

## **An inspiring journey to financial freedom**

In the village of Mziliwanda, Traditional Authority (T/A) Mwaluweni, within the heart of Rumphu district, Chindikani Gondwe once faced the harsh reality of life.

As a single mother, she could not bear a look at despair on the faces of her children each time they went to bed hungry.

"I lacked basic needs. I could not afford the easiest things a house hold ought to have and there was no hope for me," she recalls.

However, a turning point came in 2020 when she joined a village bank, courtesy of Opportunity International Malawi (OIM).

OIM was implementing the Inclusive Rural Finance and Sustainable Livelihood project with funding from the Financial Access for Rural Markets, Smallholders, and Enterprises Program (FARMSE).

Chindikani vividly recalls the pivotal moment when the door of opportunities swung open for her. Exclusive financial literacy sessions conducted under the project became her beacon of hope.

"It was a lifeline for me; a chance to break free from the chains of despair," she states.

Guided by the project's core aim of empowering village banks and imparting technical skills to Community Based Financial Organizations (CBFOs), Chindikani made the life-altering decision to join the village bank despite the initial struggle to contribute weekly shares.

"Joining the village bank was the best decision I ever made," she emphasizes, expressing gratitude for the project that changed her life trajectory.

At the end of 2020, Chindikani received K150, 000 as her village bank shares proceeds. With unwavering determination, she invested in her one-acre garden, reaping the rewards in 2021 with a bountiful harvest of maize and tobacco.

This marked the beginning of her journey towards self-sufficiency. In 2021, Chindikani's harvest did not only make food for her family but also turned into a financial boost to bankroll some plans.

She invested in essential household items – a television set, decoder, and electricity for her home. As her hope gradually grew, she set her sights on the future.

Undeterred by challenges, Chindikani increased her weekly shares to K3000 in 2022, resulting in doubled proceeds of K300,000. This enabled her to purchase 14 bags of cement, a mattress, and fertilizer, laying the groundwork for the 2022/24 farming season.

In 2023 she had a strategic shift, diversifying her crops to groundnuts, tomatoes, tobacco, and maize.

The fruits of her labor manifested in a staggering return of K2, 000,000 – a sum she had never dared to dream of. Her prudent investment strategy for the 2023-2024 farming season reflects her determination to achieve even greater heights.

Rex Kamwendo, OIM community facilitator, attests to the project's profound impact, stating, "the project has indeed elevated the financial status of households, including Chindikani's. Now, beneficiaries can comfortably pay school fees and meet other household needs that were once distant dreams."

Chindikani Gondwe's journey is not merely a success story; it's a testament to the transformative power of financial empowerment agenda through Farmse.

Through the Inclusive Rural Finance and Sustainable Livelihood project, her life has evolved from one of despair to prosperity, showcasing the potential within communities when provided with the right tools and opportunities