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Is it all in the detail? A Story of Transformation from Zambia



Ruairidh Waddell
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Greetings everybody from a very wet Lilongwe, Malawi.

The rains have started in earnest. It is my seven-year-old daughter Lucy's job to check the rain gauge after every downpour and it is the one chore that she gets excited about — *Lucy is very detail oriented*. After every rain, the rubber boots go on and out she goes with her notebook and pencil to record the rainfall. At breakfast this morning, I watched her work through her notebook for five minutes, adding up the figures, checking and re-checking her calculations, until she proudly announced that we had had 108 mm or 4.25 inches of rain in November. She further informed us that this, *according to her note book*, is the best start to a wet season in three years and so we give thanks. (We had another 38 mm over the weekend!)

In September, I travelled to Lundazi, Eastern Zambia with volunteer Mike Jette, who has walked alongside us for many years and assisted World Renew in teaching and rolling out the village savings & loans association (VSLA) concept across the region. We had just finished a three-day training for community volunteers from programs in Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia and were now headed to assist our partner, The Presbyterian Church of Central Africa, with a mini-evaluation of their VSLA program, looking at the finer details of the methodology in action.

As we travelled around from program to program, it became clear that none of the groups were exactly following the methodologies that had been taught, but rather had adapted them to suit their own individual needs and context. I was concerned. This is not the way they were taught; why were they not following the training materials as we had laid out?

But Mike gave me a "slap across the face," as he often does. He provided a timely reminder about why we are here. World Renew is all about help-



ing people to make the best decisions for themselves and for their community and then empowering them to take action. We *want* them to be innovative, to respond to their needs in their own way, to take ownership over their challenges and resources. We give them the tools, training, and freedom to do that and that is exactly what each of these communities have done. There I was, in contortions over the fact that my very precise and perfect methodology had been amended in favor of some modifications by the community *to better serve the community!*

Here is what Mike wrote about the same experience.

"I have been teaching and training the village savings and loan model since 2010. But this was the first time I got to see VSLA in action. While none of the groups operated exactly as taught, every one of them was transforming their members and their communities. In short, I was blown away ... [they] exceeded my deepest hopes."

And here are just a few of the testimonies we heard when we asked "How have VSLAs benefited you?"

- "Before, if I had money, I would spend it; now I save it."
- "I used to beg for money when I needed it. I don't have to beg now. My husband asks me for money!"
- "I've been able to start a business."

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Practicing Better Nutrition In Mozambique

A Story of Transformation



By Steve Sywulka
Team Leader
Southern Africa Team

With funding from Baker Health, on-the-ground support from the Anglican Diocese of Niassa in Mozambique, and a church reaching out to its community, beliefs and attitudes about nutrition are changing in the community of Chapitas. This slow and critical work is done person by person, with community members learning, applying, and then sharing nutritional advice that is making a real difference in the lives of children and families there. Here is the story of one of those changed minds changing the minds of others.



Helen with two of her children

Learning

One day Helen saw that some people in her village were receiving nutrition training. She went to watch, even though she wasn't one of the people selected to attend (typically one person from every tenth house is selected). Standing in the back, Helen listened intently to the teaching about three different kinds of food with different functions: strengthening, protecting, building. She learned that food is critical to a child's physical and intellectual development. At the end of the first day, she signed up to become a counselor. She went home and told her husband about it. He encouraged her to attend the rest of the week. "Even if I didn't get food there, I wanted to learn," she says.

Sharing

After the initial training, Helen started going from house to house to share what she had learned. The goal was to share with ten houses near her. "Some of the people didn't want to listen much," she laughs "but eventually they listened to me." With ongoing training Helen soon learned about things like breastfeeding and food frequency. She shared what she learned with her neighbors. Today, the neighbors talk about what Helen has taught them: the importance of eating well during pregnancy, how vital good nutrition is during the first 1000 days of a child's life, and the functions of different foods.

Applying

Helen did not just tell others. She started by making changes in her own household.

Her family now eats soy, fish, meat, beans, groundnuts, vegetables. Some of those items have to be purchased, but many are readily available. Thanks to the simple change of combining different kinds of foods, she and her husband can see that their children are growing better. There are big differences between their four children and other kids. "In the past, I didn't think much about feeding the children. I did what I learned from my parents, and fed my children just to satisfy their hunger, and nothing else. Before, I wouldn't feed the kids until lunch, unless we happened to have some nsima left over from the day before," explains Helen. "Now I understand my kids might need food at other times. I can give them banana, papaya, or orange."

