

Southern Africa Fresh from the Field

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The Rains Have Come



By Steve Sywulka
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The Thungo family, the Free a Family representative family for Southern Africa, has some big weather news to share: the rains have come!

One of the challenges that many families in Southern Africa face is unpredictable rainfall. Nasoweka Thungo and her children rejoiced as they sat under their thatched roof and watched droplets of rain water her crops. The rains are something to be thankful for as they help the plants grow. Nasoweka's corn crop is getting tall. Cowpeas, local beans, and nutritious lab-lab beans are growing in the soil between the corn stalks. The rain not only nourishes the soil, it also grows weeds! Nasoweka and her family have spent the last few months weeding—and there is still much to do!

Nasoweka's life is difficult. To earn money, she gathers firewood to sell or occasionally works as a day laborer on a nearby farm, but there isn't always work available. It is important for Nasoweka to get a good harvest from her work so she and her family will have enough to eat throughout the year.

Nasoweka's children have had some ups and downs in recent months. Simon, the oldest son, has been able to find occasional work, and he is paying for his own school expenses. When he has extra income, he also buys food and other essentials that he shares with his younger siblings. Nasoweka's son Muhammed started going to school very late this year, because Nasoweka had not been able to get work to buy him the clothes he needed for school. She is thankful that eventually she was able to find enough to allow him to return to school. She was also thankful that she had some money to use to pay for the medical treatment that her son Philipo needed when he broke his arm while playing with friends. His arm was in a sling for several weeks, but he is doing better.

Nasoweka has been getting supplemental food items from the local health center for her youngest son, Kingsley. He was quite malnourished,



Nasoweka's corn is growing much better, thanks to the assistance from World Renew.

but now that he is regularly eating nutritious porridge, he is starting to look healthier. Through World Renew's health programs, Nasoweka has also been learning to make nutritious food for her children. When she has money, she buys tomatoes to add to traditional corn porridge. Now that she has tomato plants growing in her garden, she won't always have to buy them. She also tried adding pumpkin leaves, soy, and peanuts to the porridge and her children really enjoyed it! She would also like to put eggs in her porridge, but they are too expensive to add on a regular basis.

Nasoweka is also putting her hygiene and sanitation training into practice. She recently made a tippy tap (a hygienic handwashing device) to help prevent diseases in her household. She has been learning about conservation agriculture techniques, too. She saved and replanted some of the sweet potatoes she received through World Renew last year, and they are growing well. Nasoweka has worked hard to grow corn using improved seeds she received from World Renew. She is thrilled that they look fantastic—much bigger than her neighbor's plants. She hopes her results will inspire others to try conservation agriculture techniques.

After two successive years of drought, Nasoweka's community is hopeful that this year their harvest will be plentiful. Please pray with us that it will be. Thank you for making it possible for families like the Thungos to have healthier lives and brighter futures through your support of Free a Family.

Transforming people's lives through sustainability programs

A Story of Transformation in Niassa Province, Northern Mozambique



Juvêncio Mataria
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More than 60 percent of the population of Niassa lives below the national poverty line, and rural areas are even poorer, with no easy access to financial services. World Renew and its partner in this area, Diocese de Niassa, are setting up Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) with the aim of improving local financial intermediation and helping farmers in periods of waiting after planting and in times of uncertainty about harvest outcomes.

The food security and livelihood program introduced savings and credit strategies to enable farmers to have access to capital for improving their farming activities. Farmers joined as individuals and as groups, gaining access to credit facilities that will allow them to diversify their entrepreneurial activities. Further, farmers are becoming resilient and more able to withstand drops in crop prices during harvest time and to raise higher profits for their produce.

The following story is from a farmer, Estela Jaime. Born in 1967 in Chissaua, she has five children and 12 grandchildren and is now living in Nabuzi community, Mecanhelas District (Niassa Province). Estela Jaime has been a farmer for 32 years, lives on her own, and has three farming fields.

Some years back I used to have good harvests in my fields, but when the soil became weaker with no nutrients, the yield started dropping to a point where I barely harvested anything. And for almost 29 years things got even worse.

Since I depend solely on farming, my financial situation was not stable, and in 2015 the field extension officers came to my community with various ideas and activities, and I was one of the people who participated in the meetings. After the meetings the community members chose me to be a leading farmer. In the beginning I thought that what we learned would not work, but as the crops grew, we saw that the new techniques were making a difference.

With traditional techniques, the crops grow slowly due to lack of rain, but I am enthusiastic about the new farming



Estela Jaime on her maize and cassava farm

techniques in that crops are growing well despite a scarcity of rain. I hope to have a good harvest at the end of this agricultural season.

I was also trained in how to manage my finances through a Village Savings and Loan (VSLA), and with the help of loans I was able to start a small bakery business to improve my family income. I am now able to buy school materials and feed my children; I also bought farming inputs to be used in the Conservation Agriculture techniques, so as to increase my yield and fight against soil degradation.

I am glad to be part of the programs (Conservation Agriculture and VSLA-Savings), and I look forward to teaching my children and my neighbors. I also pray that more people in this community and other communities adopt these techniques and practices.

The increase of savings and credit obtained through the VSLAs has improved agricultural investments and income from small businesses. As rural farmers continue to cope with the growing challenges caused by climate change, VSLAs are a valuable tool to help them meet today's needs while preparing for an increasingly uncertain future.



