Training of lead farmers yields enhanced adoption of climate change adaptation measures in Machinga

Case Study of GVH Mkhumbwa

While the impacts of climate change continue to affect our decade-old practices as we know them, villagers from GVH Mkhumbwa in Machinga District have adopted the use of Mwale fertilizer in their fields to increase yield production as one way of adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Mwale fertilizer is not a new type of fertilizer on the market. It is a name given to the organic fertilizer that the people of GVH Mkhumbwa decided to name after one Mr. Joseph Mwale, a lead farmer who took it upon himself to advocate for and teach his fellow villagers how to prepare the manure which has since become popular in all of GVH Mkhumbwa

Mkhumbwa, a village at the corner of Machinga District under Traditional Authority Nsanama, has not been spared from the adverse impacts of climate change. The advent of climate change has since led to intermittent rainfall that has led to a decrease in farm production levels. Floods that have led to soil erosion has caused low fertility levels as the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) being implemented by Government does not provide enough fertilizer to carter for people's farms.

CISONECC with support from the Scottish Government and SCIAF through Trocaire has been implementing the Climate Challenge Programme Malawi (CCPM) Climate Justice Advocacy Project (CJAP). The project aims at helping Malawians to find new and innovative solutions to problems caused by climate change. GVH Mkhumbwa is one of the communities in Machinga District that is benefitting from the CCPM which is being implemented in the area in partnership with Churches Action in Relief and Development (CARD).

Patrick Mkwapatira from EAD, speaking to community members on Climate Change and Climate Justice during a community sensitization meeting CISONECC conducted in GVH Mkhumbwa in February, 2020

As a way of effectively advocating for better climate practices, the CCPM through CARD has managed to train lead farmers in climate change adaptation measures such as bee keeping, using energy saving cook stoves and use of briquettes as alternative sources of energy. One of the most prominent adaptation measure was how to make manure. Mr Joseph Mwale, one of the esteemed and self-motivated Lead Farmers in GVH Mkhumbwa, has been making enormous efforts to train his fellow villagers to adopt the use of manure as opposed to chemical fertilizer. Chemical fertilizer has proven to be expensive, inaccessible and has the tendency of polluting the environment.

Mwale expressed how climate change has adversely impacted agriculture which is the source of livelihoods for him and his family including people in his community. He added that his selection to be one of the lead farmers in GVH Mkhumbwa was both a challenge and an opportunity to make a better living for not only his family but his entire village. Having been trained in making manure, he made sure to advocate for the same and train people in GVH Mkhumbwa to adopt the fertility increasing substance through community gatherings.

Mr Mwale, together with his fellow lead farmers, have been showcasing the strides they have and are making in their farms during Field Day meetings with the aim of raising awareness on the use of organic fertilizer. Many people have embraced the use organic fertilizer popular known as Mwale fertilizer and crops are doing well as observed from the 2019 harvest season. He also explained how they have opened a "demonstration field" to help inspire and motivate people to adopt the use of organic fertilizer. This was done to not only raise awareness but also entice the people considering the harsh realities that manifests as a result of climate change.

Joseph Mwale, Lead Farmer, stands proudly in his vegetable field he applied manure

GVH Mkhumbwa is still facing a number of challenges with regards to climate change but the people are optimistic that working in unison will go a long way in curbing these impacts than individual efforts. This is in line with the 2016 National Climate Change Management Policy that calls for coordinated and harmonized approach to climate change management.