Insights from the family

Helen's ten-year-old daughter Aidinha is a bit shy. She likes to design houses and wants to stay home when she grows up. She loves the taste of the porridge she gets now, enriched with groundnuts, beans, soya, or fish. Her mother learned how to prepare it during the cooking demonstration.

Helen's husband explains: "Since my wife learned about base, protector, and builder food groups, we have seen a big change. Before, the health center staff would tell us our children were underweight. Our children weigh the right amounts now. I like the flavor of the food now that we add fish and vegetables. It hasn't changed the cost much because we use locally available things, like nutritious leaves."

Challenges

Helen is now learning about other health topics beyond nutrition. While the lesson to enrich porridge to make it more nutritious is an easy one for her to teach, some of the concepts she shares seem more difficult for people to apply. For example, very few people take their sick loved ones to the hospital, which might be far away and is seen as a strange novelty. Instead, everyone seems to prefer a nearby traditional healer. This leads to many deaths and permanent injuries.

Helen sometimes wonders to herself: "What should I do when people don't want to listen to me? Should I go to other places?" Instead of being grateful and encouraging, some people in her community criticize her for doing this work without getting paid for it. This can be discouraging. But Helen plans to continue anyway. "I hope to do more and bigger things to see more changes in my community," she declares. "My job is not finished. I want to continue until everyone is practicing the things I taught them."

Helen gives the gifts of time and knowledge to her community. What are we giving?

Praise:

- Some rains have started
- The big evaluation in Mozambique went smoothly
- New staff members strengthen our team

Pray for:

- More progress in language learning
- Restful holidays for our team
- Congolese refugees entering Zambia



Church in Community

A Story of Transformation from Malawi

Faye Yu
Program Consultant
Malawi Team



During the summer of my freshman year, I attended an Intersarsity training where I learned how to study the Bible and lead small groups in reading, interpreting, and applying the Bible. Then, in my sophomore year, I led a small group Bible study in a coffee shop and, by the end of the year, got pretty good at it. But Bible study facilitation was not a skill that was going to help me in my job... *or so I thought.*

World Renew's Church in Community programs help church leaders and their congregations work to bring about positive changes for their larger community. *Together*, churches and communities identify a vision for their village. They prioritize the challenges that need to be addressed to achieve their vision, and identify the resources they have which could help them to develop and achieve the dreams they have for their entire community, not just themselves or their family or their particular church.

Church In Community programs encourage local churches to understand what it means to love their neighbors, especially the poor and vulnerable around them **and we can do this through Bible study.** The Bible has much to say about how we use our resources and what we should do with them. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a wonderful example of God calling us to sacrificially care for our neighbor. In the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000, God used one person's resources to address a wider need and the resources, though small, were able to do an amazing thing.

However, Bible studies are not common in the villages. I have heard some people say "only the Pentecostals have Bible studies". People do not get together to read and study together. Most Bible study leaders don't know how to ask questions to facili-

tate thinking and discussion, so Bible studies are often just another time for preaching. As a result, people are not given the chance to discover for themselves what the Bible is saying to them; people don't personally wrestle with how Jesus' teaching applies to life and their behaviors.

But we know that by studying the Bible together, church leaders and members in our Church In Community programs can better see God's call to work together and help one another and so become more convicted and more uplifted in their efforts to bring about positive change for their entire community.

So, for the past few months we have held trainings for partner staff and leaders from the community to deepen their understanding of the goal of church in community and to support them in their efforts. One of the topics we focused on was how to facilitate a good Bible study, how to encourage those who attend to think and wrestle with Bible. We acted out the Bible passage and read the passage aloud, so that those who don't have Bibles or are illiterate can still participate and *see and hear* the text. We talked about how to ask *observation, interpretation* and *application* questions.

As I led these sessions, my college Bible study facilitation lessons came flooding back! Who knew those "obscure" skills would be so useful to my work in the field now!

