Philisiwe Sibanda (24).

“Clients trusted us enough to place scores of orders – this would not be the case had we not been part of SIPS. Furthermore, it validated us as trusted professionals,” says Manatsa.

According to Manatsa, competing in regional, national, and international fairs is crucial for the leather sector in Africa because it propels innovation, opens up market access, links buyers and sellers and so much more. By aligning with global standards, African producers can enhance competitiveness, attract investment, and expand their presence in national and international markets.



STITCHING UP SOLE SUCCESS

Sibanda reinforced the growth in income that came from exhibiting at the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair. “The profit that I received from the sales generated in four days at the fair was equivalent to my monthly sales. I got a lot of orders – even greater than I can deliver because I lack the working capital to deliver on them. That is because most customers believe in buying the product fully done rather than depositing it before it’s done. I am so much better now in terms of marketing and improving my quality of work. I cannot thank the SIPS project enough,” adds Sibanda.

Sibanda’s award-winning journey in shoemaking is not an isolated case. She alleges that she was guided by Nomazulu Nguni (22), a young shoemaker whose skills were honed through a training programme in Bulawayo. She was inspired by Nguni’s success, which included expanding her business after training and participating in international workshops.

Convinced by the impact of the training programme from watching fellow peers who did it, she also signed up. Today, she too is counted among the youth awarded a trophy, showcasing the growth and opportunities fostered by the program under the Ministry of Youth Empowerment and Vocational Training in Zimbabwe.



I won’t complain about the money that we made in the four days of exhibiting at the 2024 Zimbabwe International Trade Fair. Even better, we won!

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER FOR GOOD

According to Sibanda, the training she received through the SIPS Programme was a game changer. Not only did it benefit her financially but it also reinstated a relentless drive for excellence within her.

It not only equipped me with advanced skills in shoemaking but also instilled in me the confidence to compete on national platforms. Being recognized at the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair is a validation of the hard work and dedication I’ve put into honing my craft.

“The SIPS Programme provided me with the platform to showcase my talent and connect with broader markets. We learn from each other and are empowered to do our best. Even though we were awarded trophies, there are many like me from humble villages and communities whose lives are enriched,” says Nguni.





SADC SIPS HELPS SME

Shoemaster application

Author: Liberty Muleya, Project Coordinator



STRINGING ALONG TO NEW LANDS...

Owen Taruvinga has been part of the Harare Leather Cluster since 2016, spearheading the production of high-quality leather goods such as shoes, belts, and sandals. This dedicated team of five production members crafts approximately 40 pairs of formal shoes daily.

Taruvinga attributes their efficiency to the training received from Solidaridad Southern Africa, particularly the virtual design techniques from the Virtual Design Studio, which has revolutionized their pattern grading and time management processes.

“Mastering the core aspects of footwear production with Solidaridad has been transformative,” Taruvinga explains. “Learning virtual shoe designing and training with the Shoemaster app was a dream come true. It simplifies the cumbersome processes involved in shoemaking.”

The Shoemaster application, equipped with features for shoe designing, pattern grading, shoe costing, and raw material management, has significantly enhanced the accuracy of their designs. “The use of the Shoemaster app promotes accuracy in shoe designs and patterns and reduces the time spent on designing, allowing us to focus more on production and other critical tasks,” he adds.

DIVERSIFICATION AND EDUCATION ARE KEY

Taruvinga’s business has also diversified into making bags and corporate accessories, further expanding their market reach and fostering both personal and professional growth for him and his team. Their participation in various training programmes and export readiness initiatives has enriched their skills and contributed to their business success.

“With the Ministry of Agriculture, I learned a lot about good animal management and husbandry practices. Retaining the best hides without using hot branding and avoiding barbed wires for kraals are crucial for maintaining high-quality leather,” Taruvinga notes. Despite the progress, Taruvinga acknowledges the challenges faced by shoemakers in the region.

“SMEs in shoemaking in the SADC region are still lagging behind in competitiveness. There’s a lack of diversity in the raw materials available to us, especially in Zimbabwe,” he says. Taruvinga believes that targeted support programmes from organizations like Solidaridad could make a significant difference.





PAVING A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD

The training and improvements, empowered by the Support to Industrialization & Productive Sectors (SIPS) Programme funded by the European Union (EU) through Southern African Development Community (SADC) and implemented by Solidaridad, came to fruition at the 2024 Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF), where Taruvinga's products garnered commendable business leads.

