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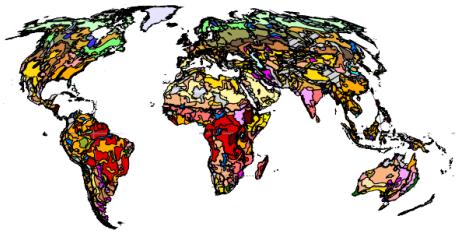

SANET

The Chitunda Project

A Community-based Livelihood Enhancement Project in Malawi

Introduction

In February 2011 Harco Jellema and Teun Wolters (advisers attached to the Sustainable Agricultural Support Network, SANET in the Netherlands) went to the village of Chitunda in Malawi to investigate the possibility of an agricultural project. In Chitunda agriculture is by far the most important source of income. To improve the livelihoods of the people, heightening productivity and increasing revenues from agriculture is a serious cause given the prevalence of poverty. Food security needs to be improved while other basic needs cannot be met without social and economic improvements.

A major asset in Chitunda is the primary school, in the first place for its capacity to provide education. However, the school also adds value to the village in terms of facilities and the presence of educated people who can help to make things better. Moreover, the involvement of the CCAP (through which the school was established) offers possiblities to rally funds and expertise that can embed new projects in an overall framework of community-based development.

Like in many places in Malawi, in Chitunda the farmers grow maize as staple food and tobacco as cash crop. Besides these two crops, most farmers also cultivate crops such as groundnut, millet, cassava, soya beans, green beans, sweet potatoes, Irish potato or pumpkin. Although sparse, critrus and banana trees are also part of the package. Some farmers use hybrid maize varieties to generate higher yields as compared with the traditional varieties. There were also instances of testing various millet varieties. Almost every farmer uses fertilizers attempting to boost the harvest against the poor soil quality.

This paper contains a brief description of the circumstances in Chitunda and a proposed project to improve the livelihoods of the Chitunda people, especially by implementing an agricultural project.

First of all, a development framework will be presented. Then, based on the findings of the feasibility study, it will be explained how the project could be shaped and carried out.

Sustainable livelihoods

For the project, we wish to base ourselves on internationally accepted principles for actions to improve the people's livelihoods. For that matter, we follow the SLED[1] approach, which has adopted the following key principles:

1. Being people-centred – action should focus on the impacts it will have on the livelihoods of people (not on institutions, resources, technology)
2. Building on strengths – all action should seek to build on people's own capacities, skills, knowledge and aspirations
3. Giving voice and choice – action should always seek to increase people's capacity and opportunity to give voice to their concerns and it should aim to increase their choices.

The SLED approach is structured around three distinct phases:

1. Discovery Phase – During this phase the practitioner is required to gain a full understanding of the complexity of people's livelihoods and their relationship with natural resources, the wider economy and society. This is carried out through collaborative learning with people about the diversity of resources, skills, capacities and interests in the community, and those factors that have helped or inhibited people from making changes in the past. This joint learning process helps to build a consensus for the need to change resource use patterns and livelihood strategies. Based on their learning, participants then build "visions" that express the desired outcomes of future livelihood change.
2. Direction Phase – This phase focuses on understanding and analysing the opportunities for achieving people's visions developed during the Discovery Phase. Options for changing livelihood strategies are considered, choices made and more detailed planning for action carried out.
3. Doing Phase – During this phase, the emphasis is on developing people's capabilities and adaptive capacity, together with networks of government, civil society and private sector services to support the plans for sustainable livelihood development that they have developed in the previous phases. Focused on sustainability – action should always take account of economic, social, institutional and environmental implications; this is part of the people's capacity to make informed choices.

SANET's feasibility study

The feasibility study carried out by SANET is just a first step in the discovery phase. The study brought to light a number of serious problems that explain why it is difficult to improve the livelihoods of the people. The farmers are working hard and are open to change. But the knowledge and facilities to do a better job seem to be absent.

The feasibility study has identified the following agricultural problems:

- The top soil looks like a "sandy" soil and is very poor; it has hardly any nutrients
- There is a great deal of erosion
- The top soil is incapable of holding humidity

[1] SLED stands for Sustainable Livelihoods Enhancement and Diversification, which is supported by international organisations such as the UNEP. We follow the SLED Manual for Practitioners.

- There is hardly any or no use of compost or organic fertilizer
- The soil is not or insufficiently enriched with organic materials (leftovers from previous harvests)
- Where fertilizer is used, this is mostly done inexpertly (too much in one time)
- The quality of the seeds and cuttings appears to be low
- Crop rotation is often done contradictory to state of the art knowledge
- More generally, the mixture of crops is liable to improvement
- Sowing and planting is often done too late
- Many parts of the soil are unfit for plants to take roots while infiltration of water is insufficient

Moreover, it could be noticed that the people's food pattern is highly one-sided (maize porridge without sufficient vegetables and fruits).

The indentified problems have to do with a lack of knowledge and a lack of money to invest in basic facilities. However, under all circumstances, we wish to build on the will and determination of the local farmers to improve their farms. We have seen that many of them are hard-working and open to change. From there, the project can be rolled out. Change for the better requires education, change in production method, learning by doing, technical support, and the dvelopment of new market opportunities. To this, it is important to add that the soil's paucity is rather overwelming. There are no quick fits. Therefore, it is proposed to set up a central farm that serves three purposes:

1. Demonstrating, facilitiating and starting up additional ways of farming that can be expected to have immediate positive effects on productivity without entailing substantial extra costs.
2. Establishing a training centre that from a practical point of view supports the farmers in implementing the improvements as mentioned above.
3. Setting up a central farm land to executive controlled experiments with an integrated packages of improvements in the area of land treatment, seeds, fertilizers, rotation, crop mixture, storage and use of water. Over a period of several years, the experiments are to produce new knowledge as to how the farmers can improve their yields and increase their income. This knowledge can be subsequently made available through the training centre.