A couple of weeks ago I visited a Bible study in one of our Church In Community projects. I was curious to see how the staff person communicated what he had learned in our training to the leaders of the project. I was delighted to see that the Bible study leader had organized a drama to act out the story of the widow's oil

found in 2 King 4: 1-7. He had also prepared observation, interpretation, and application questions. Many people participated in the Bible study and shared how they want to apply what they had learned to their lives. Though the pastor was present, people still felt like they could contribute to the study. *I was very encouraged by what I saw* and prayed that people walked away with a deeper understanding of how even something as small as the widow's oil can be used by God to help what seems like a hopeless situation. Church In Community work is hard to do. It is challenging to work with other people to solve problems; it is hard to be generous when people around you not equally generous; it is hard to overcome jealousy, suspicion, and fear. It is easier to just take care of your own family; it is easier to do what you and your ancestors have always done. This way you know the results. To do something different and to care about your neighbor — that can be costly. We need your prayers.

- Pray that the leaders will be able to facilitate the Bible studies in engaging ways and that people can walk away from the study encouraged.
- Pray that people will love their neighbor and want to help them even though it could be costly for them.
- Pray that the leaders will develop and maintain a shepherd's heart and that they will be able to sacrificially give to their flock.
- Pray that God will speak to all the people who seek His words.

Thank you so much for your prayers and support.

-Faye

New Variety of Cassava Captures Interest of Farmers

A Story of Transformation from Mozambique



Juvêncio Mataria
Program Advisor
Mozambique Team

This year, World Renew and our local partner in Mozambique, the Diocese of Niassa, are bringing to a successful end a five-year sustainable livelihood program funded by Global Affairs Canada. In order to promote sustainable livelihoods, the program focused on food security and economic growth. The agricultural component of the project centered on conservation farming, in which we built on the capacities of local farmers while adding in knowledge of new agricultural techniques.

In order to ensure food security, as well as diet diversification, the program focused on vegetable, maize, and cassava production. However, in the province of Niassa, many farmers are losing interest in cassava production, since the local variety is vulnerable to pests and disease. Our program therefore introduced an improved cassava variety which is more resistant to pests and hardy enough to withstand prolonged periods of water shortage. Twenty-two experimental and propagation plots in the towns of Cobue, Lunho, and Mecanhelas allowed us to share new techniques with many cassava farmers in the province.

The success of these plots is best told by lead farmer, **Tereza Jose**. Forty-two years old and a mother of 7, Tereza has been a farmer for years. She and her hus-



band live in the community of Chissua, in the district of Mecanhelas.

"I was trusted by my community to be a lead farmer and run the experimental and propagation plot on cassava. Being a woman, it was quite a challenging and unique experience because few women are able to get those positions. That came with a huge responsibility looking at the reality in cassava production lately – poor productivity and low quality product. I also knew that, in the future, community members would rely on me for technology transfer and cassava stem supply."

With a local variety of cassava and traditional techniques, the crops grew slowly with no quality due to various pests and lack of rain. The spiritual and technical support we got from the field extension officer on planting, spacing, and the intercropping of cassava with cowpea or

other beans helped us to overcome doubt and carry out our work with joy and confidence.

We are now all enthusiastic about the improved variety as well as the new farming techniques. The new cassava variety is stronger and more resistant to pests and long periods of water shortage. The crop at the experimental plot is growing well and it is really encouraging. The way I look at it, we can easily foresee a good harvest with enough stems for three half-hectare plots. We have already identified the three farmers that we will share the stems with.

I look forward to teaching my children and my neighbors. I also pray that more people in this community and other communities adopt those techniques and practices."

(Continued from page 1)

- "I was able to buy one metal sheet for my house with each loan. I have now replaced my grass roof with a metal one."
- "I was able to buy a bicycle."
- "I now have money for school fees."
- "We have money for seed and fertilizer."

This is a small sample but hopefully you get the idea. I was especially touched by how much the women felt empowered by belonging to their groups. I wish I could describe the joy evident in each face. The success of the groups in these rural areas is contagious and people are clamoring for more.

I am still trying to process my initial reaction to the communities' adaptations to our program. Is it that everybody who knows something about VSLA says "don't mess with the system" or is it my *pride* (groups are not following MY methodology)? It is probably a bit of both.

I will continue to work through this but **the transformation of lives is evident, real, and overwhelming**. Far more important than the finer details, like the number of shares people are allowed to buy or a universal group contribution, is the fact that communities have taken ownership in the concept of village savings and loan associations, adapting to the benefit of their communities. They are facing their challenges together and working together to overcome *in their own way* – a way that honors each other, acknowledges their resources, and is set in the foundation of Jesus Christ.

A blessed Christmas to you all,

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