

Food and nutrition security in Malawi



Context

Malawian diets are primarily based on maize as a staple food. There are several reasons for this, including a lack of natural resources, poverty, and lack of knowledge. Children and women in particular suffer from under- and malnourishment as a result of an unbalanced diet and lack of dietary diversity. Many of the households are subsistence households. This means that they produce exclusively for their own needs. Therefore, the period between December and March, i.e. prior to the next maize harvest, is particularly problematic – especially for the impoverished rural population. Stunting rates (impaired growth resulting from chronic malnutrition) in Malawi have declined somewhat (from 47 percent in 2010 to 42 percent in 2014 for children under five years of age). Particularly pregnant women, mothers, young

children under two years of age as well as children in pre-school and primary school whose diets are insufficient and suffer the most - for example from iron and iron deficiencies. This situation is exacerbated by natural disasters, such as the El Niño phenomenon, as harvests are severely diminished by failing rainy seasons. With funding from the One World – No Hunger Initiative of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and in cooperation with government institutions and district administrations, GIZ generates networks and strategies. They target at lasting improvements to the nutritional situation of the people of Malawi, and of women and children in particular.

Activities in Malawi

- The project establishes 'nutrition groups' in primary schools and pre-schools and works together with health and agricultural advisors in order to convey nutrition and hygiene practices to children and their mothers. It also supports schools (e.g. school meals programmes and the installation of kitchens and sanitary infrastructure in schools).
- The projects strengthens the institutional capacities of the food and nutrition committees in the Dedza and Salima districts in terms of planning, management, coordination and monitoring of governmental and non-governmental organisations.

- The project feeds experiences into the national Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) process where they are discussed and evaluated by a broad community of experts with a view to making lasting improvements and problem-solving approaches.

Our objective

The project's aim is to ensure that currently food-insecure people in Malawi's Dedza and Salima districts, and in particular women of childbearing age and children, have access to sufficient and healthy food at all times, even in times of food crises.



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Region(s)

Dedza and Salima Districts in Malawi's Central Region

Duration

2/2015 – 12/2019

Budget

EUR 10.5 million (including EUR 3 million of 'El Niño' funds)

Implementation partners

Welthungerhilfe, Concern Universal, CARE International, VillageReach

Lead executing agency

Department of Nutrition, HIV and AIDS of the Ministry of Health of Malawi

Target group

15,000 women, 8,000 children under two years of age as well as approximately 38,000 primary school children



How we work in practice

The Dedza District is one of Malawi's 'breadbaskets'. Farmers in this district produce a great variety of foods in sufficient quantities. Nonetheless, food and nutrition insecurity has steadily increased. Children, who were already underweight at birth, generally only eat one or two meals a day. These meals normally consist of 'nsima', a kind of porridge made from maize meal and water. The other – nutritious – foods are being sold.

With the help of an experienced nutritionist, the project assists the Dedza and Salima Districts in incorporating the issue of nutrition into their development plans. During a GIZ workshop the agricultural advisor Chimweme Msukwa asks: 'Why do children in these areas suffer from hunger?'

Together with GIZ and non-governmental organisations, Msukwa aims to close gaps in the area of food and nutrition security.

One of the problems is that to date the villagers had often not been involved in the district administrations' problem solving processes. However, it is the villagers who best know their own needs and can articulate these. 'First and foremost we need a critical discourse in the communities in order to enable them to instigate change.' After all, the villagers are the engines driving development. In this way they will also benefit from their own breadbasket.



Results

In the Dedza and Salima District administrations, development workers assist this process by integrating the issue of food and nutrition security into food committees which bring together the health, agriculture and education sectors. This strengthens the role of the committees and allows for more effective planning, coordination and control of interventions.

One outcome of these interventions is the introduction of drip irrigation systems in schools. Now, fruits and vegetables can be harvested year-round and school children have at least one healthy meal a day.

Imprint

Editor

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Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
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February 2017