Discovery Phase

This phase has already begon with the feasibility study. The advisers who did the study have held several meetings with teachers, farmers and chiefs. Moreover, they have had a meeting with the CCAP's development director, Mr. Donald Manda, who showed an interest in the project idea. It was concluded that in recent CCAP projects Malawian farmers had received quite some support with positive effects[2]. These projects have been motivated by the risks of climate change (which makes rains erratic and therefore adds to food insecurity) aiming at preventative investments in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptability and resilience. The CCAP has been involved in various projects that help farmers to increase and diversify crop production and increase livestock production (in particular goats) and by so doing improve food security.

[2] See, e.g., C. Cabot Venton and J. Siedenburg, "Investing in Communities. The benefits and costs of building resilience for food security in Malawi", Tearfund and CCAP, Synod of Livingstone, 2010.

The CCAP has developed quite some expertise that could be used in running the project in Chitunda. Therefore, we see the project placed under the CCAP but with a strong role and say by the local farmers and by a major advising role to be played by SANET.

Given the need for a broad package of measures that are well considered and coordinatied, the central farm should, besides initial steps that give instant advantage to the farmers, run a programme of scientifically controlled experiments in agricultural improvement.

Direction Phase

The central farm will closely work together with the local farmers so as to attain a situation of mutal learning. Knowledge about better practices that the central farm is expected to generate, needs to be embedded in business cases that are workable for and beneficial to the local farmers. This takes time to mature, recognising that we do not have all the answers in advance. Besides direct training of local farmers (which should be evidence-based and a matter of action learning), there is a prior need to 'train the trainers' so that the farmers can be addressed in their native language.

Doing phase

In principe, there is a lot of 'doing' right from the beginning. Where there is basic knowledge available to improve things, it can and will be applied right away. The direction phase will result into new evidence-based knowledge that is particularly focused on the situation in Malawi. This is primarily a matter of learning by doing and evidence-based teaching.

The wider experience that the central farm and its programmes will generate, can lead to livelihood strategies that will also be of great significance to other villages and parts of the country. If the central farm appears to be successful, its replication in other regions in Malawi can be considered. Then a full-fledge doing phase will emerge, so that many poor families benefit and get better lifes.

Improving the lifes of individuals will go together with community-development, involving better financial services, educational opportunities, health services. The challenge is to create an atmosphere of resolve and social responsibility that enable the people to build a better future.

Project proposal

During the time the feasibility study was carried out, one the farmers of Chitunda (who is one of the chiefs) made available a piece of land (around 6.4 acres); the land is allowed to be used free of rent during the first two years. The position of this land is very favourable; it is close to the residential area while it borders to the main road. This land is big enough to establish the central farm. For economic reasons, other pieces of land could be rent to increase production and sales. Moreover, it was discussed that the present (only partially finished) church building could be completed in a way that it can be both a church building and a training centre.

Programme items that could lead to immediate involvement by the farmers is composting and a goat rearing programme and the planting of Jatropha trees (in conjunction with a company that will buy the nuts for oil making).

The central farm will have a controlled programme of seed selection, soil and water management, rotation and various ways of using fertilizers and other nutrients.

This whole programme can be set up in a minimum variant and a more elaborate variant. For instance, it could be interesting to have on site a small guesthouse (so as to save hotel and travel bills when guests come down to assist). Moreover, the availability of a pickup and one or more generators is hard to dispense with.

It is SANET's estimation that the whole project needs € 211,300 to be implemented during the first two years. The project also envisages to generate its own income by renting various hectares of land in the surrounding villages and cultivating crops that can be profitably sold in the market. This could also lead to the employment of people while also engaging them in an educational program. This can be interesting to young people who can be taught how to set up their own farm and to be successful. © SANET 2011

Indicative budget Chitunda Project

I. Setting up of the central farm		Euros
Building (storage of products, storage of equipment, personnel facility, meeting place)		15000
Sanitary block (incl sceptic tank, water reservoir and solar pumping system)		10000
Building of a rain water catchment basin and accompanying equipment		8000
Installation of an electricity network and generators		8000
Building for goat raising and keeping		6000
Farming equipment (including a small tractor)		10000
A second hand pick up Toyota		10000
Purchase of goats		2000
Goat houses for the farmers		4000
Purchase of two bicycles		500
Subtotal		**73500**
II. Operational costs for the first two years		
Salary manager (1800 per year)		3600
Wages other personnel central farm		2000
Supervision by CCAP		4000
Running training programmes		2000
Fuels for generators and pickup		2000
Seeds and cuttings		1000
Fertilizers		2000
Sundries		1200
Subtotal		**17800**
III Training and technical assistance		
Finishing of the church annex training centre		15000
A small guest house		20000
Technical assistance from SANET (inclusive international travel) 2 years		30000
Subtotal		**65000**
IV Wider agricultural production and sales (to be set up as a profitable business, payback period 4 years)		
Lease of land outside Chitunda: 100 acres		25000
workers 2 years		10000
Inputs and equipment 2 years		20000
Subtotal		**55000**
Grand total		**211300**