

**BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (DCHA)
OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (OFDA)**

**SUCCESS STORY
IRRIGATION BRINGS FOOD SECURITY AND A
HOUSE FOR A FAMILY IN MALAWI**

Dorika Majawa and her family finally have a house to call their own. A widow who lost her husband eight years ago and a smallholder farmer, Dorika did not have enough money to build a house to live with her two children and mother. The construction of the house became a reality for Dorika and her family thanks to the USAID/OFDA-funded Rehabilitation through Irrigation and Production Extension (RIPE) program. Implemented by a non-governmental organization consortium that includes Africare, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Emmanuel International, Save the Children/US, and World Vision, the RIPE initiative promotes small-scale irrigation in six drought-prone and food insecure districts of Malawi in order to increase and support more consistent agricultural production for families, while strengthening their resilience to withstand droughts. The RIPE program is closely integrated with the Improving Livelihoods through Increased Food Security (I-LIFE) initiative, a development assistance program funded through USAID's Office of Food for Peace (USAID/FFP) since 2004. The I-LIFE program works with farmers to transition from subsistence to commercial agricultural production and to improve their nutritional and health practices. Through the program, farmers receive training in improved agricultural practices, such as conservation farming, crop diversification, and the establishment of soil and water conservation structures.

Like most Malawian smallholder farmers, Dorika did not have the technology to use river or ground water to irrigate crops prior to the RIPE program. In addition, most rural families depend on a single harvest of maize grown during the rainy season in small landholdings, which make them unable to grow enough food to last the entire year. Successive years of drought and other production shocks in Malawi, as in many parts of Southern Africa, have reduced crop productivity and undermined livelihoods, leaving farmers increasingly food insecure and vulnerable and making recovery more difficult.

Prior to participating in the RIPE program, to supplement her family's income, Dorika occasionally did *ganyu* (casual labor), working in the fields of other farmers to earn 100 Kwacha, approximately \$0.70, a day. With less time to tend to her fields due to her *ganyu* work, her family's food production was further reduced. In years of severe drought, Dorika and her family were dependent on food aid distributions when their food stocks ran out.



Through her hard work and the USAID/OFDA-funded RIPE program, Dorika Majawa now enjoys food security and a house for her and her family (Photo by Alexandra Riboul, USAID).



A feeder channel and irrigation canals built through the RIPE program provide water to farmers' fields in Thyolo District (Photo by Alexandra Riboul, USAID).

In 2006, Dorika joined other members of her village of Nkhwali in Thyolo District, southern Malawi, to participate in the RIPE program, which for the first time taught them about irrigation and helped them establish a small-scale gravity-fed system to irrigate crops from a nearby water source. With materials, training, and technical assistance provided by the RIPE and I-LIFE programs, the members of Nkhwali built a small dam, provided sand and rocks, and dug out a feeder channel and irrigation canals that diverted the water to farmers' fields.

By irrigating her field during the dry season, Dorika was able to grow maize, vegetables, and beans. With two harvests in one year, Dorika increased her annual crop production and fed her family, selling the surplus in the local market. In just three months, Dorika made 20,000 Kwacha, approximately \$140, a significant improvement from the average annual household income of \$400 in Malawi. With the income from her sales, in 2008, Dorika hired a contractor to build a house for her family.

In expressing her gratitude for the assistance received through the RIPE and I-LIFE programs, Dorika describes how her and her family's life has changed. "I'm very happy because we now have a house. Before, I could feed my family one meal a day. If I worked very hard doing *ganyu*, I could feed them two meals, but then I

could not work in my field. I had to buy vegetables to give nutritious food to my children. Now, I'm proud that we no longer depend on food aid during the hungry season. I can feed my family three meals a day and give my children vegetables from my own field." Dorika looks positively towards the future. She plans to sell the surplus maize and vegetables from the harvest in September 2008 and use the profits to buy inputs and agricultural tools for the main agricultural season, which starts in November.

Since the start of the program in March 2006, RIPE has had a significant impact on the lives of many smallholder farmers in the districts of Dedza, Lilongwe, Mangochi, Mchinji, Ntcheu, and Thyolo in central and southern Malawi. During the program's first phase, which lasted until September 2007, the program benefited 3,819 vulnerable subsistence farmers and their families, with an additional 12,713 benefiting indirectly. The program established 55 irrigation sites and resulted in a total of 270.6 hectares of irrigated land. The program's impact will expand through a second phase, which began in October 2007 and will benefit 1,000 farming households and their families through the establishment or expansion of 37 irrigation sites. A measure of the program's success has been the interest expressed by other communities in establishing small-scale irrigation systems. Through the promotion of small-scale irrigation and improved agricultural practices, the RIPE program has improved food security for vulnerable smallholder farmers, while benefiting communities in the longer-term through increased productive capacity and strengthened resilience to future droughts and other climatic shocks.