"The Shoemaker training has enabled us to present improved products and secure new business leads at ZITF," he says. However, he also highlights the broader issues affecting the industry, such as the high cost of raw materials and the lack of capital or financing options for shoemakers.

To address these challenges, Taruvinga suggests more initiatives to support SMEs in the leather value chain, such as collaboration platforms and participation in international expos and fairs.

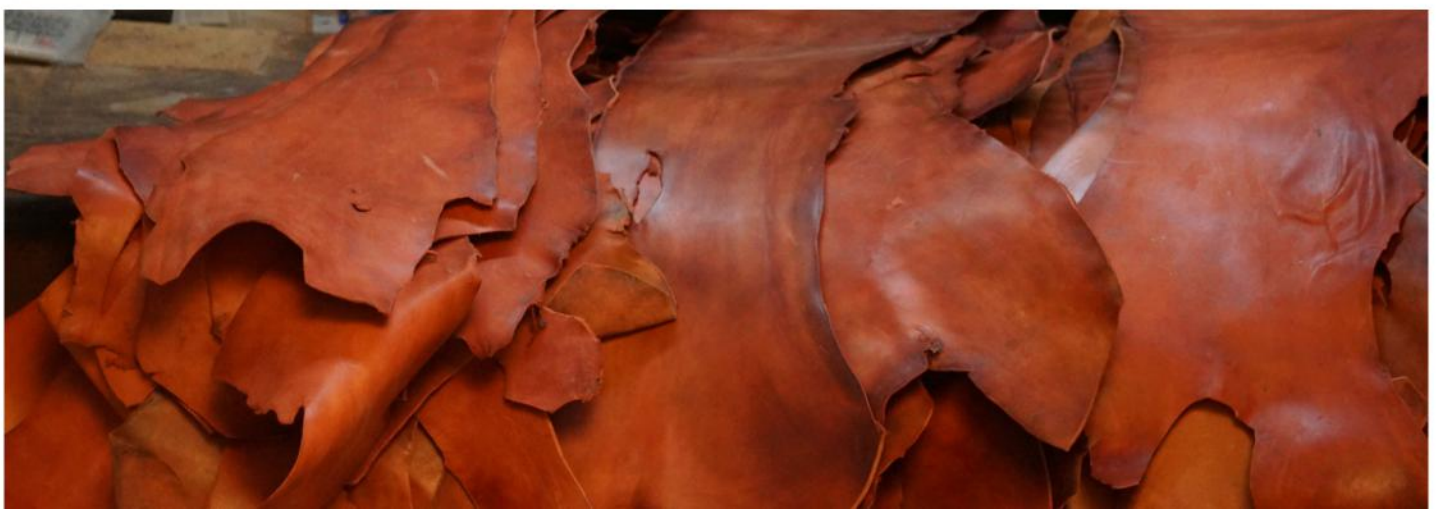
"We need more training programmes and follow-up support to fully grasp new skills and improve product quality for export readiness," Taruvinga emphasizes.

Despite these hurdles, Taruvinga remains optimistic about the future, hoping for continued support and growth opportunities in the leather industry.

Taruvinga attributes his success to empowerment by the Support to Industrialization & Productive Sectors (SIPS) Programme funded by the European Union (EU) through Southern African Development Community (SADC) and implemented by Solidaridad.



The Shoemaker training has enabled us to present improved products and secure new business leads.





MOM AND DAUGHTER

Set up shop

Author: Liberty Muleya, Project Coordinator



LEATHER STRAPS ZIM FAMILY TOGETHER

“Welcome to my shop. Correction, welcome to our shop,” smiles Otilia Ndlovu, the proud owner of a leather shop based in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. “I still pinch myself occasionally to remind myself that this is real. And yet, here you are. Here we are... In our shop.

“It’s all thanks to what the SIPS Project did for me. Your protective gear, training, exposure and networking did not go to waste. If I told you where I come from, you would not believe me. Even in the midst of the poverty in our country today, I am a shop owner, working side by side with my daughter Lethokuhle Ncube,” continues Ndlovu.

WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK MAMA

The poverty alluded to by Ndlovu is not an isolated case. Zimbabwe’s extreme poverty crisis saw nearly half of the population living in extreme poverty by 2020, exacerbated by economic mismanagement, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which according to the World Bank pushed an additional 1.3 million Zimbabweans into extreme poverty.