Estela Jaime selling homemade cakes by the roadside

A gathering of a Village Savings and Loan Association



Finding Freedom from the Pressures of Transactional Sex

A Story of Transformation



Faye Yu
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Hamida and her seven siblings moved in with her grandmother after her parents passed away. Her grandmother, however, didn't earn much, and with eight more mouths to feed, she often ran short of money and the children went to bed hungry. Her income came from collecting branches from a nearby forest and selling it as firewood. Hamida began to help her grandmother sell firewood at the marketplace, and after a while she also decided to drop out of school. They didn't earn enough money to pay for school fees for all the kids, and Hamida thought attending school was a waste of time because it meant she had less time to help her grandmother sell at the marketplace.

It was not easy to earn money selling wood. Oftentimes Hamida did not earn enough at the marketplace to buy food for the family. Men began to approach her for sex. At first she ignored the requests, but she saw that other girls in the marketplace went along with it. When those girls didn't earn what was needed for the day from their goods trade, they would sleep with a man so that they could have enough money. Some of Hamida's friends also became involved in transactional sex. And one day when she was desperate, Hamida tried it as well. Then whenever she was short of money, she would sleep with men. That was over four years ago.

Last year World Renew and its partner, Word Alive Commission on Relief and Development, started to reach out to girls in Hamida's village who were engaged in transactional sex. At first she was suspicious of the program and the girls group that was formed in her village, but she learned that it was a safe place to ask questions and get information. In the group Hamida met other girls who had experiences similar to hers, and they could discuss their situations together. The group also encouraged Hamida to get HIV tested, so now she knows her status. Through the help of this group, she has stopped engaging in transactional sex.

Last November, Hamida attended a weeklong Stepping Stones training orga-



nized by World Renew. She learned how to lead small groups to talk about love, sexual reproductive health, and cultural practices that are harmful to girls. Not only was it a fun and educational training, she said, but she enjoyed the time she had with peers. The World Renew and Word Alive staff saw her leadership potential and asked if she would be interested in leading a group of girls through the Stepping Stones curriculum. Now she is a peer mentor and leads a group of 17 girls. Because all the girls share similar experiences, they are comfortable with each other. They are able to discuss openly the challenges of being a girl and trying to support their family. In this way Hamida has been able to help other girls stop engaging in transactional sex.

By being a peer mentor, Hamida receives a stipend. The money she receives helps her provide for her family. The project also offers training in business and entrepreneurship. She hopes that this training will help her and her peers start a business so that they can earn enough money to support themselves and their families.

Please pray for the ongoing success of this project, that more girls can leave transactional sex. Please also pray that the business and entrepreneurship training will help the girls in starting businesses and learning skills and trades that can help them be more financially secure. Pray too for the village and community leaders, that they will help to do away with cultural practices that are harmful to girls and make the community and the marketplace a safe place for everyone.



Transforming Our Communities' Resilience and Their Abilities to Respond to Disaster



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The fall armyworm is an invasive alien pest that has blighted much of southern Africa's maize crop this year. Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi have all reported widespread outbreaks, and we have seen the trail of destruction throughout many of our program areas. The pest is not so much a worm as a caterpillar, and its common name derives from the way these invaders generally come in overwhelming numbers, giving the appearance of an army crawling and eating their way through a field.

World Renew has been working with CCAP Relief and Development on an integrated food security and livelihoods program in Lundazi District for the past three years. A significant part of this program has consisted of developing response mechanisms and resilient networks in the community so that people are better prepared to respond together to a disaster or potential disaster. The program works with 900 farmers across 15 congregations, with each grouping of 30 to 40 farmers led by an agriculture volunteer worker.

In the second week of January at their monthly meeting with the agriculture volunteer workers, our field staff learned that farmers across the entire district had been affected by armyworms. It was decided that after the meeting an assessment of numbers and impact would be completed, and a followup meeting would take place the following week. At that next meeting it was reported that approximately 450 farmers from the program were affected and that 200 saw significant losses that would require replanting.

CCAP then contacted World Renew with a proposal asking for assistance to purchase chemicals, sprayers, protective clothing, and seed for replanting. Within two days the proposal was approved, commodities were purchased, and activities commenced. Activities have now been completed, with affected farmers' fields being sprayed and replanted within just two weeks after the notification of infestation.

The critical factor in the communities' ability to respond effectively was that the community networks were in place to first identify the threat, then communicate clearly and accurately assess the situation, then plan a response, and then, most importantly, put the plan into action with the involvement of the whole community of farmers assisting those affected in order to recover.

CCAP and World Renew actually played the smallest part in this response. The local farmer groups led by the agriculture volunteer workers were the ones to identify the problem, clarify the extent and the nature of it, and communicate it to CCAP -- and then when help from World Renew arrived, they ensured that the farmers whose crops were affected received the assistance and support of the group to treat their crop and to replant areas that were damaged beyond repair.

For many farmers, the labor burden to do all this by themselves in the short space of time required would have been too great. But with the farmer groups coming together to support those in need, the affected farmers received the assistance they needed -- and this dis-

played the communities' ability to respond and organize in the face of a potential disaster. The cooperation of farmer groups transformed a potentially disastrous scenario into one in which the communities' food security is now assured.

Lundazi is not the only one of our program areas to be infested by armyworms. Mwandi, where our relief program has been supporting drought-afflicted communities for two years, has also been hit by the outbreak, and many farmers have suffered crop damage by the caterpillars. World Renew has put crop diversification at the center of its relief work in this area, however, and farming households have been assisted with access to groundnut, cowpea, and millet seed -- all of which are more drought tolerant than maize. Another benefit is that these crops are not palatable to the armyworm. So an encouraging result of this strategy is that while many farmers have seen significant damage to their maize crop, they will still have a significant harvest of millet, cowpea, and groundnuts to fall back on.

👉 *The Damage.*

👉 *The community assessing the damage.*

