

The Chikondas turning point

In Nkwinda village under the traditional authority Kaphuka in Dedza, the Chinkonda family once lived with the wrath of poverty.

Living in a leaky grass-thatched house, Mr. and Mrs. Chinkonda struggled to make ends meet, often facing the gnawing pangs of hunger. Their 6-year-old daughter could even get the attention for her primary school.

However, things turned around through a transformative Tilimbike project by Action Aid, with support from Financial Access for Rural Markets, Smallholders and Enterprises (FARMSE). This project provided a beacon of hope for families like the Chikondas' as it sought to Increase access and utilization of financial products through financial literacy and enhanced vertical and horizontal linkages with formal financial institutions, among others.

The couple's decision to join the village bank marked the inception of their journey towards financial independence.

As Chinkonda vividly recalls, "joining the village bank was a game-changer for us. It opened doors to opportunities we never thought possible."

In 2020, leveraging the resources from the village bank, they secured K120, 000 which they invested in soya cultivation, a strategic move that set the stage for their ascent.

The gamble paid off handsomely in 2021 when their harvest yielded an impressive 15 bags, translating to a windfall of K650, 000 proceeds.

Empowered by this unexpected financial boost, the Chinkonda family turned their dream into reality by purchasing a motorcycle.

"The motorcycle became our ticket to a more stable income, as we started a taxi service in the village," Chinkonda's wife narrates.

Buoyed by their success, the family's ambitions soared further in 2022. They judiciously utilized their village bank shares to invest in materials for construction—bricks and iron sheets.

A sturdy house that now exempts them from the once-dreaded leakages during the rainy season.

Fast forward to 2023, the Chinkonda family stands tall as a testament to resilience and hard work. With their village bank shares amounting to an impressive K262, 000, they have set their sights on a new venture—a grocery store.

Reflecting on their journey, Mr. Moda Chinkonda states, "Our life has undergone a remarkable transformation. We are no longer the talk of the village; instead, we are inspiring others to believe

in the power of change. Our gratitude extends to both FARMSE and Action Aid for this life-changing project. It has elevated us from a state of constant struggle to a point where we are now self-reliant," Mr. Chinkonda acknowledges, symbolizing the profound impact of the initiative on their lives.

Maria Singini, Action Aid's project officer, stated, "The project activities, like training CBFOs in savings and loans, financial education, and income-generating activities, along with linkages to formal financial institutions, have enhanced livelihoods, ensuring food and financial security.

"Additionally, mainstreaming nutrition, environmental, and gender aspects through a household approach has promoted equitable access and equal participation, particularly for women and disabled individuals. This has contributed to achieving the overall goal of improving access to affordable and sustainable financial services for rural households and micro, small, and medium enterprises."