Rural areas are particularly hard hit. According to the BTI Transformation Index of the 2024 Zimbabwe Country Report, over 4 million people require food aid as of 2022, largely due to poor agricultural yields and economic instability. Job creation is, therefore, of paramount importance especially for women and children, vulnerable and the disabled.

FOUNDED ON INCLUSIVITY

Ndlovu is grateful to the Support to Industrialization & Productive Sectors (SIPS) Programme funded by the European Union (EU) through Southern African Development Community (SADC) and implemented by Solidaridad, and as means of paying it forward, she has incorporated previously disadvantaged and disabled people in her shop.

She attributes the focus on inclusivity to the SIPS Programme training where she was taught the value of adaptation, networking, incorporating others, market research, branding and using technology.

“The SADC-funded SIPS Programme gave me a chance and so I need to pay it forward. I have learned to evolve, especially since being introduced to the Virtual Design Studio (VDS) which rapidly fast-tracked the shoe-making process.



STRAPPING UP FOR TOMORROW

By working with a deaf and mute colleague, I learned to understand differently-abled people. I am still learning and seeing how our love for leather and craftsmanship can help us to feed our families, children and communities at large,” says Ndlovu.

According to Ndlovu, hiring disabled people is crucial for Zimbabwean small business owners as it promotes diversity and inclusion, fostering a positive workplace culture. It can enhance the business’s reputation, attracting a broader customer base. Moreover, disabled employees often bring unique perspectives and problem-solving skills. She is very appreciative of the workmanship, professionalism and quality brought by the inclusive approach.

“Can you see these shoes? I made them with these hands of mine,” signs Susu Munsaka, a deaf and mute colleague, as he proudly showcased his shoes displayed in Ndlovu’s shop counter.

“Today, I can feed my family and work on my passion because of what the SIPS Programme did for us. Look at our products. They speak for themselves. The quality has improved. We can sell across the board. Thanks to SIPS, I can fit in and find where I belong. I can also be a professional and add value to our community,” concludes Munsaka.



Today, I can feed my family and work on my passion because of what the SIPS Programme did for us.





WATCH THIS SPACE

Young shoemaker leads

Author: Sikhulekile Ncube, Project Manager



A REAL, PERSONIFIED SUCCESS STORY

Nomazulu Mguni, a 22-year-old shoemaker from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, has made remarkable strides in her craft after undergoing specialized training. The training enhanced her skills in designing various types of shoes, enabling her to produce high-quality footwear.

"Thanks to the programme, I learned to make quality shoes using environmentally-friendly materials. I now know a lot, even as a designer. I use technology taught to me by SIPS," says Mguni.

According to Mguni, this training was made possible by the Support to Industrialization & Productive Sectors (SIPS) Programme funded by the European Union (EU) through Southern African Development Community (SADC) and implemented by Solidaridad," Nomazulu acknowledges.

Her participation in a virtual designing workshop further enriched her expertise, equipping her with modern techniques in shoe design. This experience was instrumental in broadening her business horizons.

SADC workshop in Durban proved to be a turning point, connecting her with South African clients and opening up opportunities for increased regional shoe exports. The training and networking significantly boosted her sales, allowing her to diversify her product line to include safety and school shoes.

TRAINING YOUNG MINDS TO LEAD AND BE

"Thanks to the training, I am not just a shoe manufacturer; I am also a shoe designer. Before the training, I was just an ordinary person, but now I am an empowered, young business woman with the knowledge I acquired from these projects I am also fully committed to educating others so that we can proper the leather sector forward," says Mguni.

She also plays a pivotal role in the Bulawayo Leather Cluster, contributing to the production of school shoes for Edgars. This involvement not only supports local manufacturing but also showcases her integral role in both local and regional shoe markets. "Last year, when I was in South Africa at a BIO Africa Convention, I was educated on the importance of marketing. Thanks to the SIPS training and other interventions, I can now better market my business and can also better network with peers to educate and learn from them. I am now fully independent. I no longer rely anyone else," adds Mguni.

Mguni's journey reflects the impact of targeted training and regional collaboration. Her story is a testament to the transformative power of support programmes in fostering industrial growth and entrepreneurship. As she continues to expand her business, Mguni remains a shining example of how young entrepreneurs can thrive with the right support and opportunities.



ACCELERATION

Craftsman pulls the right strings

Author: Sikhulekile Ncube, Project Manager



SKILLFULLY TRAINED TO STITCH GROWTH

Herbert Muchineripi, a leather craftsman who is part of the Western Leather and Shoe Repairs, has witnessed remarkable growth and expansion after participating in ZimTrade's training programmes.

Operating for 19 years in the Central Business District, he has witnessed progress due to enhanced marketing strategies and refined techniques. "I am in business," Muchineripi states proudly. "I used to go for trade fairs and did a lot of leather exhibitions and trainings. I work with leather products. I make shoes, belts, wallets, and anything in leather."

The impact of ZimTrade's training and exposure is evident in the business's increased visibility and customer loyalty. Muchineripi's team, known for its efficiency, has diversified their range of leather products, appealing to a broader market.

This strategic approach has significantly boosted their monthly sales, increasing from \$750 to \$1,000. "I am operating in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe," Muchineripi says, highlighting his commitment to the leather industry. "I am in leather products; that is my profession."



EMPOWERED TO STEP UP

The success has enabled Western Leather and Shoe Repairs to open a new branch at the Tsholotsho center, further expanding their reach.

This growth showcases the tangible benefits and improved efficiency achieved through training. Muchineripi's journey reflects a sustainable success model, positioning Western Leather and Shoe Repairs as a prominent player in Zimbabwe's leather industry.

Muchineripi was empowered by the Support to Industrialization & Productive Sectors (SIPS) Programme funded by the European Union (EU) through Southern African Development Community (SADC) and implemented by Solidaridad.





AGAINST ALL ODDS

Scaling up, come what may

Author: Sikhulekile Ncube, Project Manager



JOSEPH THE GREAT LEATHER DREAMER

There are many Josephs who have made an indelible mark on the African continent and proudly represented their countries. There's Joseph Musonda, the Zambian professional footballer. Joseph Adewumi, the esteemed Nigerian academic and professor. Joseph Mukasa Zuza, the late Malawian Roman Catholic bishop. These are just a few. It is without reservations that we introduce you to Joseph Mukondo, a rising shoemaker who is proactively changing the game in Zimbabwe.

Mukondo is leaving a mark in the leather sectors of Zimbabwe. To date, he has received various orders because of his impeccable merchandise, strong workmanship and quality products.

"Firstly, I would like to thank you for the programme. I learned a lot about product development and designing. I used to design manually but now I am able to use the Virtual Design Studio (VDS) you put up at the Bulawayo Leather Cluster. That developed my products to be of better quality. I also learned a lot about teamwork and manufacturing. I wish I could get further support on working capital. Most SMEs who were part of this programme also learned a lot but they can't handle big orders because of a lack of working capital.

I encourage those who want to be involved with programmes like SIPS to be associated with bodies like the Bulawayo Leather Cluster as it helps to open doors," says Mukondo who has since received various "big orders" since upskilling with the training offered by the programme.

DEALING WITH LARGE RETAIL ORDERS

According to Mukondo, he has received various large orders, including but not limited to, getting an order from Edgars to produce 3,200 pairs of school shoes. He states that as a young Zimbabwean leather shoemaker who faces significant challenges without access to capital, he has difficulty purchasing materials, meeting production deadlines, scaling the business, and competing with larger, well-funded competitors.

"Yes, I have orders from Edgars, but I cannot do them since I don't have money to finance the order. Banks need collateral in the form of immovable assets, and I simply don't have that as yet. Thank you for teaching us how to go so much quicker and to think outside the box. Due to your help, I have scaled up and am now trying to find a resolution so that I can work on scaling up even more and competing with the larger companies. The difference that VDS has made is incredible," adds Mukondo, the brightly shining star turning leather into dreams coming true.

VDS provides training in modern design, benefiting 15 SMEs with improved quality and market presence. Participants like Mukondo and Trauma Chiwira showcase success, signaling a promising future for the industry. The VDS marks a crucial step in revitalizing Zimbabwe's leather sector, with ongoing innovation through the Digital Center of Excellence.



CROSSING BORDERS

Candidate steps into new territories

Author: Sikhulekile Ncube, Project Manager



STEPPING INTO NEW MARKETS TO SELL

Thanks to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) funded SIPS Programme and their trainings, I was able to identify a niche and fill it. “I was also able to network with peers in the industry, focus on marketing, and learn so much more than I knew before.

Today, I don’t just rely on selling my leather slippers to Zimbabwean clients. I also sell my merchandise in Botswana. As of last year to date, I have exported about 500 pairs of shoes,” says David Manatsa (35).

Regional trade agreements within SADC can facilitate smoother cross-border transactions and lower tariffs, enhancing competitiveness. It also offers Manatsa, who received a trophy at the 2024 Zimbabwe International Trade Fair, an opportunity to shine while proudly representing Zimbabwean products in other countries.

Manatsa attributes his success to empowerment by the Support to Industrialization & Productive Sectors (SIPS) Programme funded by the European Union (EU) through Southern African Development Community (SADC) and implemented by Solidaridad.

TAKING CHARGE OF OPEN MARKETS

He can now skilfully make shoes, belts and other leather merchandise. While he is grateful for the training, exposure and networking from being part of the programme as well as being under the Bulawayo Leather Cluster which helped him to gain access to machines, he highlights that challenges still exist.

Whether selling in Zimbabwe or in Botswana, Manatsa attributes access to finance as one of the biggest challenges for African shoemakers. “The exposure, training and skills gained by the programme gave us exposure and increased sales. The quality of my product is now at a level where I am able to get tenders. I once got a government tender for more than 1,000 pairs of shoes, but it is tough for young entrepreneurs to fulfil such orders because of a lack of access to finance to fulfil such big orders, says Manatsa.

The program’s emphasis on training and technology transfer has empowered SMEs and micro-enterprises to adopt eco-friendly practices, modernize their operations, and enhance product quality. By equipping young individuals with the necessary skills and resources, SIPS Programme is not only revitalizing traditional industries but also propelling them towards international standards of excellence.



Transforming African food systems through digital innovation (Solidaridad Network)

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) Shungu Kanyemba, Managing Director of Solidaridad Southern Africa and Candice Kroutz-Kabongo, Digital Innovations Lead for Solidaridad Southern Africa speak with the press at the Africa Food Systems Forum in Rwanda. [...] ... read full story



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African Leather Gets a New Shine: SIPS Programme Sparks Innovation

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Solidaridad is pleased to announce the implementation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Support to Industrialisation and Productive Sectors (SIPS) Programme. This five-year initiative, which commenced in 2019 and is coordinated by the SADC Secretariat, is financed to the tune of €18 million by the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF). As part of the broader SIPS Programme, we recognize the critical importance of enhancing the regional leather value chain in Africa, particularly in East and Southern Africa.

Under the auspices of SIPS, Solidaridad is implementing a 27-month project on promoting a competitive, inclusive and sustainable leather sector in Tanzania and Zimbabwe. This project aims at promoting green innovative solutions in the leather sector and creating market linkages for leather products at a domestic, regional and international level.

"Enhancing private sector participation in the regional leather value chain is a crucial step towards achieving sustainable industrialization and economic development in the SADC region. Through this project, we strive to build the capacities at SME tanneries to implement green tanning approaches, introduce new leather products, and digitally transfer technology to SMEs to improve their production as well as market linkages," says Humphrey Nxumalo, Head of Programmes for Solidaridad Southern Africa.

According to Nxumalo, some of the success stories attained by this programme include, but are not limited to:

- Improving the capability to design leather products through establishing Virtual Design Studios in Tanzania and Zimbabwe – for example, leather products that initially took a week to design can now be accomplished in an hour.
- The introduction of green tanning technologies which reduced the tanning process from one week to only one day, thereby promoting efficiency.
- Exposure to international exhibitions has connected some SMEs to international markets and improved their sales.
- SMEs attaining number one positions and winning awards at international trade fairs.
- SMEs being awarded contracts to supply school shoes to retailers.

Time to break cycles of violence in farming communities

Solidaridad urges continued action against gender-based violence in farming communities, highlighting the need to challenge harmful norms, foster safety, and build resilience

by Staff Reporter — 20th December 2024



Ending gender-based violence is key to thriving farms and sustainable supply chains. Solidaridad engages communities with education, resources, and advocacy, ensuring everyone feels safe and valued. Photo: Supplied/Feed the World

Solidaridad Calls For Robust Digital Innovations

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By Kimo News — September 10, 2024



Some Shona Business Development Managers of Solidaridad Southern Africa: Shungu Kanyemba (Managing Director Solidaridad Southern Africa) and Candice Kroutz-Kabongo (Digital Innovation Lead)

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